

Evacuation planning: Stage 3 – Withdrawal

Speed read

- Withdrawal is the organised movement of people from a dangerous or potentially dangerous area to one that is safer.
- Some people may choose to shelter in place and others will wait and assess the situation before deciding whether to evacuate.
- Effective withdrawal arrangements are carried out according to a prepared plan that has been developed with a diverse range of relevant stakeholders with various needs.

Key points

Authority and responsibility: Evacuation plans designate authority and responsibility for withdrawal management. Reference relevant state and territory legislation and documented emergency management arrangements for delegated authority and command control structures. Identify arrangements to ensure those managing withdrawals remain well-informed about the incident.

Consider the different needs of affected people in withdrawal:

- **People at higher risk.** Identify people at higher risk, where specific withdrawal arrangements (e.g. suitable transport and destinations) or shelter in place arrangements may need to be prepared.
- **Those who remain.** Some people may choose to shelter in place. Identify the relevant legislation and formal plans or arrangements that exist to inform how people who choose to remain are managed.
- **Groups of people (e.g. families, residents and staff of care facilities, neighbours).** Where possible and appropriate, move groups of people familiar with each other as a complete unit to minimise the sense of dislocation during an evacuation. Consider cultural factors, intervention orders and the psychosocial safety of people that can be overshadowed in emergency situations.
- **Infants and young children and their caregivers.** Those caring for infants and young children may have more difficulty and risk when evacuating. Parents and caregivers will not evacuate to environments they feel are unsafe or unsuitable for their children.
- **Animal management.** Timing of withdrawal, capacity to move pets / animals, and an appropriate location to move pets / animals will affect people's decisions about evacuation. Some people may choose to remain in place rather than evacuating without their animals. People with assistance animals need special consideration in evacuation plans.

Assessing risk and managing safe and secure withdrawal approaches:

- **Timing.** Consider time available to conduct the withdrawal, the time required to move people at higher risk and the time of impact of the emergency. Include realistic estimations of how long the withdrawal stage will take in different scenarios. This information is critical to how affected people make decisions about evacuations.
- **Partial or phased evacuations.** Approach this based on the risk assessment and planning conducted when making the decision to evacuate. If a partial evacuation is possible, identify who is likely to be withdrawn, who is not and the arrangements in place to manage both groups. E.g. to

avoid traffic congestion, some at-risk groups may be withdrawn before the general population is encouraged to withdraw, and some may be protected in place. Communicate to affected people how this plan will unfold.

- **Assembly areas.** Identify assembly / transit areas where people in cars, buses and other transport can assemble safely before being escorted from the hazard impact area. Assembly areas should provide for registration of evacuees, toilet facilities, refreshments, fuel resupply, and information.
- **Transport options.** Include advice about transport options for withdrawal in warning messages. Encourage evacuees to make their own arrangements where suitable but remember at-risk groups may need specialist transport support.
- **Egress routes and traffic management.** Identify, establish and communicate safe egress (exit) routes based on traffic modelling to accommodate expected traffic volumes. Link traffic management plans to evacuation planning and identify who will staff vehicle control points.
- **Security** of vacated communities should be arranged in consultation with local police to discourage theft.

Communication. Develop a communications sub-plan that identifies how information about withdrawal will be communicated between managers and evacuees at all points of withdrawal. The time evacuees spend enroute may be considerable. Communicate via broadcast radio, promote local radio frequencies signs on highways for travellers and people not familiar with the area.

Document the process. Evacuation plan components relevant to the withdrawal phase include location and management of egress routes, vehicle control points, and assembly areas, registration of affected people, transportation arrangements, security arrangements and communication sub-plan. Use maps (digitised to enable sharing) to identify location of at-risk groups and other key withdrawal plan locations.

Take action

- See Evacuation Planning Quick Guide – Introduction for a brief summary on types of evacuations and evacuation approaches, and Chapter 1 of [Evacuation Planning](#).
- Get to know the [Common Alerting Protocol – Australia \(CAP-AU\)](#).
- Check out message content tips on page 19 of the [Evacuation Planning Handbook](#)

More information

- [Evacuation Planning Handbook](#), Chapter 5 (AIDR 2023)
- [Emergency Planning Handbook](#) (AIDR 2020)
- [Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience](#) (AIDR 2020)
- [Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines](#) (Gender and Disaster Australia, 2023)
- [Planning for Animals in Disaster](#) (AIDR 2024)
- [Emergency planning for children and young people](#) (Department of Human Services, Victoria)