Introduction to emergency planning

Speed read

- Emergency planning involves identifying and documenting strategies for preventing, preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies.
- Effective emergency planning contributes to reducing the likelihood and consequence of emergencies for individuals, communities, entities, and the environment and can have positive economic benefits.
- Emergency planning is a legislative or regulatory requirement for many entities under state, territory and Commonwealth legislation.

Key points

There are eight principles of emergency planning:

1. Emergency planning is risk informed. Planning is based on a risk management study.
2. Emergency planning reduces unknowns. Planning increases understanding of risks, vulnerabilities, and treatment options across the social, built, economic, and natural environments.
3. Emergency planning is collaborative and inclusive, involving consultation and engagement with those affected by the plan.
4. Emergency planning is strategic. Planning develops strategic objectives, relationships, and networks.
5. Emergency planning is solutions oriented. Planning develops agreed approaches to managing risks and consequences.
6. Emergency planning is iterative. Learnings from each step in the emergency planning process inform next steps.
7. Emergency planning enables adaptive capacity. Planning develops frameworks that provide a base to build flexible and adaptive solutions.
8. Emergency planning is a shared responsibility undertaken by a wide range of people/entities.

Emergency planning is relevant to all levels of government, private sector, critical infrastructure, not-for-profit and non-government organisations and community organisations. When developing an emergency plan use consistent and common terminology, responsibilities and arrangements so plans can be understood across sectors.

An emergency plan will usually sit within a framework of plans. An emergency plan can:

- fit within a hierarchical structure of plans e.g. national, state, regional and local
- cover a specific phase of prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response or recovery
- cover a specific function or activity e.g. transport functional plan
- cover a specific supporting activity e.g. evacuation plan, public information and warning plan
- cover a specific hazard e.g. exotic animal disease plan
- cover a specific event or entity e.g. festival emergency plan, airport/aerodrome emergency plan.

Emergency plans need to factor in volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). To manage VUCA in the planning process:

- adopt the emergency planning principles
- build in flexible leadership structures that can integrate entities not identified in the planning process
- set up collaborative networks and relationships
- encourage adaptive and creative thinking to produce innovative solutions
- identify and engage subject matter specialists who can provide appropriate expert advice
- foster a learning environment to enable rapid prototyping, trialling and evaluation of solutions.

Take action

- Use emergency planning tools for households, business, local government and schools knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/emergency-planning-tools
- Use the Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework: A guideline to develop the capabilities required to manage severe to catastrophic disasters (bit.ly/preparedness-framework)

More information

- Emergency Planning Handbook (AIDR 2020)
- Emergency Planning Collection