

Fri 26/08/2011

RE: Senate inquiry into emergency communications - written questions on notice for NTPFES

Please find below our answers to the questions put.

Question 1. Apart from the adoption of the Common Alerting Protocol Standard here are no current plans to further enhance the exchange of information at present. The NT has appropriate access to BOM Alerts. We have not had occasion to access Defence or AFP information resources in recent times and therefore cannot comment on our ability to access these resources in an emergency.

Question 2. Within the NT, Hazard Managers are responsible for promulgating advice to the public concerning their preparations for emergency events. Consequently the extent of these campaigns differs. For our highest risk events – cyclones and associated flood events during the wet season – there are extensive campaigns consisting of TV commercials, radio commercials, indigenous language radio commercials and talking posters, presentations to community groups and schools, and information days (ie cyclone awareness day). This is done by the NT Emergency Service in partnership with a wide variety of commercial and government agencies and news outlets. During emergencies Emergency Alert, radio and TV announcements, and increasingly twitter and facebook are being used to promulgate information.

Question 3. Backup generators are available for use when power goes out in a number of Emergency Operation Centres across the Territory. The extent to which they are used depends upon the physical location of the Emergency Operation Centre in question and the extent of the emergency event. Suffice to say that in Darwin, power can fail due to bad weather during the wet season and it would not be unusual for the Emergency Operations Centre to use backup generators maybe twice a year.

Question 4. Sponsorship of emergency services within the NT is generally quite small scale and ad hoc. The size of the population and hence the potential market for business is relatively small. Consequently, most “sponsorship” is usually one off donations of small amounts of money or services. Exceptions exist such as the large scale broadcasting of emergency cyclone community service announcements by Channel 9 or the partial sponsorship of an off-shore rescue vessel by Westpac. There is no central database which provides an accurate assessment of donations to the various emergency organisations.

Question 5. There are arrangements with commercial radio and TV operators to broadcast emergency messages and free public service announcements. Many of these arrangements have no formal agreement but are long standing. For instance, Channel Nine have broadcast Cyclone community service announcements in Darwin on the basis of an informal agreement

for many years. During emergencies there are no issues having emergency announcements broadcast by radio or TV.

Question 6. Cross border information sharing via a central database does not occur at present. Careful thought would be required to ascertain to what extent this would be helpful in responding to an emergency.

Peter Davies
Director
Northern Territory Emergency Service