CITY OF YARRA

COMMUNICATIONS SUB PLAN

PUBLIC VERSION

A sub plan of the City of Yarra Municipal Emergency Management Plan

Version 1.2

Last Amended 30-08-2018

Contact details and operational documents have been removed from this version

Contents

Document Control

Major changes to the Communications Plan must be approved and authorised by the Yarra City Council communications team and the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC). The record below is to be completed by the person making the amendment(s). Each new page will have a revision number and date of issue printed on it.

Date	Version	Page #	Description	Amended by
27-04-2016	V0.1	ALL	Public version created	Lucy Saaroni
30-08-2018	V0.1	All	Formatting updated	Sophie Barison

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1.Introduction

The purpose of this plan is to provide a framework for the effective management and coordination of internal (Council staff) and external (public) communication during all phases of emergency management within Yarra City. The plan outlines why and how internal and external communications will be managed by the Yarra City Council prior to, during and after an emergency. The plan is consistent with government legislation and guidelines including State emergency management arrangements, Council Strategy and national emergency management frameworks. The plan seeks to ensure that:
- All communication is relevant, timely, clear, accurate, credible, targeted, well-coordinated and consistent;
- All Council public messaging is consistent with, and supports the messaging of emergency service agencies, in particular the lead agency for the emergency event;
- Information is accessible at all stages of an emergency;
- Information is understood by and accessible to a diverse range of audiences including (but not limited to): vulnerable people, those with special needs and non-English speakers.

This plan is supported by a set of operational guidelines, templates and a contact directory. These supporting documents are made accessible only to those officers required to use these in their duties.

1.1 Activation and review

The decision to activate this plan will be determined by:
- The Emergency Management Control Group (EMCG); or
- Group Manager Advocacy and Engagement in Yarra City Council

This plan and its associated operating procedures will be reviewed and tested regularly to ensure the plan is fit for purpose and that it reflects the latest legislation and best practice approaches. Responsibility for reviewing and updating this plan lies with the Group Manager Advocacy and Engagement in Council. Proposed changes to the Municipal Emergency Communications Sub Plan will be presented to the MEMPC for consideration.

2. Roles and responsibilities

Establishing effective communications is a shared responsibility between all stakeholders involved in managing an emergency event. The list below outlines the key emergency communications stakeholders and their roles and responsibilities.

Control Agency
The Control Agency is responsible for authorising and developing official messaging for media and public information. In the case of a fire, the Control Agency will be the Fire Brigade. In the case of a pandemic, the Control Agency will be the Department of Health. For a list of emergency types and the associated Control Agency, refer to the State Emergency Response Plan (Part 3 of the Emergency Management Manual of Victoria).

Emergency Management Joint Public Information Committee (EMJPIC)
EMJPIC is the Emergency Management Joint Public Information Committee. Its foremost responsibility is to ensure public information is co-ordinated and distributed in a timely and accurate manner to inform and advise community members during a major emergency, as well as ensuring media needs are met, through a co-ordinated multi-agency approach. It

does this through an entity known as the Joint Public Information Centre (JPIC). The JPIC can exist as a physical centre or as a virtual centre in which members collaborate via telephone from their normal locations. In addition, the Chair of EMJPIC, the Victoria Police Media & Corporate Communications Director, can provide JPIC services as a support to any other agency.

Member agencies act as a link to extended industry contacts as emergency operational activities require. In all situations, contact with EMJPIC should be initiated via an agency's media or communications director.

Yarra City Council

The Emergency Management Manual of Victoria identifies that local government is responsible for the following communications activities prior to, during and following an emergency:

- Support Control Agencies in disseminating relevant, timely, clear, accurate, credible, targeted and consistent information about community emergency risks and strategies on risk reduction;
- Establish procedures for communication and engagement with individuals and communities and for handling media requests and liaising with the media representatives;
- Provide information to staff at recovery/information centres;
- Provide information services to the affected community (such as public meetings, newsletters, and advertising), to staff and to recovery agencies and the State Government.

Within Yarra City Council, a number of key emergency management communications roles have been established to ensure that the Council can meet its responsibilities outlined above. These roles are add-ons to Council staff roles and are as follows:

ROLE ID	Role Name
C1	Emergency Media & Communications Manager
C2	Emergency Communications & Media Liaison Officer
C3	Emergency Community Liaison Officer
C4	Emergency Internal Communications Officer
C5	Emergency Communications Support Officers
C6	ERC Information Officers

Detailed position descriptions and are provided at the **Appendices**.
Contact details for incumbents are provided at Section 5.

Residents and visitors

In an emergency Council will aim to provide information to the community via its website, social media (Twitter and Facebook), email, Customer Call Centre (telephone) or a physical customer service location or information centre. The community can communicate with

Council directly via these same mediums which are monitored for incoming information and requests.

Local Media professionals
Media professionals requiring information from Council or wanting to communicate with Council should contact Council's call centre on 9205 5555 and ask for the communications manager.

Telecommunications providers
Telecommunications providers requiring information from Council or wanting to communicate with Council should contact Council on 9205 5555 and ask for the communications manager.

3.Strategic approach to emergency management communications

External communication is more than merely sending information out to a passive audience. Effective external communications relies upon forming a meaningful dialogue with Council's stakeholders, especially members of the community and engaging with them in order to drive and enhance public information campaigns. Community engagement is thus at the core of Council's approach to meeting its emergency management responsibilities.

Successful internal communication relies upon active buy-in from all employees within the organisation. Depending on the nature of the situation, Yarra City Council will implement a cascading flow of information. This cascade process is illustrated at Section 3.5.

3.1 Best Practice Principles of communications

Adhering to a set of best practice principles of communications will help communicators meet and surpass its emergency management communication aims and obligations outlined at Section 1 and Section 3. Best practice principles of communications are described in the Victorian Emergency Management Manual (Part 4) and the Australian Red Cross Handbook 'Communicating in Recovery'. There are nine key principles communicators should strive to apply when conducting emergency management communications activities:

Best Practice Principles	Rationale
Public information, not public relations	Broadly speaking, the aim of public relations is to promote an organisation, person or event, while the aim of public information is to channel information to the relevant audiences. The aim of all communications should be to assist the community, not to promote or market.
The right to know	Members of the community should, wherever possible, be given the same status as emergency management personnel, providers of funding or others in positions of authority when considering their need for information. The community has *a right to know* about services, programs and other developments relating to relief and recovery planning.
Respect people	When people are displaced or affected by an emergency, it is easy to only see their vulnerability. Communications should be

respectful at all times. It is imperative that all communications recognise that affected people are rational beings with local knowledge and skills, who are able to make
their own decisions. Materials and messages that forget this principle can be viewed as paternalistic and patronising and can further traumatise an affected community.

Best Practice Principles	Rationale
Acknowledge the impact	People affected by the emergency have potentially experienced a life shaping event. To be able to make sense of what has happened, they need to be able to tell their story and to have their experiences validated and acknowledged.
Build on local assets	The practice of utilising and building on existing local networks and strengths in the community can influence communications practices for practical and positive benefits. Simply put, don't reinvent the wheel when you don't need to. Utilise the well-functioning and respected communication systems already in place (for example, Facebook pages or popular community radio networks or groups) to inform the community rather than developing new, and potentially ineffective, communication channels. Working *with* the community and its existing local networks rather than merely working *alongside* them empowers the community to expedite their own recovery and to contribute to specific emergency management activities.
Repeat information	After an emergency people often don't remember information. As they are working through their individual recovery, people will be looking for information to assist their specific needs at that specific time. What may be irrelevant to someone at week three may be the exact information they require at week five. Information must be repeated periodically throughout the recovery process and be reinforced by multiple sources. An effective system of receiving and recording feedback from the community – that is, working with the questions being asked - will help decide when to introduce new information and when to repeat information already provided.
Remember the 'unaffected'	Be careful not to focus solely on those directly affected in an emergency (for example people whose properties were burned or those relocated due to a flood). Those not directly affected can often experience significant trauma and stress following an emergency. Care should be taken not to alienate or differentiate between the 'affected' and 'unaffected' in an emergency.
No spin	People recovering from an emergency have specific requirements and want information solely to address their needs. Communications containing rhetoric or brand-leveraging

information are counterproductive as they will damage reputations and just add to the communications 'noise' in the community.	

Best Practice Principles	Rationale
Communicating with people with additional needs	The impact of public information in recovery is maximised when it is designed with knowledge and understanding of the target audience. People affected by an emergency will have different needs, circumstances and abilities when it comes to accessing and understanding information. Those with additional needs can be more acutely affected by an emergency.

When communicating with people with additional needs, consideration should be given to:
- The type of emergency
- The number of people affected
- The ethnic origins of the affected people
- The languages used by affected people
- People living with a disability

Council also has a number of resources to facilitate communications with people who have additional needs:
- Communication boards designed for people with additional communication needs (refer to TRIM D15/67983 and D15/67985)
- Contact details for interpreter services and service providers for people with additional needs (refer to the MEMP Part 3)
- Contact lists for facilities where vulnerable people are likely to frequent (refer to the MEMP Part 4). These include aged care facilities; hospitals; schools; childcare centres; and residential or day-care disability; mental health and drugs; and Children, Youth and Family (CYF) facilities. As the occupants of these facilities may need tailored advice in an emergency, particularly if evacuation is required, the contact details for the Proprietors, Managers and coordinators can be provided to local Police and other agencies charged with pre-arranged responsibility for helping vulnerable residents to evacuate. |

3.2 Dealing with the Media – A Best Practice Approach

Know the Media	Get to know how the various types of media work: recognise and understand their deadlines: if possible build positive, professional, personal relationships with key journalists
Be Honest, Helpful and Positive	Tell them the truth as far as the facts of the matter can be released, and help provide them with the information they require to write their copy. If you do not give them the information, they will get it from somewhere else, and it may be wrong. In providing the information, stress the positive aspects about the Council policy, track record, response actions etc.
No "No Comment"	If you can not give out certain information because it is sensitive or confidential, or the information is not yet confirmed, explain why you can not give them the news and tell them when you should be able to do so.
Do Not Admit Liability or Blame Others	There may well be facts, which are not known to you which show the City of Yarra Council to be innocent. Legal liability is something for your legal team to determine a later date. Responsibility, rather than liability, however, is another matter, and if appropriate you should be pro-active in accepting responsibility for rectifying matters, with the appropriate provisos.
Don't Speculate or go "Off the Record"	There is no such thing in practice as "off the record" - a journalist under pressure will use whatever information he can get his hands on. Speculation about causes or implications provides equally valid information to them and can end up erroneously and unnecessarily fuelling imagination and negative perceptions.
Respond Quickly	Give out such information as you can, as quickly as possible, especially if you have made a commitment to meet a certain deadline. Despite the pressure, however, do not be tempted to give out news, which is not confirmed, especially on sensitive issues such as personal injuries or fatalities.
Keep a Record of All Media Communications	You never know when it is going to come in useful, even months after the event.
Make Public Safety a Priority	Make public safety a priority. Express empathy and concern for victims and make it clear any actions you want people to undertake.

3.3 Focus of information content

Depending on the stage of an emergency, the focus of public communications will differ:

Pre-emergency
Communications will need to be regular, dynamic and engaging. Prior to an emergency, communications should aim to raise risk awareness and preparedness, by focusing on community emergency risks and practical strategies to minimise risk and consequences of risk to people and property in the community. The information disseminated will need to be topical (e.g. bushfire safety information will become more regular in the lead up to and during the bushfire season).

Early stages of an emergency event
Information needs to be updated and repeated often. Generally, communications will focus on:

- Nature and status of emergency (what has happened, what is about to happen);
- Time, date and issuing authority;
- Location and likely affected area/s (including existing dangers);
- What action to be taken by those affected (and where to go for support);
- What action can be taken by those who wish to assist;
- Where to get further information and assistance; and
- Time when next update will be issued.

Later stages of an emergency event (relief and recovery)
In the later stages, information should also focus on where affected people should go in the future to access support for accommodation, insurance, grants, counselling, re-building etc. The affected community and other community stakeholders may also need information after an emergency to help understand why the event happened, what is being done to prevent further loss or future occurrences.

3.4 Dissemination of information to the public

Proactive use of the media to broadcast information and advice will help to increase resiliency of the community prior to an emergency and will minimise phone congestion during and after emergency events. Where possible, the public should be advised to direct calls to the appropriate Control Agencies which will have the facilities, staff and specialist knowledge to answer questions and disseminate information.

A "Standard Emergency Warning Signal" may be used to alert the public to an actual or impending emergency or maintain the dissemination of public information. Authority to use the signal over electronic media must be given by the Emergency Response Co-ordinator or his/her representative.

The appropriate method of dissemination will change according to the nature of the emergency and the information available/required. The selection of the most appropriate method is to be made by the Group Manager Advocacy & Engagement in consultation with the EMCG and relevant Control Agency. The following methods should all be considered:

- Electronic media (radio & television) (Notes 1 & 2)
- Council Facebook page and Twitter account
- Council's website and other internet sites including the VicEmergency site
- SMS messaging
- Police Emergency Information Line (PEIL) (Note 3)
- Local telephone information lines
- Local and State newspapers (particularly in extended response and recovery phases)
- Local and ethnic radio stations & newspapers
- Shopping Centres
- Local radio
- Community newsletters / brochures
- Recovery centres ('one stop shops")
- Manual door knock of residences
- Church/religious groups
- Community group leaders
- Community information sessions (Note 4)

Note 1: If any emergency requires concurrent media response through radio, television and newspaper outlets, the Police Media Liaison Section may be contacted through the MERC. It is important to have the same messages on all forms of media.

Note 2: Radio station ABC Melbourne 774 AM is the primary emergency information station.

Note 3: See section 4.3 for more details regarding the PEIL.

Note 4: During an emergency, community information sessions are convened by the Control Agency. The Internal Recovery Committee, assisted by representatives of other agencies involved in the recovery operations, will coordinate community information sessions in the post impact / recovery phase.

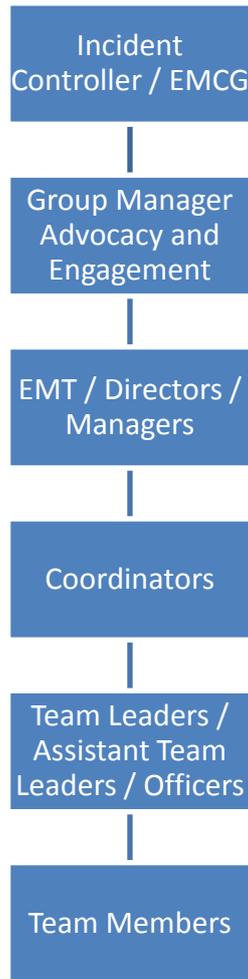### 3.5 Dissemination of information within Council

Depending upon the nature of the situation, a cascading flow of information can be applied within City of Yarra Council to inform Council staff.

A member of the EMCG is responsible for briefing Council's Group Manager Advocacy and Engagement who will be responsible for briefing Council Directors on the current situation and advising that they contact their direct reports. Direct reports are to cascade the information to their Coordinators, and so on, down the organisation until all staff has been briefed.

If normal communication channels are available, and the situation arises during business hours, staff will be notified of the situation via email, text, meetings or intranet. Email alerts are to be prepared by the Council communications team in conjunction with Human Resources (if relevant) and approved by the EMCG.

A diagram highlighting responsibility for passing on information is depicted here:

Council responsibility for circulating information internally

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┌──────────────────────┐
│      Incident        │
│  Controller / EMCG   │
└──────────┬───────────┘
           │
┌──────────┴───────────┐
│    Group Manager     │
│    Advocacy and      │
│     Engagement       │
└──────────┬───────────┘
           │
┌──────────┴───────────┐
│  EMT / Directors /   │
│      Managers        │
└──────────┬───────────┘
           │
┌──────────┴───────────┐
│                      │
│    Coordinators      │
│                      │
└──────────┬───────────┘
           │
┌──────────┴───────────┐
│   Team Leaders /     │
│   Assistant Team     │
│  Leaders / Officers  │
└──────────┬───────────┘
           │
┌──────────┴───────────┐
│                      │
│    Team Members      │
│                      │
└──────────────────────┘
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4. Responding to public enquiries

In many emergencies, community members will contact Council for emergency information. To facilitate public enquiries and ensure the public's need for information is being met efficiently, information centres and police emergency information lines may need to be established. In the initial phases of an emergency, it is Council's preference to harness already-established channels of communication to engage and inform its community.

4.1 Information Centres

If required, a community emergency information centre will be established by the Council's Customer Service Unit Manager. All public and media releases will be made available at this centre. The decision to establish a temporary information centre should be made by the Emergency Management Coordination Group (EMCG) in conjunction with the C1 role. Council Communications & Media Liaison Officers are responsible for preparing relevant information. Information must be approved by the C1.

4.2 Social Media

The Communications & Media Liaison Officers will monitor social media activity. They can request assistance from the EMJPIC for this task.

A Social Media policy exists to provide guidance for all staff using social media. The policy is accessible on Council's internal records system (TRIM: D13/11313). A snapshot of the Council's Social Media policy is provided below:

SNAPSHOT OF COUNCIL'S SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Social Media users must:
- Seek authorisation to engage in social media as a representative (official spokesperson) of Council.
- Ensure that all content published is accurate, truthful and complies with Council policies.
- Adhere to copyright, privacy, defamation, contempt of court, discrimination, harassment and other applicable laws.
- Contact the Communications & Media Unit Manager, as well as your Manager and Director immediately if you identify a post or comment from the community that breaches Council's Terms of Use for that social media platform or is on a sensitive issue that is likely to impact the reputation of Council or be of interest to the Executive or Councillors.
- Ensure comments are respectful of the community in which you are interacting online.

Social Media users must NOT:
- Post, comment, link or respond to material that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, breaches a Court suppression order, or is otherwise unlawful.
- Use or disclose any private, confidential or secure information.
- Post, comment, link or respond to any material that might otherwise cause damage to Council's reputation or bring it into disrepute.
- Post, comment, link or respond on an issue that is likely to impact other departments without first advising the other department.