



Office of the Auditor General Western Australia

Summary of the Performance Examination

COMING READY OR NOT: PREPARING FOR LARGE-SCALE EMERGENCIES

Report 4 – May 2009

Background

Emergencies are events that require a coordinated and organised response. They can happen suddenly and without warning. Some will be beyond the day-to-day capacity of local agencies and communities to respond. They will require agencies and communities to organise and gather extra resources to cope and recover.

Being prepared for emergencies involves having plans, structures and arrangements that bring together government and voluntary and private organisations so that we are ready to respond when an emergency happens.

The *Emergency Management Act 2005* (the Act) set up a number of key emergency management bodies, the peak body being the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC). The Act sets out the hazards that agencies must prepare for and allocates responsibility for their management to a number of hazard management agencies.

Western Australia's preparations include planning at the state level and the community level through local government. Western Australia also links into emergency preparation in other jurisdictions including the Commonwealth Government.

Our performance examination addressed three key criteria:

1. Does Western Australia have an emergency management framework?
2. Have emergency management plans been prepared?
3. Do SEMC and agencies know if agencies are prepared to respond?

Examination conclusion...

Gaps exist in the implementation of Western Australia's emergency management framework. These gaps include the identification of hazard management agencies and the hazards the state faces, and out-of-date emergency management plans. There has been no formal assessment

of the state's overall preparedness for large-scale emergencies. Agencies have not formally assessed their preparedness but consider that they have substantial operational experience, capability and capacity to respond to major emergencies.

What the examination found...

- There is no formal process for regularly reviewing and deciding which hazards the state should prepare for so WA may not be preparing for the right hazards.
- The SEMC has not assessed how well-prepared the state is overall for large-scale emergencies.
- Twenty-four state emergency management plans (Westplans) are in place but 13 are past the required review date, as are four of the eight support plans.
- Gaps in emergency management regulations could potentially affect agencies' capacity to respond to emergencies.
- Six hazards listed in the legislation, including bushfires, do not have a specified hazard management agency and three hazards identified by the SEMC are not included in the legislation. Hazard management agencies will not be able to use the Act's powers fully in an emergency caused by these hazards.
- SEMC has not ensured local governments comply with their emergency management obligations.
- Most agencies we reviewed test their plans, but individual agencies do not formally assess their overall capacity to respond to large-scale emergencies.

What the examination recommended...

The State Emergency Management Committee and Emergency Management WA, should:

- formally and regularly assess which hazards the state should prepare for
- assess the state's level of preparedness at least annually, identifying gaps and significant risks
- ensure agencies fulfil their obligations under the Act
- submit outstanding legislative changes to Parliament as a matter of priority
- work with local governments to ensure up-to-date comprehensive local arrangements are in place.

Agencies should:

- review out-of-date Westplans and support plans as a matter of urgency
- annually assess their capability to respond to emergencies and take measures to address any shortfalls.

**A copy of the report can be accessed at www.audit.wa.gov.au/
For further information contact by email: info@audit.wa.gov.au**