



The Standard

Newsletter for aged care home staff, managers, residents and their families

Special edition – Preparing for an emergency

We live in a vast continent. At any given time we can have bushfires in Victoria or South Australia, floods in Queensland and northern New South Wales and tropical cyclones in Western Australia, or the northern gulf region. These are just some of the regional challenges we face.

How has your home prepared for the possibility of a disaster, natural or otherwise, affecting your home, and therefore your residents and possibly your whole community?

If you haven't already, it's time to start talking about it – within your home and with local councils, emergency services, the local hospital and places you can use if you need to evacuate. What are the options available to you for evacuating your home? You need to think of more than one option - where do you go? How do you get your residents there, particularly if no ambulances are available? What if staff aren't available? If parts or all of the town are also being evacuated, how do you ensure your residents are at the forefront of emergency services' minds not just during the evacuation process but in the planning process leading up to such an emergency (ie. now).

How do you ensure that you are kept informed about potential emergencies, eg. emergency broadcasts, the media, keeping in contact with local authorities – so that you are on the front foot before disaster hits.

How do you keep residents and their families informed during and after an emergency?

This issue of *The Standard* is designed to assist the thinking about and planning your evacuation procedures, within the context of a local disaster that affects the whole community. There are so many variables when it comes to a natural or other emergency, it is impossible to predict exactly what may happen, but by investigating all the options and scenarios and feeding them into your emergency or business continuity plan, you are likely to be more prepared, and residents better protected.

Residential aged care services bushfire ready resource

Victoria recently experienced the most devastating bushfires in its history. Preparing the health and aged care services sector for the bushfire season in Victoria has been a priority for the Victorian Department of Health, which is an approved provider of almost 190 homes. Substantial work has been undertaken in collaboration with local, state and commonwealth government departments, emergency management agencies and stakeholder groups to support Victorian residential aged care providers prepare for summer 2010.

A key component of this work has been the development of a *Residential aged care services bushfire ready resource*. While an 'all hazards' approach is promoted for planning and responding to potential emergencies, the resource deals specifically with bushfire preparedness as part of organisational emergency and business continuity planning arrangements.

The resource is now available online at www.health.vic.gov.au/bushfire/health_comm/aged_care.htm

The Victorian Department of Health does not mandate relocation. Residential aged care providers are responsible for making decisions about relocating residents or staying and remaining onsite in the event of a bushfire threat. In making these decisions there are important factors that providers need to consider.

Making decisions about how best to respond to a potential bushfire threat is based on specific circumstances on specific days and in the local context of each residential aged care home. It includes making informed decisions about planned early relocation in response to high fire risk days, or evacuation in the event of 'fire in the landscape'.

The resource provides information to help inform Victorian residential aged care providers with their bushfire planning arrangements and also includes information on being a host service.



Quality
ISO 9001

SAI GLOBAL

Expected outcome 4.6 Fire, security and other emergencies

This expected outcome requires that management and staff are actively working to provide an environment and safe systems of work that minimise fire, security and emergency risks.

With a focus on results, our assessors look at a range of ways that homes meet this expected outcome, including whether approved providers have processes for the management of emergencies which may include natural disasters.

To read more about the assessment of expected outcome 4.6 Fire, security and other emergencies, refer to the Results and processes guide, available on our website: www.accreditation.org.au under Education, training and resources.



Want to read more? Following is a list of helpful websites

www.acwa.com.au/gemac – developed by Aged and Community Services Western Australia, this website has a wide range of resources available for you to help you develop and support your emergency management plan

www.cfa.vic.gov.au – The Country Fire Authority in Victoria provides information on fire restrictions, fire ratings, and a step by step guide to developing a fire plan.

www.redcross.org.au – click on Emergencies: prepare, respond and recover.

www.health.vic.gov.au/bushfire/health_comm/aged_care.htm – developed for Victorian aged care homes, the information would be useful for other states also (see story on page one).

www.ema.gov.au – Emergency Management in Australia (Attorney General's Department)

www.fesa.wa.gov.au – Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia

www.nswfb.nsw.gov.au – New South Wales Fire Brigades

www.rfs.nsw.gov.au – New South Wales Rural Fire Service

www.fire.qld.gov.au – Queensland Fire and Rescue Service

www.acpmh.unimelb.edu.au – Click on First response for information to manage trauma. Under publications and resources and fact sheets about trauma there is also information about coping with the aftermath of natural disasters and emergencies.



Checklist

Questions to consider when developing an emergency management plan

- Have a look at what plans are already in place and reassess how valuable they are. Do they answer all the following questions?
- What emergencies are likely to occur in your local environment and specifically in your home? (For example bush fires, floods, cyclones, chemical explosions, mouse/insect infestations, electrical blackouts)
- Check for any local evacuation plans already in place with your local government and authorities.
- What local or regional emergency services are able to assist?
- Do your key personnel have their contact details?
- Do the emergency services have your home's contact details, names of key personnel they should contact and their off-site contact details?
- Do the emergency services know about your home, its location, any access restrictions, number of residents and their needs in an emergency, numbers of staff and possible visitors?
- Have you contacted them to seek input into your plan and then provided the final plan so they understand what communication processes are required and at what points in any unfolding emergency?
- Have you liaised with your local hospital/s and other care services to ensure that all services have emergency management plans that can work together?
- Have you developed a process to ensure that during any period of high risk, key personnel will regularly monitor emergency broadcasts and the media for localised warnings and advice?
- What equipment or supplies are needed for residents to ensure care is continued?
- Have you identified all the decisions which must be made and who and when they will be made including at what point in an unfolding emergency you decide when to evacuate residents? (Prioritisation plan)
- Have you arranged for multiple transport options in the event of an emergency as ambulance transfers may not be available nor plentiful enough? Do you have 24 hour contact details? Can they respond quickly and at short notice?
- Have you arranged alternative accommodation in the case of a need to evacuate? Is there more than one option as your first option may not be available during an emergency? Do you have the correct contact details for personnel in the Department of Health and Ageing who may be able to assist in sourcing alternative accommodation including long term and short term options?
- Regularly confirm all arrangements, for example that accommodation agreements made a year ago are still standing.
- How do you intend to provide appropriate care during an emergency?
- Will you need additional or different staff? What if your regular staff aren't available? Will you be able to utilise volunteers and services? Do you have contact details for these people?
- How will you communicate your plan to residents and their representatives and staff before any emergency unfolds? How will you keep them informed during an emergency?
- Have you developed a plan for post-trauma counselling for residents, families and staff in case it is needed? What local agencies provide recovery or other relevant services you may need? Have you contacted them?

Further advice during an emergency can be obtained through your local emergency services or state fire authority for fires. For general matters and access to accommodation information you can contact the Department of Health and Ageing during office hours on 1800 550 552.

The Department has an emergency response number - 1800 852 649 in NSW and 1800 078 709 for Victoria.

Preparing for natural disasters in Western Australia

Bethanie Care Group in Western Australia has recently redeveloped its business continuity plan, to prepare its homes for a variety of scenarios including natural disasters such as storms and bushfire.

Bethanie Care Group Chief Operating Officer Irene Mooney said some past experience of violent and damaging storms has provided some valuable insights into how to respond to natural disasters.

“Last year a roof blew off one of our homes and the home’s emergency management plan was activated. While it worked well, we used the opportunity to take another look at our business continuity plan from a strategic level. In particular we linked in with local councils around our facilities and looked at their emergency plans and ensured we were all in cohesion,” Ms Mooney said.

Now the group is drilling down and relooking at the logistics of what happens on site during an emergency. While all homes have an emergency plan, the plans are being improved to include developing a wide-ranging list of scenarios and options about how to address various issues.

“For example, if no one can get into or out of a home due to fire or flood, how would we ensure there is enough food, medication and equipment available for our residents? And if we needed to evacuate during an emergency, where would we go and how would we get there?,” Ms Mooney said.

Until the new emergency plans are finalised, homes will continue to use the current emergency plans if necessary. Just by being involved in the process of developing scenarios and responses, the home’s staff are better placed to deal with whatever comes their way.

Floods in NSW

In May this year, Rathgar Lodge at Ulmarra (north of Grafton) enacted its emergency management plan and evacuated all residents due to local flooding. Five other homes in the area were also evacuated.

A month earlier, during a heavy downpour, Care Manager Deirdre Bubear and Quality Co-ordinator Irene Hayward reassessed the home’s evacuation plan and developed lists of what to take in an evacuation, which residents would share rooms and those with special needs that needed a staff member with them at all times.

“We already had a very comprehensive emergency management plan in place (Critical Operations Standing Operating Procedures or COSOP) which the SES had involvement in and recommended as the basis for other homes’ plans. The plan outlines a range of different risks general and specific to our home, from flood and fire to a truck crash on the highway or infectious outbreak – with a range of options for how we would deal with each situation. So we knew we were prepared,” Ms Bubear said.

The drama began early at 4.30am, with water on the floor which had overflowed from the guttering into the facility due to the torrential rain.

With regular calls into the SES for updates, they gave the go ahead for the home to evacuate at 8.30am. This is where the emergency management plan kicked in - call in staff and family members to help, ring nearby motel in a higher and more accessible location, contact local bus company, inform management and, using the newly developed evacuation list - pack what was required and get residents ready.

A family member helped get residents onto the bus and by 10.30am staff and residents were on their way to the motel. The home had made prior arrangements with the bus company and various accommodation in the case of emergency. They also had backups in case the first option was not available.

The staff were waiting at the motel to help residents off the bus. With the list of residents, a well organised allotment of rooms occurred and the cooks took over the motel kitchen.

“We were very proud of the effort and the ease in which we were able to evacuate,” Ms Bubear said. “Of course we had a debriefing afterwards and made a few changes to how we could do things next time round. But we’re very confident we are well prepared,” she said.



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