

6. Working with the media

Using media to carry awareness messages is a prime tactic for emergency management organisations, for example, in the form of newspaper articles and community service announcements for radio or television. Accessing media networks can allow you to reach a broad audience across a large area very quickly, but this can be expensive. Local and regional media are likely to be more responsive than national and international media. Specialist media may also be useful if you can convince them of the relevance of your message to their audience.

Where the media fit in the community education picture; how to get the media on-side and involved; five rules for successful media liaison

The media are important in the business of informing the community about disasters. While the media's main preoccupation may be in presenting news of a disaster itself, they may also be willing to support campaigns seeking to lessen the impact of hazards.

This will depend upon the perceived level of interest of their viewers, readers and listeners or the outlet's desire to promote themselves as a responsible community member. A householder cleaning leaves from a gutter is unlikely to make the nightly television news. However, if you can convince the Premier or Chief Minister to climb a ladder and clean leaves from gutters at their home as part of a bushfire prevention campaign, then your chances of making television news increase dramatically.

Just because major corporations may spend millions of dollars on television advertising, this does not mean this is the most effective method for emergency managers. Businesses may be satisfied with a buyer preference shift of a few percentage points. In the social change context, this is quite inadequate and a poor return on investment.

Perhaps a principal reason for using mass media is to reinforce certain aspects of the campaign or program. Messages via the media tell householders and businesses – whom you are also targeting by other more direct means – that what they are doing is part of a larger social and community activity, trend or movement. This helps to reinforce their personal decision-making.

Media outlets may be willing to enter into a partnership arrangement, in which the media agrees to provide services, such as broadcasting community service announcements, screening a documentary on disaster awareness, or writing and publishing editorials and special features on disaster preparedness. Emergency management organisations need to convince the media outlet of the worth of their 'story' to achieve free publication or broadcast time.

Unless the media are also willing to cover production costs, the significant investment required by community organisations to write or produce quality products suitable for use by the media may be prohibitive. For television, costs include scriptwriting, recording, obtaining talent, editing, copying, and distribution. For newspapers and radio, research material must be sourced, relevant photographs found,

spokespersons identified, and time allocated to work with the journalist/producer. Despite the costs involved, the return is regular delivery of the awareness message to a large audience.

Using a set of media relations 'rules' helps convince the media to join you in a community awareness campaign on the news front. The rules can be applied whether your organisation is dealing with a community radio station with a few hundred listeners, a metropolitan daily newspaper with 400 000 readers, or a television station with a million viewers.

Rule 1. Identify every medium operating in your area

Commonly thought of as 'the mass media', reality is that the media is made up of many outlets each aimed at different sectors of the community. In one geographical area you'll find some people listening to a national radio broadcaster (ABC Radio National on the AM band or Triple J and ABC FM on the FM band).

Others will be tuned to a local broadcaster (on the AM band), a national/regional commercial broadcaster on FM, or perhaps a local community radio or public broadcaster. Overall statistics suggest that about 75 per cent of the population listen to commercial radio stations, 20 per cent to the ABC, and five per cent to community stations.

People read local newspapers and watch regional television news, but also read national and metropolitan newspapers and watch national television news. They may read national magazines, but also read (possibly more closely) local newsletters published by churches, sporting clubs, schools and community groups and service clubs. In remote Aboriginal communities, radio is the most-used media.

Before embarking on a media campaign it is important to identify all media outlets that influence people in your community. Only then can you decide which are more influential and which to target in your campaign.

Rule 2. Find out what those media outlets want and need

Talk to the Editor, News Editor, Chief-of-Staff, Senior Reporter, or Program Producers. Tell them what you aim to achieve (usually coverage for your campaign and its messages), and find out where those messages fit the news agenda.

Ask about the type and style of stories they would run, and how you can provide facts, figures and people for those stories. Find out their editorial policy to community awareness.

Some newspapers, for example, have a regular 'community billboard' section in which community organisations advertise functions and events. Radio stations may be interested in community service announcements, if you provide the announcements ready to go to air. Find out when your message might fit the news cycle — bushfire and cyclone warnings in the appropriate seasons. Find out who is the 'best' person to talk to about your media release (see Rule 3).

Rule 3. Choose the 'right' method

One media myth is that you can only 'talk' to the media via a media release mailed, faxed, or E-mailed to the editor. It is certainly important to set out the message in news release style so that it can be readily understood, but there are four main means of communicating it.

- Call a media briefing. This means asking journalists to come to you so you can brief them on what you are doing or plan to do. Media briefings are less formal than news conferences (see below), and allow you to talk to several or many journalists at the one time. Often the briefing can be held at the site of the hazard (for example, on the banks of the river that may flood), which provides photographic and television opportunities. Briefings are ideal when you want journalists to understand the

background to the situation so that they can report it accurately and positively. For example, a briefing on the first day of the bushfire season is not the time or place to make news announcements — that is the role of the media conference.

- Call a media conference. Calling in media representatives to hear an announcement is a tried and true tactic. But, by definition, holding a media or news conference implies you are announcing something that is 'news'. Therefore you should call a news conference only when you have a major announcement to make. And you should provide everything needed for the media to write, film and photograph the story, including a well-trained spokesperson to present the 'news', and a media kit with full details in the form of news releases, background articles, charts, figures and samples. A news conference is often the best way to present a senior or prominent spokesperson, that person's prominence creating news.
- Invite the media to your function or event. In this instance, you ask them to come to you as observers. Attend to media representatives at the event to ensure that they have all the information they need, and that they understand exactly what is happening, and why. In this situation media see your organisation and its activities at their best, in a positive setting.
- Media releases. A traditional means of communicating with the media. Writing an informative news release is a journalistic art not everyone can master. The job of the release is first to get the attention of the news editor and second, to convince that person to publish the news release, broadcast the information on radio, or use it to compile a television news item.

A news release must be crystal clear in saying what it has to — no acronyms, no flowery language, no convoluted sentences, just plain

clear English; present the most important aspects of the subject first, in a way that catches media attention; and be of local relevance.

For example, a release aimed at the media at Smithville, might look like this:

TOILET TRAINING FOR ADULTS

The residents of Smithville will be tossing sandbags down their toilets on Saturday as part of a training exercise to prepare their houses for a flood.

They'll be putting together emergency kits ready for evacuation, moving chemicals and poisons out of reach of the flood, finding and securing valuables and photo albums — and of course putting the sandbags in the toilets to prevent sewage backflow.

According to John Smith, President of the Smithville Flood Awareness and Preparedness Committee, rehearsing what needs to be done will save lives and property when flood comes.

"More than 100 households have agreed to join us in this exercise because of the threat of floods along the Smith River this year," he said.

Always include in the release the name(s) of your organisation's media contact, with business hours and after-hours contact numbers (see Rule 4). Media personnel do not work normal business hours — the producer of a morning radio program, for example, may want to call someone at 5am to arrange an interview. And disasters strike at all hours.

Rule 4. Appoint a media liaison officer or spokesperson

Appoint someone from your organisation as the media contact point for comment and information. That person's name and contact details should be on everything given to the media, and for that matter, the same information

should be on contact lists of community organisations. Your organisation may also wish to consider providing training for a dedicated media spokesperson.

Rule 5. Look for a partner

It is useful for your organisation to have a sponsor partner in media relations. That partner might be a retailer who advertises, for example, and can use media connections and influence to gain coverage for you. The retailer could agree to use your message in its media relations, and to carry your message in advertising material (see Section 5, 'Tactics: your choice'). Alternatively, your partner may be the media network itself that can provide free airtime or assistance with production and development.

Examples of strategies

- EMA, on behalf of the States and Territories, produced a series of community service announcements (CSAs) for television, in most cases delivered to local television stations by the local emergency management authority. The CSAs are 'localised' to the extent that they focus on hazards relevant to that area at that time, or they fit into local campaigns. Because they rely on the goodwill of stations to put them to air (despite the fact that television networks are obliged to carry community service announcements), they may appear frequently but not consistently across Australia.
- Networks covering regional areas use CSAs more often than do metropolitan networks. Because CSAs cover bushfires, severe storms, cyclones and floods, not all are appropriate at all times of the year. However, in some States they are known to produce the desired effects, as local emergency service authorities receive calls for brochures promoted on the CSAs.
- In NSW, the State Emergency Service (SES) has had more success with its own radio CSAs linked to preparedness for severe storms.

Based on the EMA Action Guide series, the CSAs focused on what to do in the lead-up to, during, and after a severe storm. As they referred to actual events at the time, they tended to gain more airtime, and have been used by 107 commercial AM and FM stations and 20 community FM stations.

- The Victorian SES has embellished the CSA model by finding funds and sponsorship for its radio campaign on disaster preparedness, with considerable success. It found that buying airtime gave it leverage to gain more community service announcements.
- EMA joined forces with the ABC to produce a series of six 15-minute programs looking at steps that can be taken to limit the community impact of natural hazards. Each program examines a different natural hazard and provides practical advice to all Australians on what they can do to prepare for each. The series covers severe storms, floods, bushfire, cyclones, earthquakes, landslides and heatwave. The series first went to air in October 1998, and by the end of 1999 had been aired eight times. One output measurement is the success of the series is the strong demand for taped copies of the program.
- The NSW Fire Brigades has used media coverage to reduce the number of child-caused fires. The 10-year campaign included news, current affairs and children's television programs, radio interviews targeting parent groups, and newspapers and magazines. The number of child-caused fires decreased from 27 per cent of all fires reported to five per cent (IDNDR Day Forum, Sydney, 7 October 1998).

More ideas for developing strategic alliances and partnerships are outlined in the next chapter.

7. Partners and sponsors

Any community awareness campaign is, by definition, the product of a partnership between the organisation sponsoring the campaign and the community itself. There must be agreement from the community to accept the campaign, and the support of the community and its representative organisations to conduct it. As part of managing a campaign it makes sense to form partnerships with community organisations — service clubs, schools, the local council, the local Member of Parliament, local church leaders, or sporting clubs. These groups can take your message to their constituencies, the sections of the community they represent.

If people are told in a local community organisation newsletter that preparing for bushfires is not only sensible, but also important, they tend to take notice. Suddenly bushfire preparedness is on the agenda: the newsletter has made it so. The chance of successfully influencing these same people through, say, flyers in their letterboxes, is likely to be much less.

However, once they have received the message in this way, they are likely to be more receptive to the one that lands in the letterbox.

Other partners may be commercial sponsors — people who, or organisations that will invest funds or services in your campaign. Current tough economic competition means that potential sponsors now take a hard-headed view, needing a return on investment. Philanthropic organisations that give money and support 'for the good of the community' are fewer than ever. Most private and public sector organisations now want a clear-cut measurable return that benefits

How to get money from sponsors and what they expect in return

them. Your task is to define what that return might be, and work it into a sponsorship proposal — a very different task from asking for support on the basis of 'for the good of the community'. But most commercial organisations and public bodies rate highly the issue of protecting the community from hazards — build on that aspect.

It could be suggested to a local car dealership, for example, that if the company sponsored a display for the local shopping mall, a series of flyers for letterbox distribution and newspaper advertisements, the dealership would not only be promoted, but it would also be seen as 'keeping the community safe'. The sponsorship could also be mentioned in all communication with the community, particularly with the media.

The dealer's logo could be added to your letterhead, to equipment, and to posters. Dealership material could be added to your mail-outs, and your members could be actively encouraged to deal with that trader.

However, take time to establish with your headquarters that a sponsorship at a local level is in keeping with their policy, not in competition with a major sponsorship at a State, Territory or regional level. For government and local government agencies, check that you would not be breaching your State or Territory public sector guidelines.

Servicing sponsorships to ensure a return on investment for the sponsor takes time and resources. As well as balancing such questions as the appropriateness of a particular sponsorship, you must be sure you can service it.

The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) has established principles for sponsorship for public sector agencies. They provide a commonsense guide to what you can expect from

any sponsorship arrangement. The ICAC suggests that any sponsorship arrangement should be described in a written agreement that clearly sets out

- the benefits, including the economic benefits available to the sponsored agency and the sponsor
- any personal benefits available to the staff of the sponsor and their relatives
- the form or forms of sponsorship acknowledgment that will be available
- the term of the sponsorship and any conditions regarding renewal
- consequences of changes which may occur over time (for example, a shift in the relationship, new policies)
- financial accountability requirements, and
- any special conditions

Another form of sponsorship is grants from Commonwealth/State/Territory governments, local government bodies, and industry associations. EMA has had several grant programs which have funded education and awareness projects developed and managed by others. Available grant opportunities are usually advertised publicly, so look to newspapers and web sites for them, and include those that allow individuals to travel and study community education (eg Churchill Fellowships and The Queen's Trust).

Partnership experiences

The growing importance of partnerships means that across and within the three levels of government there is developing a strong cooperative approach to developing and distributing disaster awareness and education material.

- EMA, the Australian Geological Survey Organisation (AGSO) and the Australian Surveying and Land Information Group

(AUSTLIG) cooperated to publish the Australian Natural Hazards Map kit, a highly successful disaster education resource.

- The Victorian SES added a sponsor's name to 20 000 extra copies of the EMA-funded Victorian hazard maps. The sponsor subsidised printing and promoted the map poster in its offices throughout Victoria.
- Emergency organisations work closely with the Bureau of Meteorology, relying on it, for example, to include specific action information as part of severe weather warning and bushfire threat. The emergency services appear alongside the Bureau in public presentations and in the media, as they explain cause-and-effect and responses to cyclones, storms and bushfires. The Bureau has partnered the SES in Western Australia in a severe winter storms preparedness campaign.
- The Natural Hazards Research Centre at Macquarie University provides unique databases of natural hazards in Australia and the Asia Pacific Region, is funded by corporations in the insurance and reinsurance industries.
- In several States, local government councils distribute hazard awareness material in council rate notices. Including the material with rate notices guarantees a very large distribution, but also places it in a context (the rate notice) that may reduce its appeal.
- The NSW SES displays material in St George Bank Branches, the Police Credit Union, Building Advisory Centres, libraries and council offices, and throughout the Country Comfort motel chain.
- The NSW SES also has a sponsorship arrangement with the Country Comfort Motel Chain, which provides venues for meetings and conferences at special rates, enabling the SES to offer comfortable and attractive surroundings for public meetings.

- The Victorian SES has a major sponsor, the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV), an arrangement which allows the SES to fund the production of a range of local hazard warning materials based on EMA material. The SES also gained sponsorship from the RACV of children's colouring-in sheets with safety messages, and the Crayola company sponsored a colouring-in competition which gained media support.
- In Western Australia a local hardware chain has sponsored local fire-awareness efforts by contributing a portion of the sale price of each smoke alarm sold toward protective clothing for brigades. This helped sell the smoke alarms, and gave recognition to both the store and the brigades. In another WA deal, a major insurance company covers the purchase of SES equipment, which frees funds for awareness activities.
- In the USA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Family Protection Program joined the American Red Cross Community Disaster Education Program to produce a brochure (FEMA L-196, February 1993, ARC 4499) for parents, to help children cope with disaster.
- The West Australian Fire Services has a sponsorship from the RAC to run the Firefighter of the Year Awards which enables a major promotional campaign about the community contribution of career and volunteer firefighters.

8. Working with the community

Your organisation is not alone in taking on responsibility for community awareness in relation to disasters — around Australia there are many hundreds of organisations working on the same problem. But in the last decade the notion of working with the community, rather than for it, has emerged as a key concept in emergency management.

Working with communities to change behaviour and improve hazard awareness

In Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia and Victoria, emergency managers work with the community to determine risk and preventive action. The constant challenges are to convince people living in suburban fringes close to the bush, on floodplains of inland rivers, on beachfronts in tropical Queensland or in coastal communities in Western Australia that they face absolutely real and predictable hazards

The experience of Australian emergency management agencies in the past decade points to the strength of participative local campaigns — rather than broad national or regional 'mass' campaigns — as the most effective way to produce change

This guide outlines only a cross-section of the important work that emergency management and other community organisations are doing in trying to raise community awareness of natural hazards and to encourage communities to identify and implement appropriate risk reduction actions

We would like to build on this list of innovative ideas and advice and to share experiences across the country. EMA invites you to email a brief paragraph about your community awareness or education campaigns or projects to ema@ema.gov.au You may also consider submitting an entry under the *EMA Safer Communities Awards*

9. Information sources

Ideas for strategies, research and evaluation

Candy Tymson and Bill Sherman, *The Australian Public Relations Manual*, Millennium Books, Sydney 1996 ISBN 1 864298 057 9

Jan Quarles and Bill Rowlings, *Practising Public Relations a case study approach*, Longman, Melbourne 1995 ISBN 0 582 87187 5

The 'how to' of research methodology

Peter F Hutton, *Survey Research for Managers*, Macmillan, London, 1990

Auditor-General, Western Australia, *Listen and Learn*, using customer surveys to report performance in the Western Australian public sector, Report No 5, June 1998

An insight into integrated flood awareness campaigns in NSW

'Preparing emergency managers and the community for floods', Chas Keys, Deputy Director-General NSW SES, paper presented to the Annual Conference of Floodplain Management Authorities in NSW, Grafton, 1996

A practical guide to developing education and awareness programs in a South Pacific context

Developing Effective Education and Awareness programmes An information guide for national disaster management officials. United Nations Department for Development Support and Management Services, Tonga, 1997 ISBN 982-364-002-5 Copies (\$F 14 45 plus postage and handling) from Joint DMP-SPO, c/- UNDP, Private Mail Bag, Suva, Fiji Islands

More ideas, resources, materials and USA case studies

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) *Good Ideas Book – Office of Public Affairs*, Washington DC

Reaching people with physical, visual, auditory or cognitive disabilities

Disaster Preparedness for People with Special Needs Queensland Department of Emergency Services

Approaches to reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Report on the Strategic Planning Conference on the Development of Enhanced Disaster Awareness Education Programs and Materials for Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, Darwin, 8–9 May 1998, Australian IDNDR Secretariat

Useful hints on writing for newspapers

'Focus on the local media', prepared by Community Newspaper Group (WA), in *Western Alert* (the official journal of the Western Australian State Emergency Service), Vol 35, Spring 1995

Detailed case studies of the best Australian examples of effective communication

The Golden Target Awards Collection — award-winning campaigns in the annual Public Relations Institute of Australia (PRIA) Golden Target Awards The collection includes campaigns that focus on community education and those which promote products and services or set out to raise

funds. For a copy of the collection (at \$95.00) contact the PRIA National office by telephoning

02 9251 9000 or faxing 02 9251 9099. The library at the University of Technology in Sydney also holds the collection.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics

The Australian *Social Atlas* series has State-by-State and Territory snapshots from Census data to indicate, in map form, which areas have the highest percentages of people born overseas, where families with children live, where higher-income households are, where people who rent, live, and similar statistics.

The Atlas is available at \$65 per copy in NSW and Victoria, and \$45 in other States and Territories.

Census data is also available on CD ROM — called CData 96. Search and compile your own target audiences.

More information is available from the ABS by phoning 1300 366 323 — the State and Territory direct phone numbers are:

New South Wales	02 9268 4611
Victoria	03 9615 7755
Queensland	07 3222 6351
Western Australia	08 9360 5140
South Australia	08 8237 7100
Tasmania	03 6222 5800
Australian Capital Territory	02 6252 6627
Northern Territory	08 8943 2111

You can also contact the ABS via e-mail at client.services@abs.gov.au, or look up the ABS home page. <http://www.abs.gov.au>

EMA awareness publications and education material

Hazards, Disasters and Survival, a 48-page booklet, Disaster Awareness and Education Resource Kit, State/Territory Natural Hazard Posters, and Australia's Natural Hazard Zones Poster Map. This material is free and available from State and Territory Emergency Services. Contact EMA for *Hazard-Wise*, a classroom resource for teachers on natural hazards and disasters. *Get Ready*, an emergency awareness teaching program for Levels 1-4, and *Get Ready*, a picture set, are available from West Education Centre, 445 Melbourne Road, Newport, Victoria 3015, phone 03 9399 5011. *Geography for Primary Schools* is available from the Australian Geography Teachers' Association at 163A Greenhill Road, Parkside, South Australia 5063.

For further information on EMA, log onto the internet site www.ema.gov.au or contact EMA by phoning the Media Liaison Officer on 02 6266 5223, faxing to 02 6257 7665, or E-mailing to ema@ema.gov.au

EMA's mail address is:
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State and Territory Emergency Management

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Executive Officer
State Emergency Management Committee
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SYDNEY SOUTH NSW 1235

Phone 02 9264 7277
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Victoria

Executive Officer
Victorian Emergency Management Council
GPO Box 4356QQ
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Phone 03 9651 0351
Fax 03 9651 0356

Queensland

Executive Officer
State Counter Disaster Organisation
GPO Box 1425
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Phone 07 3247 8485
Fax 07 3247 8505

South Australia

State Emergency Services South Australia
GPO Box 2706
Adelaide SA 5001

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Fax 03 6230 2718

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NT Counter Disaster Council
PO Box 39764
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