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Government  
of South Australia



RESCUE

# Emergency Management

December 2018

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S DISASTER RESILIENCE NEWSLETTER

### AFAC18 Conference

A number of SES staff and volunteers attended the National Council for Fire and Emergency Services (AFAC) conference from 6-7 September in Perth. The theme of the conference was *Changing Lives in a Changing World*. The presentation topics focused on innovation, improvement in the industry, changes in vulnerabilities, organisational change, new challenges and climate change.

The keynote speaker, Craig Fugate, former FEMA administrator, discussed what he considers the seven deadly sins of emergency management:

1. We plan for what we are capable of;
2. We plan for our communities by placing the "too hard to do" in an annex (elderly, disabled, children, pets);
3. We exercise to success;
4. We think our emergency response system can scale up from emergency response to disasters;
5. We build our emergency management team around Government, leaving out volunteer organisations, the private sector and the public;
6. We treat the public as a liability; and
7. We price risk too low to change behaviour, as a result we continue to grow risk.

He states that when we think about disasters we need to be survivor and community centric. The private sector needs to be considered part of the team, while the public also needs to be viewed as a resource. He felt that we often plan for easy, but should be planning for real and we need to consider the "maximum of maximums".

He explained that speed is the key to stabilisation after an event and that often if we wait for assessments we will be too late. His suggestion is to respond as if it is bad and then scale back if needed. His final points were around climate change and the need to be aware that the past is not preparing us for the future.

Also of interest was the presentation from Dr Melissa Parsons, of Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, on the Australian Natural Disaster Resilience Index. The Index is designed to measure disaster resilience using themes of social character, economic capital, infrastructure and planning, emergency services, community capital, information and engagement, governance, policy and leadership and social and community engagement. The findings show that one of the key drivers for resilience is remoteness. Remote and sparsely populated communities have less capacity for disaster resilience than populated communities, because of lower economic capital, lower per capita access to emergency services, lower community capital and less well-developed resources for planning for hazards. Strong infrastructure and planning was also found to have a profound impact on disaster resilience in communities.

The South Australia contingent of presenters included Ronnie Faggotter (State Recovery Office) and Linda Black (SA Health and Medical Research Institute) who spoke about the use of the Resilience Skills training program with residents impacted by the Pinery fire.

Further information and copies of presentations can be found at <https://www.afac.com.au/events/proceedings>. The 2019 conference will be held in Melbourne.



Each decision and action makes us more vulnerable to disasters – or more resilient to them. Thus disaster risk reduction involves every part of society, every part of government, and every part of the professional and private sector." United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.



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## REPRESENTING HEATWAVE MESSAGES ON AUSTRALIAN TV-News: Beaches, Bikinis and Braving the Heat



**A study undertaken by Dr Scott Hanson-Easey, Dr Susan Williams, and Dr Alana Hansen of the University of Adelaide investigated the way in which emergency management warnings such as heatwaves were relayed to communities.**

In an ideal, albeit fantastical world, warnings and messages deployed by EM agencies via the media to the public would be sent and received in much the same way as they were intended. In a less perfect world, as we all well know, the media have a tendency to reformulate and, in many instances, overlook EM warnings and media releases, effectively broadcasting stories that either blunt or thwart effective risk messaging.

With this problem in mind, we critically explored how one mainstream media – TV-news – treats heatwaves in their reporting before and after a heatwave warning has been triggered. This question, we think, is important given the ‘silent’ nature of this particular hazard, and the journalistic habit of applying *journalistic norms and values* to determining which stories are broadcast and how these stories are presented. For instance, stories that can be fashioned to provide entertainment value (e.g. Infotainment), describe a human-interest story, or use evocative images intended to hold an audiences’ attention are often privileged over alternative, less ‘entertaining’, stories. Accordingly, we think that such media practices hold the potential to affect the interpretation, seriousness and relevance of heatwave messaging and, in some circumstances, support or inhibit risky behaviours in the heat.

So, what did we do to explore these conjectures? We searched a database of TV-news reports from all states and found 27 heatwave reports broadcast on free-to-air TV over the 2016/17 and 2017/18 summers. These were analysed with established social psychological theory and methods to examine dominant visual, linguistic and source (e.g. SES, BOM) themes within the reports.

Notwithstanding instances when EM and health representatives presented clear and consistent messages, the findings overall were worrying. For instance, in the same stories, heatwave and health warnings incongruently competed with idyllic imagery of waterways, beaches and beachgoers, signifying heat exposure and enjoyment. Similarly, bushfire, drowning risk and electricity grid stability content jostled with heatwave messages for airtime and relevance. Humour was regularly employed by journalists to ‘lighten’ the tone and provide ‘entertainment value’.

More concerning, perhaps, was that 14 stories featured and framed road and construction workers, and athletes, ‘braving the heat’ during the hottest part of the day. This kind of reporting could effectively *model* and thus *normalise* strenuous activities during heatwaves, which could function to seriously undermine health messaging and/or support the belief that only ‘vulnerable populations’ (older people and children) are prone to becoming ill in heatwave conditions.

Possibly the most worrying finding was the scarcity of stories that featured health warnings (due to editorial decisions) and health advice coupled with vision that supported the seriousness of these messages – only a handful of stories attempted to associate high temperatures with serious adverse health outcomes. This finding is especially critical given the prevalence of stories that could be working to undercut the seriousness of heatwaves i.e. stories featuring workers’ ‘braving the heat’.

So, what is to be done? Can EM agencies and others be expected to contest and amend journalistic norms and values (and profit motivations underscoring these) currently driving TV-news reporting on heatwaves? Or is it worth investing in counter-narratives that directly target and contest the more widespread and counterproductive messaging that TV-news media routinely trot out in heatwaves? Is it worth paying even more attention to social media, like Facebook and Twitter, as a means of sharing heatwave messaging, and could these communication routes provide a more faithful rendition of EM messaging to the community? Whatever the answer, what we do know is that TV-news cannot be currently relied upon to inform the community on heatwaves – unless, of course, you want to see beaches, bikinis and bravery mixed in with your heatwave reporting.

*This study was funded under the Natural Disaster Resilience Program by the South Australian State Government and the Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs (NDRP1517-28).*

*Views and findings associated with this initiative/project are expressed independently and do not necessarily represent the views of State and Commonwealth funding bodies.*



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## The Emergency Relief Functional Support Group (ERFSG) is endeavouring to make emergency relief and recovery centres more child and youth friendly.

**ERFSG is responsible for opening emergency relief and recovery centres in the aftermath of a major incident, coordinating outreach operations and reuniting relatives with their loved ones following disasters like airplane crashes or terrorist incidents. In addition, ERFSG disburses emergency grants subject to community needs and ministerial approval.**

High school students and ERFSG's network of government, non-government organisations and businesses together are exploring how the environment in the centres and the services provided can be changed to accommodate younger people's needs and be a space in which they have agency.

These organisations include Save the Children, which sets up child-friendly spaces, Emerging Minds, which provided guidance on child and youth mental health following a disaster, Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, which advised on how to consult with young South Australians and many more including Australian Red Cross, YMCA, Public Library Service, the Local Government Association and a furniture retailer, which is providing advice on interior design and layout, in addition to numerous government agencies.

The National Social Recovery Reference Group has been following the progress of this project closely as it is understood to be an Australian first.

### **Why focus on babies, children's and young people's needs?**

Taking a child and youth perspective on relief centres will benefit babies, children and young people's recovery. Firstly, their self-determination is key to a quicker recovery, and secondly, the wellbeing of the youngest has a direct impact on the wellbeing of their parents and by association, on their communities. As people may feel more vulnerable after an emergency, it is important that relief and recovery centres are a place where everyone can rest, find peace and community. Children often provide that 'social glue' that can make adults stick together and act on their community social capital, which is paramount to recovery. Further, who wouldn't prefer the sight of comfy lounges and beautiful decorations to the sight of office desks and chairs?



Changing the look of relief and recovery centres will prompt community members, staff and volunteers to interact in a different way focusing increasingly on the individual needs of people as opposed to only following a process.

### **The journey so far**

The annual ERFSG meeting, the student consultation and a ERFSG network workshop in December were used to systemically identify areas for improvement. These were divided into quick wins to implement within this fire season, systemic/cultural changes to work on in the mid to longer term, and actions for organisations to consider.

The workshop focused on:

- Physical space, e.g. furniture, layout, signage, decorations, outdoor, quiet spaces, equipment
- Activities, e.g. movies, childcare, board games, sports, wifi, books, baby bounce, etc.

- Needs of babies, children and young people, e.g. food, social-emotional needs, disabilities, protection, unaccompanied children, reunification of families, medications, etc.
- Communication, e.g. media, age-appropriate briefings, display, social media, radio/tv exposure, tone of voice, and who is best to deliver messages.

The workshop also displayed a child-friendly space coordinated by Save the Children and short, interactive presentations to guide participants how to take a child's perspective.

A progress report will be available in January 2019. If you have any questions or want to participate please email [emergencyrelief@sa.gov.au](mailto:emergencyrelief@sa.gov.au).





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## Stay Cool during a Heatwave

Dress in loose, light and light-coloured clothing. Natural materials such as 100 percent cotton and linen allow your skin to breathe more than synthetic fabrics do.

Eat lighter cold foods such as salads, low-fat dairy or frozen treats.

Don't use your oven or stove, but if you must cook, use a barbecue outside so that your house stays cooler. Or use a microwave.

Drink plenty of water. Avoid caffeine and alcohol, which can dehydrate you.

Put bottles of water in the freezer before you go to bed, this can provide ice-cold water the next day if refrigeration is not available.

If the overnight temperature is cool, exercise in the early morning or in the evening. Consider reducing your workout time or reduce your exertion. Or modify your exercise regime to enable exercising in an air conditioned room.

Cool your skin. Take cool baths or showers.

Chill washcloths in the refrigerator or use an ice pack on pulse points when you're hot.

Keep a spray bottle in the refrigerator to give yourself a cool mist. Store body lotion in the refrigerator too, so that it cools you off when you apply it. Pour a little ice water into a hat before you put it on.

Keep a hand-held fan with you when you go out.

### Stay in a Cool Space

Use air conditioning if you have it. Or go to a public places that are air conditioned, such as shopping centres or libraries.

Sleep cool. Use cotton, linen or bamboo sheets.

Use fans strategically. Set them up in windows or halls to get a cross breeze going. Place a bowl of ice at an angle in front of a fan so that air blows across it to create a cool breeze. A wet towel or piece of cloth could also be used.

If you have a ceiling fan with two directions, make sure it is running in the summer direction.

Manage your windows for heat. Keep your blinds or curtains closed during the day and

ensure hot air is not coming through from underneath the doors.

If the night or early morning is cooler, open the windows and doors to release the heat in the house. Remember to close them again as the day gets hotter.

Unplug gadgets and small appliances when you are not using them, as they generate heat even when turned off.

Replace your incandescent bulbs with LEDs as they emit less heat.



EXTREME HEAT  
WARNING



## Resilient Australia Awards

The State winner of the South Australian Resilient Australia Award, presented at the Zone Symposium this month was the Australian Red Cross for their project People at Risk in Emergencies Framework for SA.

The people at risk in emergencies framework for South Australia developed a state-wide approach that outlined how

to collectively improve the safety and wellbeing of those most at risk when disasters occurred.

Following a "whole of community approach", the framework recognises that all sectors of society, especially organisations that provide support to people at risk on a daily basis, can play a critical role in strengthening their preparedness, safety and wellbeing. The framework outlines a preferred way forward for all stakeholders and contains strategies for organisations to incorporate emergency preparedness messaging into their own planning and operations.

## Feeling Hot, Hot, Hot

This year on Tuesday the 6th of February, Resilient South in partnership with the State Emergency Service, Red Cross and Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resource Management Board hosted the hypothetical, *Feeling Hot Hot Hot! Dealing with Heatwaves in Southern Adelaide*. The event was held at Marion Cultural Centre and proved an overwhelming success. The venue, which had a 255 seating capacity, was booked out within one week.

On February 6, 2019, Resilient East and the Adelaide City Council will partner with other stakeholders to host a similar event at the Adelaide Town Hall. Well known media identity, **Amanda Blair**, will guide a panel of experts through a hypothetical extended heatwave.

Heatwaves kill more people than any other natural disaster including floods, cyclones or bushfires. They also cause serious damage to our health, ecosystems, agriculture, businesses, infrastructure and communities.

You will learn about the challenges posed by heatwaves in Adelaide as well as practical actions that can be taken to manage your risks.

Bookings for this *free* event are essential. For more information and registrations: <https://feelinghot2019.eventbrite.com.au>