

Evacuation planning: Stage 2 – Warning

Speed read

- Warning is the second stage of the evacuation process.
- Evacuation warnings save lives and minimise harm by facilitating protective action.
- Warnings are information at a point-in-time about a hazard that impacts or is expected to impact communities. Warnings include advice on what people should do.

Key points

Authority and responsibility to warn:

- **Evacuation plans designate authority and responsibility for issuing warnings.** Reference relevant state and territory legislation and documented emergency management arrangements for delegated authority and command control structures.
- **Australia's Total Warning System** defines the essential elements of delivering warnings effectively: situational awareness, monitoring and predictions, interpretation, message construction, communication, community response, organisational readiness, continuous review and improvement.
- **There is a nationally consistent warning system – the Australian Warning System (AWS).** The three-level scaled warning system includes hazard icons for each warning level and provides calls to action, with icons for cyclone, bushfire, flood, extreme heat, storm, and other hazards.

Stakeholders: Pre-identify who needs to be reached and target channels to suit them. Work with community and stakeholders to tailor warning channels and messages. Community organisations and networks will often be a trusted and frequently used source of information. Specific groups include (but not limited to): First Nations people, members of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, people living with a disability (physical and intellectual), people experience homelessness, remote communities, tourists and temporary visa holders, farmers with animal welfare responsibilities.

Communicate:

- **Construct timely, consistent, understandable warning messages.** There is often limited time available to warn people of impending impacts. Provide information as early as possible about the nature and timing of the hazard impact; who the warning applies to and why; when and where people should evacuate; how to get to an evacuation point; potential consequences of not evacuating; protective measures to take if not evacuating.
- **Stress, lack of trust in authorities or the channel the warning is coming through, literacy and comprehension, language, and how the message is constructed** can all influence the effectiveness of warnings.

- **There are agreed standard messages and templates to use.** Pre-prepare messages that can be updated and tailored, to save time during emergencies. Follow the Common Alerting Protocol – Australia (CAP-AU).

Document. Evacuation plans contain warnings templates, pre-prepared scripts, details of who needs to be warned for different hazards, networks to deliver warnings to vulnerable groups, contact details of organisations involved, templates to record dates, times and details of warnings issued.

Take action

- Learn about Australia’s Total Warning System and the Australian Warning System in [Public Information and Warnings](#) (AIDR 2021)
- Use: [Guideline 1: Warning message construction: Choosing your words](#) (AIDR 2021) for writing effective warning messages.
- Get to know the [Common Alerting Protocol – Australia](#) (CAP-AU).

More information

- [Evacuation Planning Handbook](#), Chapter 4 (AIDR 2023)
- [Public Information and Warnings](#) (AIDR 2021)
- [Emergency Planning](#) (AIDR 2020)
- [Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience](#) (AIDR 2020)
- [Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines](#) (Gender and Disaster Australia 2023)