

Warnings Republishers

Guidance on republishing warnings during emergencies for established emergency broadcasters, individuals and community members and private warning publishers or disseminators



Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience

AUSTRALIAN DISASTER RESILIENCE
HANDBOOK COLLECTION

Warnings Republishers

Additional guidance to support users of the Public Information and
Warnings Handbook



Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

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Enquiries regarding the content, licence and any use of this document may be directed to:

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience
370 Albert St, East Melbourne Vic 3002
Telephone: +61 (0) 3 9419 2388

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Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection

The Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection provides guidance on national principles and practices for disaster resilience.

The Handbook Collection:

- provides an authoritative, trusted and freely available source of knowledge about disaster resilience principles in Australia
- aligns national disaster resilience strategy and policy with practice, by guiding and supporting jurisdictions, agencies and other organisations and individuals in their implementation and adoption
- highlights and promotes the adoption of good practice in building disaster resilience in Australia
- builds interoperability between jurisdictions, agencies, the private sector, local businesses and community groups by promoting use of a common language and coordinated, nationally agreed principles.

The Handbook Collection is developed and reviewed by national consultative committees representing a range of state and territory agencies, governments, organisations and individuals involved in disaster resilience. The collection is sponsored by the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs.

Access to the Handbook Collection and further details are available on the Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub (the 'Knowledge Hub'; <https://www.knowledge.aidr.org.au/handbooks>).

Handbook 1 Disaster Health

Handbook 2 Community Recovery

Toolkit 2-1 Community recovery checklists

Toolkit 2-2 Further resources for community recovery

Toolkit 2-3 Community recovery case studies

Handbook 3 Managing Exercises

Handbook 4 Evacuation Planning

Handbook 5 Communicating with People with a Disability: National Guidelines for Emergency Managers

Handbook 6 National Strategy for Disaster Resilience: Community Engagement Framework

Handbook 7 Managing the Floodplain: A Guide to Best Practice in Flood Risk Management in Australia

Guideline 7-1 Using the National Generic Brief for Flood Investigations to Develop Project Specific Specifications

Guideline 7-2 Flood Emergency Response Classification of the Floodplain

Guideline 7-3 Flood Hazard

Template 7-4 Technical Project Brief Template

Guideline 7-5 Flood Information to Support Land-use Planning

Guideline 7-6 Assessing Options and Service Levels for Treating Existing Risk

Practice Note 7-7 Considering Flooding in Land-use Planning Activities

Handbook 8 Lessons Management

Handbook 9 Australian Emergency Management Arrangements

Handbook 10 National Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines

Guideline 10-1 National Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines: Practice Guide

Training resource 10-2 NERAG Online Training Program

Handbook 12 Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers

Handbook 14 Incident Management in Australia

Handbook 15 Safe and Healthy Crowded Places

Guideline 1 Crowded Places Checklists

Reference Crowded Places Further Resources

Handbook 16 Public Information and Warnings

Guideline 1 Warning Message Construction: Choosing your words

Guideline 2 Warnings Republishers

Australian Emergency Management Manual Series

Publications in the Australian Emergency Management Manual Series have not been reviewed since 2011 or earlier. The Manual Series is undergoing a review which will see relevant manuals either moved into the Handbook Collection or other collections or archived. Current and past manual editions will remain available on the Knowledge Hub.

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Introduction

This guideline is a companion document to the *Public Information and Warnings Handbook* (AIDR 2018).¹ It provides guidance on republishing warnings during emergencies for established emergency broadcasters, individuals and community members and private warning publishers or disseminators. It outlines key considerations for those who may be working with or sharing content for warnings.

The provision of warnings enacts a national commitment to building shared responsibility for disaster resilience, by giving people information to make decisions about their own safety.

In the context of warnings republishers, the dissemination of warnings should be encouraged, whether by formal or informal means, subject to a range of key considerations. Republished warnings can help expand the number and diversity of people that receive official warnings and can assist individuals and communities to take appropriate and timely actions that save lives, livelihoods and property.

Warnings prompt and encourage protective action to minimise the social and economic impacts of an emergency. When republishing warnings, it is therefore, important that:

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

This guideline is intended to be advisory. It is not intended to limit flexibility and individual jurisdictional practice or to impose mandatory requirements. Rather, it should be used to complement any existing Commonwealth, state and territory guidelines for warnings republishers and may be adopted into jurisdictional or organisational codes of practice.

¹ This guideline replaces the former *Code of Practice for Warnings Republishers* (Attorney-General's Department 2013). An archived copy, for reference only, is available at: <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/archived-documents/>

Context

A warning provides point-in-time information about a hazard that is impacting or is expected to impact communities. It describes the impact and expected consequences for communities and includes advice on what people should do. Warnings are a specific form of public information which is information that is provided to the public immediately before, during and after an emergency to reduce the potential impact of an emergency or hazard.

The provision of public information and warnings is a priority for any organisation with responsibility for community safety in an emergency (see Figure 1).

The issue of official warnings is primarily the responsibility of various Commonwealth, state, territory and local government authorities. People and organisations across Australia also have an important role to play in the reach and effectiveness of warnings. Partnerships are crucial between all levels of government, emergency services organisations, the community, industry and business, and the media, to ensure communities receive, share and act upon warnings in an emergency.

Authorities should work with a wide range of warning dissemination groups who are trusted by individuals and communities.

See *Public Information and Warnings Handbook* (AIDR 2018) for further information.

Who provides warnings?

In Australia, each state and territory has specific legislation governing its emergency management arrangements and statutory providers of warnings, including specific roles and responsibilities for the issue of warnings. The Commonwealth also holds warning responsibilities, particularly through the work of the Bureau of Meteorology.

A statutory provider can also be a warnings republisher by republishing another government agency's warning e.g. police may share warnings issued by the State Emergency Service in a major flood, even though they are not the official agency responsible for flood warnings.

Sometimes, warnings originate from sources other than statutory providers (e.g. insurance companies or privately-operated weather services).

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.

Warnings save lives and minimise harm by facilitating protective action

Warnings serve and support broader risk management actions, ranging from hazard reduction and response, to ongoing community education and resilience building.

Warnings empower people and foster shared responsibility

Having access to clear public information and warnings about imminent or current emergencies means communities can better understand their risk, consider their personal situation and take protective action.

A mandate and responsibility to warn

Authorities have moral and various legal obligations to do everything they can to protect life and property from the impacts of hazards and emergencies, including through the provision of knowledge and information.

Public value

Effective warnings make a clear contribution to mitigating and minimising the lasting consequences disasters can have on households, businesses and communities.

Community expectation

Communities expect if important information is available, it will be shared promptly and effectively.

Figure 1 Why we warn (extract from *Public Information and Warnings Handbook* (AIDR 2018))

What is a warnings republisher?

A warnings republisher is usually one of the following:

ESTABLISHED EMERGENCY BROADCASTERS

Radio, television, and online media broadcasters.

INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Community radio stations, Facebook groups, local emergency service units and brigades, local clubs,

social media influencers or community members and organisations.

PRIVATELY OWNED WARNING PUBLISHERS OR DISSEMINATORS

Global digital service providers (e.g. Google and Facebook offer dedicated crisis response services), insurers, businesses with experience or deep interest in emergency management, and individuals or groups with a passion for communication about emergencies.

Why republishing warnings is important

Warnings republishers may seek to republish and tailor warnings and information for their specific audience or community. It is very important that warnings republishers maintain the integrity and intention of official warnings.

The republishing of warnings has potential benefits and risks for statutory providers of warnings and the impacted communities the warnings are intended for.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF WARNINGS REPUBLISHERS TO STATUTORY PROVIDERS?

- **Extended reach:** Warnings republishers can access larger audiences to extend the reach of official warning messages. The greater the reach of warnings, the greater the chance of protective action being taken by the impacted community.
- **Reduce impact:** Official warnings that reach their intended audience can help reduce the impact on emergency service agencies. The more people that follow official calls-to-action warnings, the less likely it is people will be impacted, requiring others to risk their lives to assist them.
- **Support validation:** Republishing warnings helps impacted people confirm the validity of official information. Hearing the same message from multiple sources has been shown to reinforce its validity.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS OF WARNINGS REPUBLISHERS TO STATUTORY PROVIDERS?

- **Delayed delivery:** Republishing warnings can take time and affect timely delivery and can cause confusion. Official warnings republished hours after they are originally issued can mean people who depend on this source would get the information late which could lead to greater impact and add to the confusion in an emergency.
- **Introduction of inaccuracies:** Inaccurate republishing of warnings, particularly with the addition of myths

or misinformation, increases the burden on statutory providers of warnings during emergencies. The more unofficial sources of information being republished during an emergency, the more time and resources need to be dedicated to managing inaccurate information from these sources.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF WARNINGS REPUBLISHERS TO THE IMPACTED COMMUNITY?

- **Audience reach:** Warnings republishers can help reach different types of audiences. For example, not everyone follows the statutory provider's social media page. Impacted communities seek to connect with their peers through a wide variety of their own preferred communication channels.
- **Meaningful translation:** Warnings republishers can translate warnings into different community languages, which widens the dissemination of the calls-to-action, or reach people with special needs.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS OF WARNINGS REPUBLISHERS TO THE IMPACTED COMMUNITY?

- **Introduction of inaccuracies:** Inaccurate or incomplete republishing of a warning can potentially omit key information relevant to impacted people. If people miss key aspects of a warning, it can jeopardise their ability to prepare and protect their properties and stay safe.
- **Distraction:** Republishing some but not all official warnings may distract impacted people from the regular flow of information from emergency services. People may miss an important update because they are looking in the wrong place.
- **Complacency:** Republishing unchanged warnings may be less effective at attracting people's attention.

How warnings are republished

Warnings may be 'republished' through a variety of channels, including (but not limited to) broadcast media, websites, and web-based technologies such as social media, RSS, and smartphone applications. More traditional methods for republishing warnings include such things as community notice boards and newsletters, phone trees and community meetings.

Some people share warning information, for example, from news and radio outlets, for family and friends in the impacted area. Others forward official warnings through a variety of forms such as social media posts.

Deaf liaison officers: sharing warnings with the deaf community

NSW SES, NSW Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue NSW have worked with the NSW Deaf Society to establish Deaf Liaison Officers in high-risk communities across NSW. These Deaf Liaison Officers can help emergency services communicate important emergency information in AUSLAN to their peers in the deaf community during significant disasters. Deaf Liaison Officers have been trained to share official warnings with their networks using their preferred language (AUSLAN) and preferred communication medium (social media videos) to overcome one of the key communication barriers for deaf people and extend the capability and reach of NSW Emergency Services.

Guidelines for warnings republishers

The following are key considerations that provide guidance to warnings republishers.

Established emergency broadcasters

Some media organisations, such as the ABC, have established formal arrangements through Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with emergency management agencies, who are the statutory providers of warnings. Other media organisations have informal relationships in place. Key considerations for established emergency broadcasters include:

- Where possible, establish a formal arrangement with the statutory provider of warnings, for example, through an MoU or similar.
- Consider the robustness of your broadcast platform for republishing. Does it have sufficient capacity to continue to function effectively in times of high demand during emergency events?
- Check the warning is current and is republished in a timely manner.
- Maintain the intent of a warning, this includes both the wording and spatial representation of an official warning. Take care to correctly replicate or reproduce maps and images.
- Include the original warning's source, date and time of publication.
- Republish any revisions or updates to the original warning, including de-escalation of warnings informing the community the emergency has eased or ceased.
- Consider if the warning message complies with the Australian Government standard for Common Alerting Protocol - Australia Profile (CAP-AU-STD) where required (see Figure 2).
- Comply with relevant legislation, regulations or policy, such as privacy and data laws.
- Identify and understand the responsibilities and any legal implications including potential liability as warnings republishers.

What is the Common Alerting Protocol?

The Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) is an international standard for the construction of warning messages. It facilitates rapid and reliable information exchange between systems and networks.

A message constructed using the CAP standard can be automatically and consistently transmitted via web, text, speech, SMS, pager, electronic highway signs and radio networks. Technologies assisting the deaf or hard of hearing or people with vision impairment, and translation services to diverse languages are also directly assisted using CAP.

In 2012, the CAP-AU-STD profile of CAP was developed and formally adopted for use within Australia by all Australian, State and Territory governments. It provides tailored protocols to support Australian event terminology and area references.

The Bureau of Meteorology hosts and manages the CAP-AU-STD in Australia. For more information, visit: <http://www.bom.gov.au/metadata/CAP-AU/About.shtml>

Figure 2 Common Alerting Protocol (CAP-AU-STD)

Individuals and community members

Individuals and community members have often sought to provide information to their local community during an emergency. Previously this was informal and involved, for example, posting information on community message boards, via the activation of local phone trees or through informal community networks.

With the rise in use of social media, the ability for individuals and community members to republish warnings with a greater reach and speed has been made possible. While some individuals and community members do this to help their community access official warnings that may help them prepare for an unfolding emergency, others may seek to republish warnings for personal gain.

If communities and individuals choose to republish warnings, it is important to remember there can be a great deal of public information and warnings over a long period, at any time of day or night. What may start off as something simple can quickly become overwhelming for the uninitiated, so those involved need to consider what is involved and choose a manageable strategy.

Inaccurate warnings have the potential to inadvertently cause harm or create confusion for those impacted, so it is important for individuals and community members, who choose to republish warnings, to take into consideration the following:

- Check the warning is current and is republished in a timely manner.
- Maintain the intent of a warning, this includes both the wording and spatial representation of an official warning. Take care to correctly replicate or reproduce maps and images.
- Include the original warning's source, date and time of publication.
- Republish any revisions or updates to the original warning, including de-escalation of warnings informing the community the emergency has eased or ceased.
- If the warning is from an unofficial source, clearly indicate the source and that it contains unverified information.
- Establish procedures to verify information from unofficial sources, including checking the information against official sources.
- Remove, retract or correct inaccurate or inappropriate content as soon as possible.
- Taking photos or video during an emergency in risky situations is strongly discouraged.
- Have an exit strategy with clear messaging if for any reason unable to continue in the middle of an event.
- Identify and understand the responsibilities and any legal implications including potential liability as warnings republishers.

Privately owned warning publishers or disseminators

In recent years, there has been a rise in privately-operated weather services, social media platforms providing crisis response services, and insurance companies providing warnings to their policy holders. Where possible, private warning publishers or disseminators should seek to work collaboratively with statutory providers of warnings to enable the best possible outcome for impacted communities.

Key considerations for private warning publishers or disseminators include:

- Consider establishing a prior relationship with the statutory provider of warnings, for example, through an MoU or informal agreement.
- Consider the robustness of your republishing platform. Does it have sufficient capacity to continue to function effectively in times of high demand during emergency events? Keep your user base informed of impending changes.
- Check the warning is current and is republished in a timely manner.
- Maintain the intent of a warning, this includes both the wording and spatial representation of an official warning. Take care to correctly replicate or reproduce maps and images.
- Include the original warning's source, date and time of publication.
- Republish any revisions or updates to the original warning, including de-escalation of warnings informing the community the emergency has eased or ceased.
- If the warning is from an unofficial source, clearly indicate the source and that it contains unverified information.
- Establish procedures to verify information from unofficial sources, including checking the information against official sources.
- Remove, retract or correct inaccurate or inappropriate content as soon as possible.
- Consider if the warning complies with the Australian Government standard for Common Alerting Protocol - Australia Profile (CAP-AU-STD) (see Figure 2).
- Comply with relevant legislation, regulations or policy, e.g. privacy and data laws.
- Identify and understand the responsibilities and any legal implications including potential liability as warnings republishers.

See *Public Information and Warnings Handbook* (AIDR 2018) for further information.



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