AUSTRALIA
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AUSTRALIA

INTRODUCTION

Under the Australian Constitution, the eight States and Territories have direct responsibility for the protection of lives and property. Accordingly, they maintain well-developed emergency management capabilities and have arrangements to meet their responsibility.

The Commonwealth (Federal) Government accepts responsibility for providing national disaster management leadership and standardisation. It meets this responsibility by developing policy; by supporting the State and Territory Governments in developing their disaster management capabilities; by providing assistance in the response and recovery stages after disasters; by providing warning and monitoring services for specific hazards; and by facilitating national training, public awareness and education, information management and research activities. The Commonwealth Government is also responsible for providing disaster management assistance to other countries.

Emergency Management Australia is the agency responsible for coordinating Commonwealth Government disaster management activities and, in conjunction with the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), for coordinating Australian disaster response and mitigation assistance to other countries.

For a number of years, disaster management in Australia has been based on four fundamental approaches:

- The **All Hazards Approach** - under which a single set of management arrangements are used to deal with the effects of all types of hazards.

- The **Comprehensive Approach** - under which a risk management approach to potential disasters is used to design the mix of strategies covering prevention, preparedness, response and recovery so as to provide the most effective disaster management structure.

- The **All Agencies Approach** - under which disaster management is seen as a partnership which requires the active involvement of all levels of government as well as voluntary organisations and the community itself.

- The **Prepared Community** - under which it is recognised that the basis of successful emergency management is effective arrangements at community level. This requires an alert, informed and active community which supports its emergency services and voluntary organisations, complemented by an active and involved local government. All levels work within an agreed and coordinated set of arrangements covering prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Although for some years the emphasis in Australia was placed primarily on preparedness and response measures, there has been growing awareness in recent years of the links between disasters and development. This has resulted in recognition of the increasing importance of prevention, mitigation and reduction strategies. The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction has played an important part in encouraging this change of emphasis.

NATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

National coordination of emergency and disaster management activities is exercised through a National Emergency Management Committee. This committee, which is chaired by the Director General of Emergency Management Australia, includes the senior emergency management representatives of all States and Territories in its membership. This committee provides a valuable forum for Australia-wide endorsement of policy and arrangements and for discussion of a wide range of subjects. Specialist advisory groups have been established to study such subjects as communications, information technology, public awareness, training and education, and civil defence (as defined under the Geneva Conventions). A small Executive Group meets at regular intervals to examine practical issues. The committee has been meeting since 1993 and is beginning to have a significant impact on a national approach to disaster and emergency management in Australia.

AUSTRALIAN DISASTER REDUCTION MEASURES

Emergency/Disaster Legislation and Plans

Six of the States and Territories have enacted disaster management legislation. The remaining two have administrative arrangements for emergency management and are currently examining options for legislation. All States and Territories have well-developed plans and procedures in place which are approved by respective peak emergency management committees; and these are supported by plans and arrangements at regional and at local government levels.

The Australian Government has decided that, because of the constitutional arrangements, there is no need for specialised disaster management legislation at the national level although emergency management issues are covered in other legislation. Many of these have an impact on disaster reduction including those dealing with:

- Environmental protection
- Hazardous waste
- Urban and regional development
- Quarantine
- Health
- Industrial development
- Natural resources management;
- National water resources
- Primary industries
- Energy
- Social security
- Transport

Australia has a small number of plans which describe the Commonwealth response to domestic and overseas disasters. There are also national plans for dealing with specialised disasters which require the use of skills and resources from the whole country. These include plans for dealing with radioactive space debris, marine pollution and exotic animal diseases.

Emergency Management Training

Emergency management training is carried out on a national centralised basis by Emergency Management Australia. Additionally, significant training, especially of a practical nature, is undertaken by State and Territory agencies.

Agreement has been given by all States and Territories to the introduction of competency-based training. Earlier this year National Emergency Management Competency Standards were endorsed by the National Training Board. These competencies, which will form the basis for national recognition of the qualifications of emergency management practitioners and for the development of training curricula, cover:

- Development of Emergency Management Policy
- Assessment of Vulnerability
- Selection of Emergency Management Strategies
- Planning of Strategy Implementation
- Implementation of Plans
- Effective Communication

- Management of People
- Management of Resources
- Coordination of Resources
- Management of Information
- Processing of Information
- Management of Training and Education
- Design and Delivery of Training and Education

To allow emergency management practitioners to develop these competencies, new curricula are being developed which will cover all levels of training from the introductory level to tertiary level. The first courses to be affected by the competency standards are those currently delivered by Emergency Management Australia. The courses in Vulnerability Analysis, Evacuation, and Operations Centre Management are already being changed and work is continuing on other courses.

It is anticipated that the development of these national competencies will have a significant impact on the capabilities of emergency managers and will improve national capabilities to reduce, mitigate and respond to disasters.

Exercises

Regular exercises are conducted at all levels of emergency management to validate plans and procedures and to reinforce training. A national exercise register is being developed to facilitate free exchange of experience and this will shortly be made available on the Internet.

Public Awareness

Traditionally, Emergency Management Australia has taken the lead in the design and production of a wide-ranging series of public education material in the form of pamphlets, posters and emergency manuals. This activity is now conducted on a national basis through a National Community Awareness Advisory Group which meets regularly to prepare strategies and share experience as well as advising the National Emergency Management Committee. Currently, the Advisory Group is studying the potential for wider use of the expertise available in the media, advertising and public awareness sectors to help the messages to penetrate the whole of society. The challenge in public awareness is to devise strategies which lead to changes in attitudes and behaviour. Significant success is being achieved in relation to reduction of forest fire vulnerability through the use of experienced facilitators working with community groups to identify the hazards and vulnerabilities which a community faces and assisting in the development of appropriate disaster-reduction strategies. The applicability of such an approach to a broad range of hazards is an area for further investigation

Research

Disaster-related research is conducted by various government agencies covering hazards such as bushfire, earthquake, cyclone. Research is also undertaken in various tertiary institutions around the country. The Australian Coordination Committee for IDNDR has funded the development of a research directory which will make information on the range of available research available to the whole community. An area which has received insufficient attention in Australia is in relation to the social science aspects of emergency management. The IDNDR Committee has recently decided that it should be more directive in encouraging projects and research to meet identified gaps.

Future Developments

Australia is making a significant commitment to raising the importance of disaster reduction without reducing its disaster preparedness and response capabilities. This requires that a wider range of agencies and community organisations accept their disaster management responsibilities and contribute to the overall national capability. Government and business enterprises are also being encouraged to develop their own capabilities to continue their business when they have been affected by disasters or emergencies. The whole concept of risk management, as practiced in business, is seen as particularly appropriate to the emergency and disaster discipline. It is also one which has a terminology which will assist emergency managers to communicate more effectively with business and administration. Such improved communication is expected to encourage wider acceptance of, and involvement in, the aims of disaster and emergency management.

REGIONAL ASSISTANCE WITH DISASTER REDUCTION

The island countries of the South Pacific are at risk from a variety of hazards which cause regular disasters. While small on the global scale, these are major disasters for the countries affected with far more impact on national economies and development than more significant disasters in countries with larger resource bases.

Australia, as the largest developed nation in the region, has been a major provider of disaster response assistance for many years. Over the last 10 years it has also been making an increasing commitment to the provision of assistance with disaster-reduction measures. The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) has in place a Pacific Disaster Preparedness Program which has provided technical assistance, equipment and training to a number of regional countries using expertise provided by Emergency Management Australia and by non-government organisations.

In recent years AusAID has cooperated closely with the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs in implementing a South Pacific Disaster Reduction Program. Currently AusAID is examining the feasibility of a major project to assist Papua New Guinea develop its disaster management capacity and for a coordinated approach to institutional strengthening and emergency management training in the South Pacific. Although training has been provided in Australia for a number of countries by Emergency Management Australia, our preference is to conduct courses in the requesting country in conjunction with their officials so that requirements can be tailored more directly to local needs.

The Australian Government provides funding to the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre in Bangkok and to specific non-government organisation programs which assist the development of national disaster management capabilities in other countries. Australia also provides funds for a number of development projects in various countries of Asia and the Pacific which have direct implications for disaster reduction.

Australia has a significant capability to respond to disasters in the Asian region. On a few occasions it has provided shelter materials and similar immediate response stores, but it is more frequently asked to provide financial or food aid to relieve immediate needs. In relation to the longer-term recovery period, Australia has provided significant assistance to Asian countries through development assistance projects. Where possible these are designed so that they reduce the vulnerability of the recipient country to disaster and enhance its recovery capability after similar future events.

International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

The Australian Coordination Committee for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction includes government and non-government members, along with representatives of academic, scientific and community organisations. The committee, in line with the United Nations initiative, aims to reduce the loss of life and property damage caused by natural disasters, especially in developing countries.

The Australian committee has an annual allocation of funds from which it has funded a wide range of disaster reduction projects in the scientific, technical, educational, social and public awareness fields. The Committee recently commissioned an independent mid-decade review of its activities. The report of this review was discussed last month at a workshop which made recommendations which are expected to influence the activities of the committee for the remainder of the Decade. The committee is also developing a strategic plan for the remainder of the Decade and for the continuation of disaster education activities beyond the year 2000. A number of projects funded by the committee have been directed to the South Pacific region and Papua New Guinea. This emphasis is likely to continue during the remaining years of the International Decade.