



Code of Practice  
for  
Warning  
Republishers

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[Publishing information]

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# 1 Introduction

## Purpose

The *Code of Practice for Warning Republishers* has been developed as an aide for warning republishers. Its purpose is to provide emergency warning republishers with guidance to ensure that:

- the accuracy and timeliness of republished warnings is preserved, and
- appropriate contextual information – especially relating to the reliability and source of warnings – is properly communicated with republished warnings.

This Code of Practice was endorsed by the Standing Council on Police and Emergency Management (SCPEM) on 4 July 2013. The Code is complemented by two other documents, *Australia's Emergency Warning Arrangements* and the *Best Practice Guide for Warning Originators*. The Code of Practice is advisory - it is not intended to limit flexibility and individual jurisdictional practice or to impose mandatory requirements. It should be used to complement any existing state and territory guidelines for warning republishers.

## Context

An **emergency warning** is a message signalling an imminent hazard, which may include advice on protective measures.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of a warning is to inform a community of an impending or current threat and to prompt an appropriate response or action. The action that is required of the community is usually contained in the warning message, for example, 'seek further information', 'take shelter', or 'activate your emergency plan'.

Constitutionally, primary responsibility for the protection of life, property and the environment rests with the states and territories, in their capacity as first responders.

In the context of their emergency management arrangements, state and territory emergency management agencies make decisions about to whom, whether and when emergency warnings should be issued, and the content of warnings. It is also a matter for individual states and territories to choose which warning technologies to adopt and when to activate them in accordance with the specific circumstances of an incident.

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<sup>1</sup> Emergency Management Australia, Attorney-General's Department, *Australian Emergency Manuals Series: Glossary*, 1998, p 115. The *Australian Emergency Manuals Series: Glossary* defines a warning as the 'dissemination of a message signalling an imminent hazard, which may include advice on protective measures'.

In addition to state and territory emergency management agencies, the Bureau of Meteorology issues warnings and watch notices (via the broadcast media and the internet) directly to the public for weather warnings (such as severe thunderstorm, high sea, flood and tropical cyclone warnings) and, in conjunction with Geoscience Australia, also issues tsunami warnings.

A number of local governments have localised warning arrangements in place, and most local governments have the support of well-established state and territory government emergency warning arrangements.

Warnings issued by Australian government authorities and agencies comply with relevant government policies, procedures and standards.

A **warning republisher** is usually a private organisation or individual that republishes emergency warnings. These warnings may be official, where they originate from a government authority, or unofficial, where they originate from another source. Warnings may be ‘republished’ in a variety of forms, including (but not restricted to) broadcast media, websites, and web-based technologies such as social media, RSS, and smartphone applications. A republisher can also be a government agency that republishes another government agency’s warning; for example, many state emergency service organisations republish warnings issued by the Bureau of Meteorology.

Warning republishers have the capacity to broaden the reach of official warning messages, which will be acted upon by the general public. They also have the potential to disseminate misinformation that may cause unnecessary harm or create confusion if not managed judiciously. Adherence by warning republishers to this Code of Practice can optimise the impact of emergency warnings and assist individuals and communities to act on warning advice.

For the purposes of these arrangements, a **warning originator** is defined as a government agency with the authority to warn the public of an imminent hazard.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth and state and territory government agencies with the authority to warn communities are listed in *Australia’s Emergency Warning Arrangements*.

# 2 Code of Practice

Emergency warnings are a key disaster management tool as they have the potential to significantly reduce the impact of disasters on communities and protect lives, properties and the environment.

Republishers are encouraged to apply the following Code of Practice to ensure that republished warnings maintain the integrity of original warnings and complement official warning methods.

## Prior to republishing official warnings

- i) Establish formally agreed arrangements with government authorities.
- ii) Consider the resilience of the mechanism for republishing—especially whether it has sufficient capacity to continue functioning effectively in times of high demand during emergency events.

## Republishing official warnings

- iii) Ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that the warning to be republished is current and is republished in a timely manner.
- iv) Do not alter the wording and spatial representation of an official warning.<sup>3</sup>
- v) Include the original warning's source, date and time of publication.
- vi) Republish any revisions or updates to the original warning, including closure notices informing the community that the emergency has eased or ceased.

## Republishing unofficial warnings

In addition to paragraphs ii-vi above:

- vii) Clearly indicate that the warning is not from an official source, and that it is unverified (where applicable).
- viii) Establish procedures to verify information from unofficial sources, including checking the information against official sources.
- ix) Remove, retract or correct inaccurate or inappropriate content as soon as possible.

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<sup>3</sup> Official government warnings should contain the following information: the type of threat, issuing agency, affected area, action required, information about where further information can be found, and, where relevant, the timing of the threat impact (e.g. when a cyclone would be expected to make landfall).  
*Best Practice Guide for Warning Originators.*

## Official standards

Republishers are encouraged to consider the following standards (to the extent that they are relevant and within the control of republishers), which are recognised by government authorities responsible for issuing emergency warnings to the public:

- x) Consider if the warning information complies with the Australian Government standard for Common Alerting Protocol - Australia Profile (CAP-AU-STD).<sup>4</sup>
- xi) Consider if the distribution of warning information complies with the *National Warning Principles*.<sup>5</sup>
- xii) Maintain records in accordance with legal obligations.
- xiii) Comply with Commonwealth, state and territory privacy laws.

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<sup>4</sup> CAP is an international standard that facilitates the construction and exchange of all-hazard emergency alert and warning messages between various alerting technologies, systems and networks.

See: <https://govshare.gov.au/xmlui/handle/10772/6379>

<sup>5</sup> 'National Warning Principles', *Australia's Emergency Warning Arrangements*.