

THE SOUTHLAND FLOOD
AN ORGANISATIONAL APPROACH TO DISASTER RECOVERY

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INTRODUCTION

A disaster seriously disrupts the personal, social, economic and political interactions of the individual and family. Such disruption places the individual and family in unfamiliar stressful situations, as they attempt to gain assistance and find solutions to the numerous problems that confront them. Disaster relief for the individual involves a large number of organisations and departments.

Since the first Civil Defence Act in 1962, civil defence responsibilities in New Zealand have terminated once the threat to life had diminished. With no organisations to coordinate the post disaster recovery, the stress placed upon the individual and family increased considerably as they tried to get the necessary assistance through a myriad of private aid groups, government departments and insurance groups.

With these problems identified the Civil Defence Act 1983 made provision for the coordination of those agencies involved in disaster relief and recovery. The Southland flood of January 1984 was the first opportunity for the new legislation to be used.

This paper provides a synopsis of the Southland flood and sets out the organisational approach that was adopted for relief and recovery in the affected communities.

Currently, a research programme is being developed to ~~examine~~ human behavioural aspects of the disaster, in particular the long-term effectiveness of the organisational response to the disaster. From the results it is hoped to improve the disaster recovery capabilities of civil defence organisations and government departments.

Introduction to Civil Defence in New Zealand.

"Civil Defence" is defined as measures necessary for public safety, designed to prevent, reduce or overcome the effects of earthquakes, explosions, floods, storms, tsunamis, land movement or the spillage of dangerous gases or substances.

Civil defence is the responsibility of local and regional government, central government and all government departments. All these agencies must plan for their use in a civil defence emergency.