Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience

COMPANION DOCUMENT

AUSTRALIAN DISASTER RESILIENCE HANDBOOK COLLECTION

The Australian Warning System

Companion to *Public Information and Warnings* (AIDR 2021)

This document complements *Public Information and Warnings* (2021).
It is available as an online resource on the Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub: **knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/public-information-and-warnings-handbook**

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Contents

Introduction **4**

How the system has been developed **4**

Context **4**

1. Elements of the Australian Warning System **5**

1.1 A nested model 5

1.2 Warning levels 5

1.3 Hazard icons 5

1.3.1 National hazard icons 5

1.4 Action statements 7

List of Figures

Figure 1. Australian Warning System warning levels 5

List of Tables

Table 1.: Australian Warning System hazard icons 6

Table 2: Australian Warning System calls to action 7

Introduction

This handbook companion document supports *Public Information and Warnings* (AIDR 2021) and provides guidance on the elements of the Australian Warning System.

The role of warnings in a public information and warnings context is to provide 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.

Previously, there have been different warning systems for different hazard types across Australia. The Australian Warning System was adopted by ANZEMC in March 2021 and aims to provide a consistent warnings approach to Australian communities.

The system is a three-level scaled warning system and includes a nationally consistent set of hazard icons for each warning level to show warnings on various publishing platforms (e.g. websites and apps) and provides calls to action. There are icons for cyclone, bushfire, flood, extreme heat, storm, and other. There is a consistent shape and colour scheme, with icons increasing in size as the warning level increases.

Each warning level is to be combined with an action statement to give the community clearer advice about what to do. Calls to action can be used flexibly across all three warning levels and contextualised for each hazard within each state or territory.

The system builds on existing warning frameworks and applies to bushfire, flood, severe storm, cyclone and extreme heat – but is designed to be adaptable and scalable to other hazards.

How the system has been developed

The Australian Warning System has been developed based on community research and input from Australia's emergency services and hazard agencies. As part of the Multi Hazard Warnings Social Research conducted by Metrix, more than 14,000 people were surveyed or interviewed to assess community perceptions of existing warning systems and improvements which could make warnings clearer and lead people to take action during hazard events.

Further information on this community research can be found on AIDR's Knowledge Hub: **knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/multi-hazard-warning-system-social-research**

Context

The Australian Warning System sits within a broader context of public information and warnings:

- general preparedness and pre-season messaging (e.g. community engagement campaigns)
- information and advice about increasing hazard danger or impact (e.g. short-term forecasts, weather products, fire danger ratings)
- general information about hazard or planned events which are not posing a threat or do not require specific community action
- information and advice on reduced threats (i.e closure of hazard event, or when a hazard is no longer posing a threat to the community)
- relief and recovery information commencing during the hazard event
- ongoing information and messaging (i.e. routine information about recovery or preparing for future hazard events).

1. Elements of the Australian Warning System

1.1 A nested model

The Australian Warning System utilises a nested model that includes the warning level + hazard / location + action statements.

Warning level	+	Hazard / location	+	Action statement

=

EMERGENCY WARNING – Browntown bushfire – Leave now

ADVICE – Smithtown flooding – Stay informed

1.2 Warning levels

There are three warning levels:

1. **Advice:** An incident has started. There is no immediate danger. Stay up to date in case the situation changes.
2. **Watch and Act:** There is a heightened level of threat. Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect you and your family.
3. **Emergency Warning:** This is the highest level of warning. You may be in danger and need to take action immediately. Any delay now puts your life at risk.

Figure 1. Australian Warning System warning levels

1.3 Hazard icons

The Australian Warning System icons are consistent in shape and colour scheme, and increase in size as the warning level increases. Using the outcomes of community research, a consistent set of hazard icons has been developed for the five hazards:

- triangle shape with sharp corners
- yellow, orange, red colour palette
- icon size or type increasing as warning level increases
- reduced threat option to inform community that it is safe to resume normal activities.

Table 1 shows each set of hazard icons for cyclone, fire, flood, heat, storm and other.

1.3.1 National hazard icons

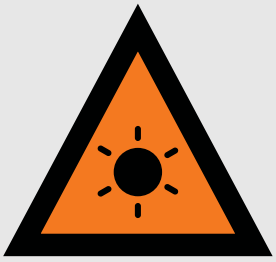
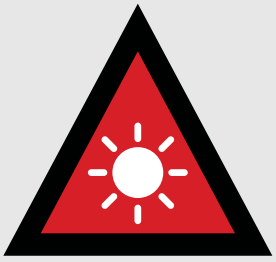
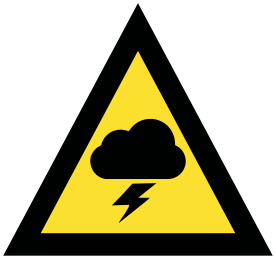
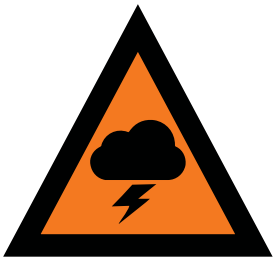
The hazard icons appear in three escalating tiers. Black must always be used to outline the triangle in which the icon appears in.

In yellow and orange tiered icons:

- Black must always be used as the primary icon fill colour.
- White may be used sparingly as a secondary colour.
- In red tiered icons:
- White must always be used as the primary icon fill colour.
- Red may be used sparingly as a secondary colour.

Specific guidelines on the colour palette can be found in the National hazard icons – design guidelines: **knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/8310/national-hazard-icons-design-guidelines.pdf**

Table 1. Australian Warning System hazard icons

CYCLONE			
FIRE			
FLOOD			
HEAT			
STORM			
OTHER			

1.4 Action statements

Each warning level has a set of action statements to give the community clearer advice about what to do. Calls to action can be used flexibly across all three warning levels and contextualised for each hazard within each state or territory.

Table 2. Australian Warning System calls to action

ADVICE	WATCH AND ACT	EMERGENCY WARNING
• Prepare now • Stay informed • Monitor conditions • Stay informed/threat is reduced • Avoid the area • Return with caution • Avoid smoke	• Prepare to leave/evacuate • Leave/evacuate now (if you are not prepared) • Prepare to take shelter • Move/stay indoors • Stay near shelter • Walk two or more streets back • Monitor conditions as they are changing • Be aware of ember attack • Move to higher ground (away from creeks/rivers/coast) • Limit time outside (cyclone, heat, asthma) • Avoid the area/avoid the flooded area • Stay away from damaged buildings and other hazards • Prepare for isolation • Protect yourself against the impacts of extreme heat • Do not enter flood water • Not safe to return • Prepare your property (cyclone/storm	• Leave/evacuate (immediately, by am/pm/hazard timing) • Seek/take shelter now • Shelter indoors now • Too late/dangerous to leave

Key considerations for writing effecting messages can be found in handbook companion document *Guideline 1: Warning Message Construction: Choosing your words* (AIDR 2021) and further guidance on republishing warnings during emergencies can be found in *Guideline 2: Warnings Republishers* (AIDR 2021) **knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/public-information-and-warnings-handbook**

1.5 Consistent hazard warning frameworks

The Australian Warning System will be supported by hazard warning guidance. This hazard warning guidance is under development to map hazard impacts to warning levels.

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