

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

DFES Community
Resilience Workshops
(2020) stressed:

- + the unexpected will occur more and more in future, and
- + communities cannot rely on government to save them.



WHAT IS A RESILIENT COMMUNITY?

“Resilience doesn’t mean toughening up. It means coming together to help each other - physically and emotionally”.

“Resilience helps us deal with the unexpected”

“When there’s a crisis, 95% of assistance comes from within 500 metres of your home”

Source Red Cross

Background

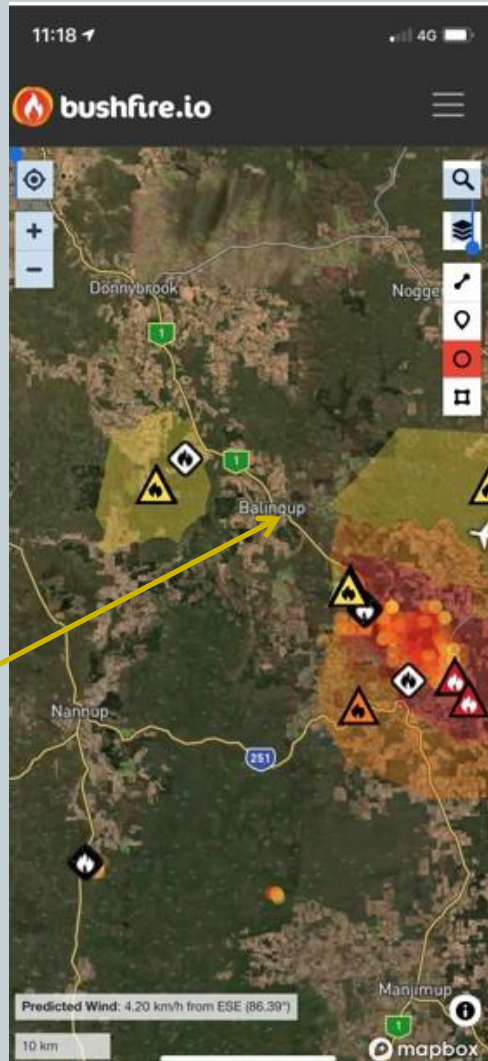
- ✗ May 2020 lost electricity due to severe storm.
- ✗ No telecommunications for 18 hours.

Discussions with Telstra, Shire, DFES, Western Power.
Problem = insufficient backup power (generator).

How long do YOU think a mobile phone tower should be able to operate when mains power is lost?

-
- Balingup (population 600) and Donnybrook (3000) are considered small phone towers and have battery backup only.
 - Battery life 6 -8 hours – no permanent generator.
 - ✗ Outcome = no landlines or mobile phones after 8 hours. What is the impact of that?

FEBRUARY 2022 MAJOR BUSHFIRE





- Balingup Resilience Group formed.
- Liaised with emergency services and LGA.
- Set up Community Information & Social Centre (CISCO)

WHAT IS THE CISCO?

- Generator
 - Satellite phone
 - Skymuster
 - Starlink
-
- ✗ Work closely with local Bushfire Brigade &
 - ✗ Bushfire Ready.



STEP BY STEP GUIDE

Community Information & Social Centre (CISCO) Guidelines

Aim. The aim of the Community Information & Social Centre (CISCO) is to provide a venue where members of the community can gather together to provide mutual support during an emergency (could be during a fire, storm or major incident).

Activation. There are a number of scenarios that could result in the activation of the CISCO and some examples are given in the table below. If the CISCO is activated, see the recommended process at Annex A.

Authorisation. The CISCO can only be activated by any of the following people:

BADSA President, Vice President or Secretary.	Any Balingup Shire Councilor
BPA President, Vice President or Secretary	BADTA President or Coordinator.
CWA President or Secretary	

Possible Activation Scenarios:

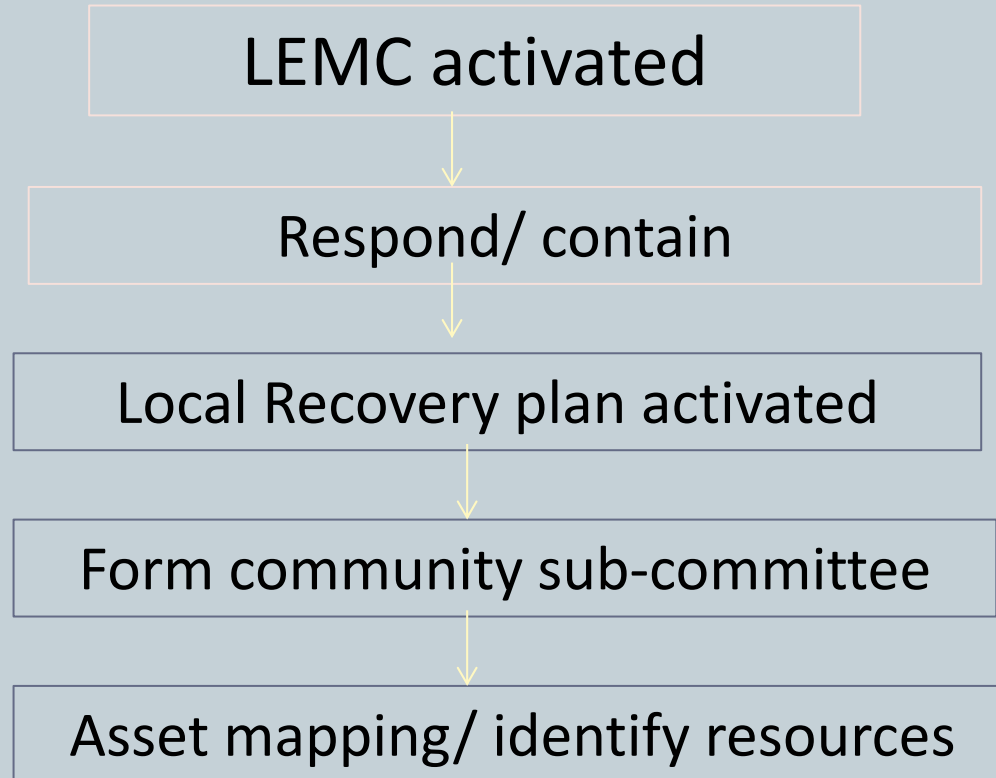
Situation	Possible action
Power is on but there are bushfires or other threats within 30km of Balingup.	Consideration would be given to opening the Recreation Centre depending on the level of concern in the community.
Power is off. Check Western Power website. https://www.westernpower.com.au/faults-outages/power-outages/ Will it be off for more than 6 hours? No —————> Yes 	If power will be restored in less than 6 hours, make a decision based on the conditions at the time. If it is a very hot day, you may decide to open the Centre, even if the power is expected back on in a few hours. In this case, it should not be necessary to order a generator.

HOW DOES CISCO FIT IN?

Who	What	When
Bushfire Ready	Prepare properties for fire.	Done before the fire season.
CISCO	Community response	When there's a bushfire or other emergency.
Bushfire Brigade	Fight the fire	During fire
Local Recovery Officer	Coordinate recovery	Most work is done after fire

✗ It is not an evacuation centre!!!

LOCAL EMERGENCY ARRANGEMENTS



CISCO MODEL

Form community sub-committee



Asset mapping/ identify resources



LEMC activated



Respond/ contain



Local Recovery Plan activated

ASSET MAPPING - COMMUNITY SURVEY

MARCH 2025

89 responses:

- 10 have satellite telecoms
- 10 first aid
- 6 bus/truck license
- 9 need help during Watch & Act

WHY WE NEED IT

Warning level		Evacuation Centre open?
Bushfire Advice	Recommend people who have respiratory problems – go now	Rarely
Watch & Act	If your plan is to leave, leave now	Sometimes
Emergency Warning	Leave/evacuate now. Too late to leave.	Always

Animals not allowed Evacuation/ Welfare Centres
Evacuation Centre is 30 km away.

WHY WE NEED IT.....

- ✗ Less information than Bushfire.io (wind direction, location of aircraft etc).
- ✗ Doesn't provide detailed information on the exact location of a fire.
- ✗ No phone tower = no Emergency WA warnings.



EMERGENCY
WARNINGS APP

WHY WE NEED IT.....

Who is familiar with:

- ✗ Local Emergency Management Committee
- ✗ Local Recovery Plan

How do you contact them when the mobile phone tower is down?

Who knows the contact details for:

- ✗ Shire Emergency Services Manager
- ✗ Shire Ranger
- ✗ Shire Local Recovery Officer
- ✗ Hospital
- ✗ DFES Regional Coordinator
- ✗ Chief Bushfire Control Officer
- ✗ Shire President
- ✗ Department of Communities

WHY WE NEED IT.....



Email to Shire – “Can you let the emergency response team know please?”

Response : “Unfortunately, due to safety concerns we are prevented from posting these sorts of offers on our Shire FB. The only things we are authorised to post are from DFES.”



It's not
just
Balingup



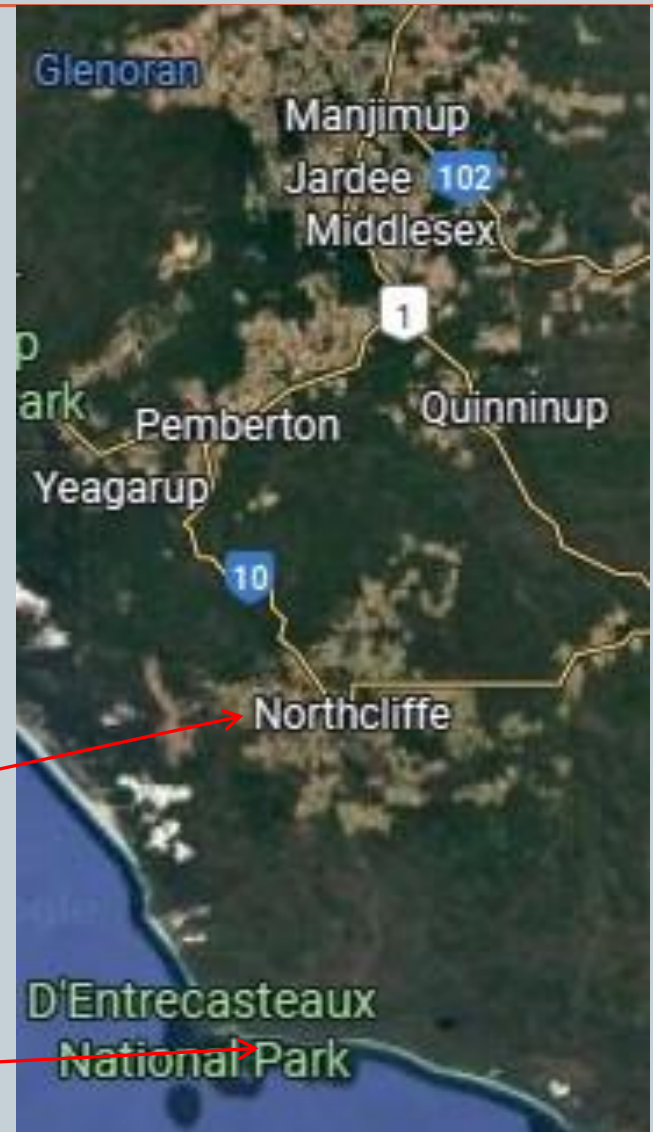
- No community plan in place
- Poor telecommunications
- No generator/ sources of backup power.
- Didn't know what LEMC was

NORTHCLIFFE FIRE – FEB 25

- Watch & Act issued at 9.30pm
- State forest & hermits.
- Shire 55km away.
- Windy Harbour resident – caught out by road closure.

Northcliffe

Windy Harbour



NORTHCLIFFE FIRES – FEB 25

- ✗ 20 Feb 25 “The Shire did come down and keep the Visitor Centre open on Tuesday afternoon until about 7 but very few people turned up. It was too little and too late.
- ✗ This is why it needs to be made clear to everyone well in advance.”

A red oval graphic with a thin black border, containing white text.

Fire started
9th February

DOES ANYONE HAVE SIMILAR EXPERIENCES
TO SHARE?

NEXT STEP IN THIS WORKSHOP

- ✗ To develop actual plans for your community group to respond to an emergency.
- ✗ Answer the questions in the Workshop Questions Template:
 - + Can do as one community, or
 - + Small groups, or
 - + Individual
 - + Handwritten
- ✗ If time, when you have finished, join a second table to compare ideas.

✗ Media strategy – one central point where people can contact for information. Stick to the basics:

- +What we know

- +What we don't know

- +What we are doing

- +What we want you to do.

IMPORTANT!

- ✗ Any time you have an opportunity, reinforce message:
 - Only accepting money.
 - Don't want physical donations – we'll ask if we need it.



CONSIDERATIONS. WHO COULD.....

- + Provide short term accommodation?
- + Provide temporary safe places for pets and stock?
- + Supply food – central point and home delivery?
- + Provide assistance to complete paperwork/
application forms?
- + Assist with wildlife rescue?
- + Take care of backpackers, grey nomads and
homeless?

IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH.....

- ✗ Step 1 is to just meet, chat, listen to those affected / we are here for you.

This job is better done by outsiders (Red Cross, Shire etc).



THEN LATER.....



- ✗ Step 2 is collection of detailed information (how much property, stock lost etc).
- ✗ Better done by outsiders (Red Cross, Shire etc).

THINK LONG TERM:

- ✗ Focus on what's strong, what's available, what do we have now.
- ✗ Monitor and capture political commitments and pledges.
- ✗ Do no harm (to local businesses)
- ✗ Built infrastructure gets fixed quickly (roads, infrastructure etc). Others need more help.

WHO THINKS IT'S A GOOD IDEA?

WA State Recovery Arrangements	☒	“Require local and State government to engage community members to understand community needs and priorities, and in the planning, design and governance of recovery”.
Australia Institute for Disaster Resilience	☒	Participation Goal: Building connected networks and relationships, ownership and trust through active involvement”.

ALSO SUPPORT CONCEPT

Who		Comment
Red Cross	☒	Community-led resilience teams. Won award 2020 “Never got off ground due to governance issues”
FRRR	☒	“A vital resource not being utilized when every resource is needed”
Volunteers WA	☒	“Spontaneous volunteers are siloed from official response.” No process in place to manage spontaneous volunteers

PROBLEMMANAGEMENT OF SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS

WHAT'S HAPPENING OVERSEAS?

UK government	“Spontaneous volunteer planning should be done before an incident”
Churchill Trust (2 reports)	Effective use of volunteer reception centre in multiple countries (Europe, Japan, Turkey etc)
Wellington (NZ)	Community Emergency Hubs

FEMA – USA

Volunteer Reception Centres & waivers

<https://www.galaxydigital.com/blog/volunteer-liability-waiver-best-practices>

LIABILITY WAIVER TEMPLATE (USA)

In return for being allowed to participate in [Organization] volunteer activities and all related activities, including any activities incidental to such participation ("Volunteer Activities"), the undersigned Volunteer or Parent/Legal Guardian of Volunteer if Volunteer is under age 18 (hereafter referred to using "I", "me", or "my") releases and agrees not to sue the [Organization] or its officers, directors, employees, sub-contractors, sponsors, agents and affiliates ("the Foundation") from all present and future claims that may be made by me, my family, estate, heirs, or assigns for property damage, personal injury, or wrongful death arising as a result of my participation in the Volunteer Activities wherever, whenever, or however the same may occur.

I understand and agree that the [Organization] is not responsible for any injury or property damage arising out of the Volunteer Activities, even if caused by their ordinary negligence or otherwise.

I understand that participation in Volunteer Activities involves certain risks, including, but not limited to, serious injury and death. I am voluntarily participating in the Volunteer Activities with knowledge of the danger involved and I agree to accept all risks of participation.

I also agree to indemnify and hold harmless the [Organization] for all claims arising out of my participation in the Volunteer Activities.

I understand that this document is intended to be as broad and inclusive as permitted by the laws of the state in which the Volunteer Activities take place and agree that if any portion of this Agreement is invalid, the remainder will continue in full legal force and effect.

I also acknowledge that the [Organization] has not arranged and does not carry any insurance of any kind for my benefit or that of Volunteer (if Volunteer is under 18), my parents, guardians, trustees, heirs, executors, administrators, successors, and assigns.

I represent that, to my knowledge, I am in good health and suffer no physical impairment that would or should prevent my participation in Volunteer Activities.

I also understand that this document is a contract that grants certain rights to and eliminates the liability of the [Organization].

Volunteer Signature

Date

2025

- ✗ Asked for CISCO to be included in Local Emergency Management Arrangements.
 - Request denied.
 - “volunteer liability”.
- ✗ Offered to attend a DEMC session to discuss community engagement.
 - Declined.
 - “It’s only for local government and emergency services”.

CURRENT STATUS

Local Emergency Management Committee:

Shire

DFES

DBCA

DPIRD

Western Power

St John Ambulance

Bushfire Brigade

Etc

CISCO

Hi Wendy,

I have decided to leave the Resilience group (not that I have done anything useful yet!) I just can't come to terms with the way it seems to need to operate under all those rules and restrictions and fear of litigation if every T and I is not crossed and dotted. To me, and I suspect, most of the people in the group, we want to be there to help community in a crisis, and do whatever it takes. All the red tape is an anathema to me. That's not how I want to live. I applaud your determination to make CISCO happen and grind through all the impediments.

Carolyn

- ✗ Member left Resilience Group because she “couldn't come to terms with all those rules and restrictions and fear of litigation”.
- ✗ Just wants “to help the community in a crisis and do whatever it takes”.

The rigidity and risk sensitivity around health and safety for volunteers is an ongoing contentious issue and requires serious debate, but if we had stopped then, over 100,000 hours of organised volunteering would have been quashed in a heartbeat".
(Christchurch student)



DISASTER RELIEF AUSTRALIA



- ✗ Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) - national not-for-profit organisation.
- ✗ Mix of military veterans, emergency services and civilians that volunteer in recovery (not response) after an emergency.
- ✗ Individuals may request assistance from DRA, but DRA will always check in with Local Government.

RESPONSE

- ✘ Assist incident impacting a small number of properties – clearing debris, trees etc
- ✘ Usually come 3- 4 weeks after the event for 3-4 days.
- ✘ Crews of four including one usually a chainsaw operator.
- ✘ Focus on residents who are under/not insured and often work with older people or people with disabilities.

AND THERE'S MORE!

- ✗ Participate in community meetings and recovery hubs.
- ✗ Help businesses get back on their feet.
- ✗ Clean up reserves if the LG has not got the funding.
- ✗ Assist in damage assessment through the ADAT (Aerial Damage Assessment Team) drones.
- ✗ Undertake spontaneous volunteer management for locals to register with them
- ✗ Run training on 4WD, remote first aiders, chainsaw operations etc.

IS THERE A FEE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

- ✗ Short term project (3-4 days) - charge a fee if LGA can afford it. In kind support if not.
- ✗ Longer-term operation - request a financial contribution.



www.disasterreliefaus.org

IF I HAD A MAGIC WAND?

FEDERAL/STATE GOVERNMENT REVIEW EXISTING
MODELS (Australia and overseas)



INSURANCE? WAIVERS? LEGISLATION?



IDENTIFY BEST MODEL – VOLUNTEER RECEPTION
CENTRE OR OTHER



FUND IT



PROVIDE TEMPLATE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

IF I HAD A MAGIC WAND?

EMPLOY A PERSON IN EACH LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AREA TO SET UP AND MENTOR CISCO IN EVERY
SMALL TOWN.



COMMUNITY WRITES ACTIVATION PROCESS AND
IDENTIFY WHAT EQUIPMENT IS NEEDED



EQUIPMENT PROVIDED *1



REVIEW ANNUALLY AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK TO
LEMC – WHAT CAN THEY DO TO HELP EACH
OTHER?

*1 No funding
application required.
Activation Process =
grant application.

FIRE RETARDANT TREES

Egerton-Warburton Homestead Bridgetown Jan 2009



<https://www.smalltreefarm.com.au/Fire-retardants.html>

FIRE SAFE COMMUNITIES

- ✗ Nurseries to show plant flammability on label.



MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS?

- ✗ Don't leave it too late.
- ✗ The rest is up to you.
- ✗ Wendy Trow
- ✗ brookview@wn.com.au
- ✗ 0457404571

