

Introduction to evacuation planning

Speed read

- Evacuation aims to reduce loss of life or lessen the effects of a hazard on a community, before or during a disaster.
- There is a nationally consistent five-stage evacuation process.
- Involve government, non-government organisations and communities in inclusive evacuation planning.

Key points

Plan and manage evacuation in 5 stages:

1. Decision to evacuate
2. Warning
3. Withdrawal
4. Shelter
5. Return

Evacuation involves the movement of people threatened by a hazard to a safer location and their safe and timely return. Evacuations may take days, weeks or months to complete.

Types of evacuation		
Pre-warned evacuation: community are provided with warning of the impending hazard, and timely and coordinated actions have been facilitated with evacuation plans. E.g. flood, cyclone, bushfire.	Immediate evacuation: rapid onset hazard causes a threat with no or limited opportunity to warn the affected individuals or communities, requiring immediate and rapid protective movements. E.g. earthquake, structural collapse, gas explosion, active shooter or transport accident	
Total, partial, and phased evacuations		
In total evacuations everyone in the affected community is recommended or directed to evacuate	In partial evacuations some are evacuated (e.g. only people in low lying areas during a flood).	In phased evacuations affected communities evacuate at different times (e.g. due to slow onset of a hazard and/or to avoid congestion on transport routes).

Evacuation approaches		
Directed evacuation: a relevant government organisation has exercised a legislated power that requires people to evacuate	Recommended evacuation: evacuation warning has been issued but people have the option to remain	Self-initiated evacuation of people to safer places prior to, or in the absence of, official warnings to evacuate. They manage their own withdrawal, transportation arrangements but still may need support services.

Shelter in place means finding a safe location and staying there until the threat has passed or you are told to evacuate. Sometimes this is recommended by the organisation managing the emergency. Sometimes people may decide themselves to shelter in place (often where they live), even when an evacuation is directed or recommended to (for example) protect homes, pets, livestock, crops, or because they believe it is too late or unsafe to evacuate because warnings have not been received, understood and acted on in a timely manner.

Evacuation can be stressful for people. In addition to the risk of harm to their own life, other factors may influence behaviours and decisions made in an emergency, such as concern for loved ones, concern for property and livelihoods, reliance on items that they cannot easily access when evacuated, cultural or linguistic constraints, lack of trust in the organisations tasked with the evacuation process.

Involve community in evacuation planning. It is a key responsibility of governments at all levels, emergency management organisations, and community organisations. Engage all relevant stakeholders, including the community, to develop, exercise and continually improve evacuation plans.

Take action

- Use the Quick Guide to learn the 5 stages.
- Understand sheltering terminology – read Appendix 1 of *Evacuation Planning* (AIDR 2023)
- Prepare yourself for an emergency. For household emergency planning, see Australian Red Cross' Emergency RediPlan: www.redcross.org.au/prepare
- Check out principles of and regulations related to evacuation planning in the Quick Guide – planning and regulations

More information

- [Evacuation Planning, Chapter 1](#) (AIDR 2023)
- [Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience](#) (AIDR 2020)
- [Managing Exercises](#) (AIDR 2023)
- [Emergency Planning](#) (AIDR 2020)
- [Coping after a crisis](#) (Australian Red Cross 2024)