Recent developments in NSW emergency management

by Ian Walker, State Training Co-ordinator, Emergency Management, NSW State Emergency Management Committee

A number of significant national developments in emergency management have occurred over the past two years.

Inter-agency policy co-ordination at National and State levels

In Australia, emergency management policy co-ordination is achieved through a formal structure of emergency management committees at National and State levels. The National Emergency Management Committee (NEMC) is the peak consultative forum for emergency management in Australia. Chaired by the Director-General of Emergency Management Australia (EMA), it comprises the chairpersons and Executive Officers of State and Territory emergency management organisations. The committee meets annually to coordinate Commonwealth and State interests in national emergency management (EMA, 1994).

Each State and Territory has established a peak body to oversee emergency management matters. In NSW, the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) is the principal committee established under the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act for the purposes of emergency management throughout the State and, in particular, is responsible for emergency planning at State level.

The SEMC comprises a chairperson appointed by the Minister, the State

Emergency Operations Controller (SEOCON), representatives of the Emergency Services Organisations, Functional Area Coordinators, and other advisors (see *Figure 1*).

In NSW, similar arrangements for emergency management committees exist at district and local government levels, with each level responsive to the next highest level. In this way, policy co-ordination on an all-agency basis occurs right down to the local community.

Two recent examples of national policy co-ordination, which have an impact throughout the emergency management structure, are the application of *National Emergency Management Competency Standards* and the *Risk Management* standard.

National Emergency Management Competency Standards

The first edition of the Competency Standards was published in 1995. It has subsequently been revised and rewritten as a second edition. The final draft of the second edition was referred to the State and Territory Emergency Management Committees for comment by EMA in May 1997.

The impact of developments in national emergency management policy brought about the need for massive
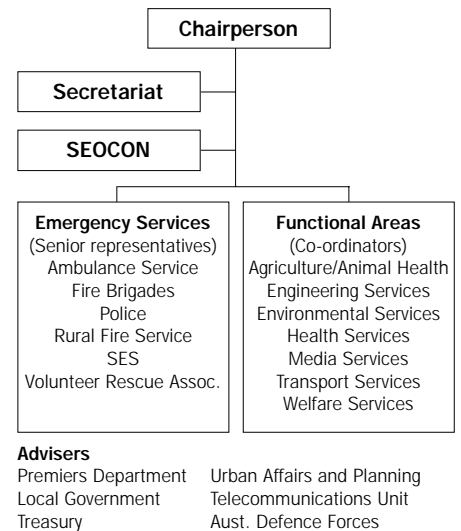

Figure 1: State Emergency Mgt Committee

revision of the first edition. One important development was the endorsement by the NEMC of Australian/New Zealand Standard 4360 — Risk Management and its agreement 'to the incorporation of a risk management approach (based on AS/NZS 4360) into emergency management documentation and the development of appropriate products that established risk management in an emergency management context' (EMA, 1997).

The subsequent incorporation of risk management into the revised Competency Standards required major changes to be made. In addition, the lack of comprehensive evidence guides in the initial edition necessitated their en-

Edition 1 (1995)	Edition 2 (final draft) 1997
Unit 1: Develop Emergency Management Policy	Unit 1: Contribute to and Implement Emergency Management Policy
Unit 2: Assess Vulnerability	Unit 2: Establish Emergency Risk Management Context
Unit 3: Select Emergency Management Strategies	Unit 3: Emergency Risk Identification, Analysis and Evaluation
Unit 4: Plan Strategy Implementation	Unit 4: Select and Document Emergency Management Intervention Strategies
Unit 5: Implement Plans	Unit 5: Implement and Review Intervention Strategies
Unit 6: Communicate Effectively	Unit 6: Controlling Emergencies
Unit 7: Manage People	Unit 7: Exercise Elements of Emergency Management
Unit 8: Manage Resources	Unit 8: Communicate Effectively
Unit 9: Co-ordinate Resources	Unit 9: Lead, Manage and Develop People
Unit 10: Manage Information	Unit 10: Co-ordinate Resources
Unit 11: Process Information	Unit 11: Process Information
Unit 12: Manage Training and Education	
Unit 13: Design and Deliver Training and Education	

Table 1: Comparison between 1995 and 1997 versions of the Competency Standards

hancement to meet current assessment requirements.

Extent of revision

A comparison of the *Units of Competency* in both editions shows clearly the extent of revision (see *Table 1*).

The new Units 1–5 are complete revisions, incorporating an *Emergency Risk Management* model. Units 6 and 7 are both new units. Unit 8 is a revision of the original Unit 6: *Communicate Effectively*. Unit 9 is a revision of the original Unit 7: *Manage People*, and incorporates a new element 'Facilitate Training, Education and Development Opportunities'. Unit 10 merges and revises the content of the original Unit 8: *Manage Resources* and Unit 9: *Coordinate Resources*. Unit 11 merges and revises the content of the original Unit 10: *Manage Information* and Unit 11: *Process Information*. Finally, the two original Units 12 and 13 have been deleted as they are already covered by the existing Workplace Trainer and Workplace Assessor competency standards.

The revised Competency Standards incorporate greatly improved guidelines for assessment. The original standards are deficient in that they lack clear indicators of the link between learning outcomes from training and units of competency, and methods of assessing whether full or partial competency has been achieved. In preparing submissions for the accreditation of emergency management training, based on the original standards, some rather subjective judgements have had to be made to indicate the extent to which learning outcomes meet various units of competency. The revision includes evidence guides that are greatly enhanced in comparison, and should provide a much more objective basis for such decisions.

Implications for multi-agency training

A major implication at national level is the development of a curriculum framework in emergency management by Swinburne University of Technology (Victoria), funded by the Australian National Training Authority. Based on the National Emergency Management Competency Standards, the curriculum framework is aimed at providing emergency management practitioners with articulated training for the achievement of nationally recognised qualifications. The framework provides competencies required at senior management level through an *Advanced Diploma of Emer-*

Course	Days	Remarks
Introduction to Emergency Management*	2	Prerequisite to other courses
EOC Management*	1	
Exercise Management*	1	
Emergency Response Management	4	Conducted as AEMI Extension
Local Emergency Response Management*	2	and funded by AEMI.
Senior Emergency Management	4½	Conducted by NSW Police Academy for District to State level participants. 'User pays' funding

* Conducted by districts (funding provided by SEMC).

Table 2: Suite of emergency management courses for which accreditation is sought.

gency Management, and at middle management level through a *Diploma of Emergency Management.*

The Australian Emergency Management Institute (AEMI) is currently seeking national accreditation of its residential courses.

Concurrently, the NSW State Emergency Management Committee has commenced a program to seek accreditation of a suite of multi-agency emergency management courses from the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB), and registration of the committee as the training provider. The courses in *Table 2*, endorsed by the State Emergency Management Committee, are included in this program.

The Introduction to Emergency Management Course has already been accredited by VETAB. Submissions are to be progressively prepared over the next six months seeking accreditation of the remaining courses.

Accreditation of these courses will provide a greater opportunity for emergency management practitioners in NSW to obtain a nationally recognised qualification that meets industry needs and demand for competency based training.

Flowing from the accreditation of courses is the requirement to conduct an objective assessment of each participant based on prescribed learning outcomes. This presents a major problem to those delivering courses where the primary method of assessment is an operations centre exercise. In the past, it has been common practice to observe the participants working as a group in a simulated operations centre and provide a global assessment of the group as a whole. This approach has some validity as, in an actual operational situation, staff members of an operations centre are required to work effectively as a team.

The group assessment approach needs to be reviewed with the requirement to conduct individual assessment. Now each participant needs to be assessed performing the role they would normally perform in the operations centre during an actual emergency operation. The main problem here, of course, is that the roles performed in an operations room are markedly different from each other — Senior Operations Officer compared with Emergency Services Liaison Officer for example. Both roles are equally important, but they are different and the assessment needs to reflect the difference.

The use of prepared check lists for each key position is a possible answer, but these will also need to record the contribution made by the participant to essential group activity, such as operational decision making and planning. By their nature, some positions in the operations centre tend to be far busier and more demanding than others. The capacity to cope with these and other constraints should also form part of assessment. The number of assessors required to observe and objectively assess perhaps twenty plus people being exercised is another constraint to be overcome.

We need to consider this aspect of assessment further and come to some agreement on the optimal way of effectively assessing numbers of participants performing different roles with differing complexities and constraints, whilst making some positive and observable contribution to overall group performance.

Applying risk management to emergency management

The application of the *Risk Management Standard* to the revised *National Emergency Management Competency Standards* is not without its problems. The final draft of the revised standards
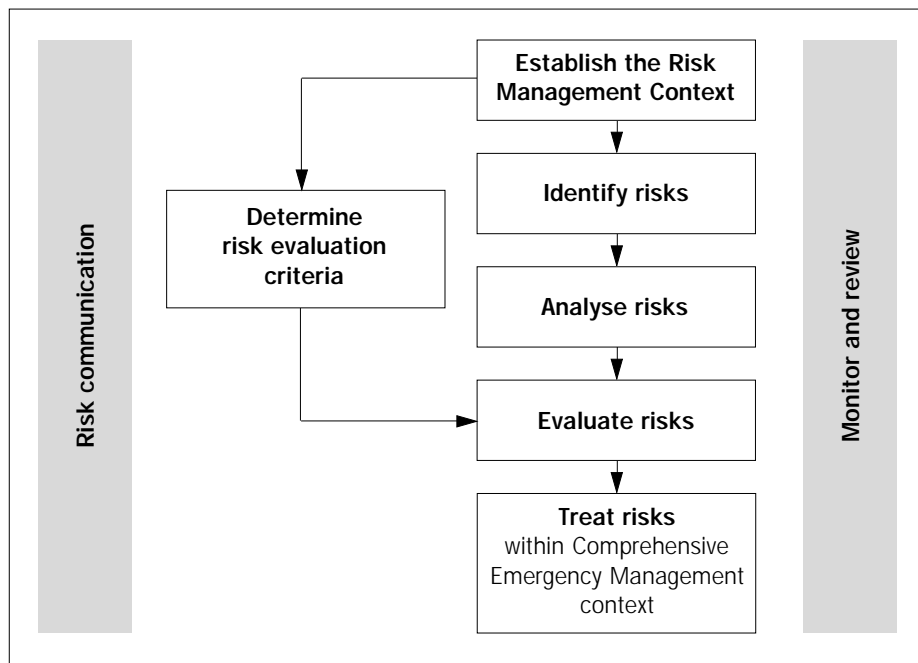
Figure 2: Model for applying Risk Management in an Emergency Management Context

shows a *Model for Applying Risk Management in an Emergency Management Context (Outline)* (EMA, 1997) that is very close to the generic risk management model. The additions are the inclusion of the words 'within Comprehensive Emergency Management context' in the 'Treat Risks' box, and a box indicating the need for Risk Communication at each stage of the process (see *Figure 2*).

The NSW State Emergency Management Committee, in its consideration of the revised standards, concluded that it was not satisfied that the generic Risk Management Standard had been adequately adapted to emergency management. The committee expressed the view that the standard needed to be properly contextualised before it can be integrated into either the revised emergency management competency standards or curriculum derived from those standards. The link between the Risk Management Standard and the competency standards, which is assumed to exist in the model adopted, is not naturally there, and the appropriate context must be established before the two can be effectively integrated.

Establishing the emergency management context necessitates consideration of such factors as:

- the organisational and emergency environment
- legislated roles and responsibilities;
- government policies
- emergency management arrangements
- social and environmental issues
- hazards affecting communities.

The context also needs to be expressed in terms of the nationally accepted concepts of emergency management — an all-hazard, all-agency, comprehensive approach focusing upon a prepared community.

Application to planning

The application of emergency risk management to planning changes the emphasis from the hazard, and local response and recovery arrangements applied after hazard impact, to a focus on the total vulnerability of the community and the range of prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery interventions that can be applied by all levels of government and the wider community.

In NSW, since the promulgation of the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act, a range of emergency management plans have been prepared at State, emergency management district and local government levels. Plans prepared at State level (for example) are shown in *Table 3*.

The basis of this planning has been the hazard and community analysis process where potential and actual hazards are identified and analysed in

State Disaster Plan (DISPLAN)

Special Hazard Plans	Supporting Plans
Exotic Animal Disease Aviation Emergency Hazardous Materials State Flood Nepean-Hawkesbury Flood Emergency State Bushfire State Marine Oil Spill	Agriculture and Animal Services Engineering Services Environmental Services Health Services Media Services Transport Services Welfare Services

Table 3: NSW Emergency Management Plans

terms of their interface with the vulnerable community. An examination of this interface reveals consequences to the community that have emergency management planning implications. These implications lead to negotiated and agreed emergency management arrangements between agencies that are documented as plans.

The problem here is that the documented arrangements, as an outcome of this process, tend to focus upon response and initial recovery requirements that allow the affected community to survive the hazard impact and to rebuild and restore itself back to a normal level of functioning. The other elements of comprehensive emergency management, particularly prevention and aspects of preparedness (community education for example) tend to receive a lesser degree of attention.

Adoption of an emergency risk management model should appropriately place the planning focus on risk and community vulnerability. By lessening community vulnerability (increasing the capacity of a community to cope with an emergency) the levels of risk to the community may be reduced to acceptable levels.

It also promotes a greater degree of communication about risk between responsible agencies and the community. The process provides for a continuous exchange of information and opinion on a two-way basis. It allows the responsible agency to provide important information to the community and, at the same time, allows the public to make known its concerns about risk and request additional information so that it can make informed decisions about its own risk management options.

Application to training

In the same way, emergency management training can be designed to be more relevant to community risk and vulnerability. Members of Emergency Management Committees at all levels should be trained to apply emergency risk management principles to their role of vulnerability assessment, planning, plan maintenance, and identifying and implementing preparedness strategies.

Their training should cover a broad range of comprehensive emergency management options to address risk and vulnerability. In particular, prevention and certain preparedness issues have received disproportionately less attention in the past and greater focus needs to be placed here.

The NSW State Disaster Plan states as a principle that 'prevention measures remain the responsibility of authorities and agencies charged by statute with the responsibility'. However, it tasks Emergency Management Committees at all levels to identify prevention or mitigation options, to refer these options and recommendations to the appropriate responsible agency, and to monitor the outcomes. Training programs, particularly those delivered at district and local levels, need to provide learning outcomes that equip members of committees to meet this challenge.

National Emergency Management Committee endorsement

The generic *Risk Management Standard* needs to be more effectively contextualised to the emergency management system before it can be formally endorsed as the basis for the revision of the *National Emergency Management Competency Standards* and the derived public domain curriculum. An emergency risk management model that adequately provides this context must be developed for the endorsement of the NEMC before any action to submit the standards to ANTA for final approval is taken.

Emergency management lessons

The recent landslip emergency at Thredbo is an event from which we can draw important lessons to apply to our risk and emergency management efforts. Although operational debriefs and official enquires are still continuing, there are a number of general observations that can be made that may influence or reinforce future preparedness for impact events of this type.

- The event was an *emergency*, as prescribed by the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act, as it required 'a significant and coordinated response'. Even though the area directly affected by the landslip was relatively small, the range of resources required and the number of agencies from which the resources were to be accessed was 'significant' and required 'co-ordination'.
- There is no designated 'combat agency' for a landslip event. Under the NSW State Disaster Plan, the emergency management structure assumes control of an emergency for which there is no combat agency. Control and co-ordination was applied by emergency operations controllers operating from Thredbo and Jindabyne.

- The planned location of both the district and local Emergency Operations Centres was adjusted due to the localised nature of the emergency. Both EOCs moved 'forward' from their designated locations, with the Local EOC acting as Site Control at Thredbo, and the District EOC being established at the National Parks and Wildlife Service Headquarters at Jindabyne to co-ordinate the accessing of out-of-area resources, including the all-important engineering advice. The established District EOC at Queanbeyan was considered to be too remote for this operation.

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- This flexibility in the control and co-ordination structure should preferably be planned for, with the process documented in the District Disaster Plan. Problems of establishing and maintaining appropriate communications from and between the substitute EOCs need to be addressed beforehand.
- The emergency became an international media event. Management of the mass of media resources is a major and continuing problem. Emergency controllers and commanders of participating agencies must be available to provide regular up-dated briefings to media represen-

tatives. At the same time, controllers should consider the media as a valuable resource in passing important information to the general community, both inside and outside the affected area. Again, the use of the media to pass public information must be planned for.

- The State Emergency Operations Centre in Sydney was activated to co-ordinate State and National level support to Thredbo, and to disseminate information to the Government and to emergency services and supporting agencies. Although working at a minimum staffing level, its operation was necessary over the full period of the emergency.

Conclusion

The adoption of the revised National Emergency Management Competency Standards, based upon the Risk Management Standard, promises to provide major benefits to emergency management planning, training and general preparedness in NSW.

It is important, however, that the National Emergency Management Committee ensures that the Risk Management Standard is appropriately contextualised to emergency management before its final endorsement is given.

The Thredbo landslip operation provides us with a timely reminder of the importance of identifying and analysing the total implications of risk and community vulnerability, and of considering a range of comprehensive emergency management options to meet the assessed threat to the community.

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