



NATIONAL GUIDELINES & BROADCAST LEVELS
CHART FOR THE BROADCAST OF EMERGENCY
PUBLIC WARNINGS



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BACKGROUND

The *National Guidelines for the Request and Broadcast of Emergency Warnings* are an initiative of the Australian Government and have been developed in consultation with State and Territory Governments and all peak broadcast media bodies. The objective of this work is to improve the effectiveness, clarity and consistency of arrangements between all broadcast media, and all emergency management organisations, for the request and broadcast of emergency public warnings.

The Guidelines have received in-principle endorsement from all members of the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management, and from peak broadcast media bodies including Free TV Australia, Commercial Radio Australia, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Australian Subscription Television & Radio Association, the Special Broadcasting Service, and the Community Broadcasters Association of Australia.

These 'best practice' Guidelines will form the basis of ongoing discussion and work between all the media and government emergency management stakeholders to increase the consistency and effectiveness of processes, and to identify relevant and emerging national issues.

Issues that have already been identified as having a national impact on the arrangements for the request and broadcast emergency warnings, include:

The increasing use of broadcast program streaming across state and territory borders;

Emerging communications and broadcast technologies;

The increased mobility of media and emergency management staff across jurisdictions and networks; and

Variations in the formality and scope of arrangements between emergency management bodies and different media sectors for the broadcast of warnings.

Within the Australian Government, this work is being coordinated and managed by the Attorney-General's Department. For further information on this activity, please contact the Public Affairs Branch, Attorney-General's Department, National Circuit, Barton, ACT, Phone: 02 6250 6666.



An Australian Government Initiative



NATIONAL GUIDELINES & BROADCAST LEVELS CHART FOR THE BROADCAST OF EMERGENCY PUBLIC WARNINGS

National Guidelines and a Broadcast Levels Chart for the broadcast of emergency warnings to the Australian public have been developed to provide a consistent approach across Australia, on the processes and expectations that underpin the issue and broadcast of emergency warnings to the public.

The guidelines relate only to warnings where persons, property or the environment are under emerging or immediate threat. The Guidelines do not encompass news or disaster recovery information, editorial comment, or dissemination of general emergency preparedness advice. Broadcast media outlets are encouraged to make separate arrangements within their State and Territory for provision of ongoing news coverage of an incident.

Where an incident becomes an ongoing response/recovery operation, State and Territory arrangements (e.g. Public Information Coordination Centres) will supersede these guidelines.

The guidelines support existing arrangements and commitments made by the broadcast industry under the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Special Broadcasting Service, Commercial Television Industry and Commercial Radio Codes of Practice. They do not intend to change existing local arrangements, but rather to complement them and provide a consistent approach to the broadcast of emergency warnings to the public across all States and Territories.

SCOPE

The guidelines and broadcast levels chart were developed following consultation with broadcast media representatives, State and Territory emergency services organisations and relevant government Australian government agencies. In 2007 the guidelines received in-principle endorsement from Commercial Radio Australia, Free TV Australia, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation; the Special Broadcasting Service; the Australian Subscription Television & Radio Association; the Community Broadcasters Association of Australia, the Attorney-General representing the Australian Government, and from Ministers representing the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania, Western Australia and Victoria.

The guidelines acknowledge the requirements and processes that exist under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* and the relevant codes of practice and aim to complement any existing Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between governments and broadcast media.

They aim to be inclusive of all emergency services organisations and broadcast media outlets – public, commercial, and community. The guidelines take into account the technical and operational differences between the broadcast industry sectors and between individual broadcasters.

The guidelines do not seek to limit in any way the maintenance of ongoing working relationships between the broadcast media and emergency services organisations at the local level, or to preclude the development or ongoing maintenance of arrangements under MOUs that cover issues broader than emergency warning announcements to the public. They do not seek to change the processes of how warnings are issued by the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM).

The guidelines will be reviewed in conjunction with statutory reviews (section 123A, *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* refers) of the Commercial Television and Commercial Radio Codes of Practice.

The guidelines consist of two documents:

- **National Guidelines** that outline a process and method of requesting and verifying broadcast requests, and
- **Broadcast Levels** Chart that takes into account both the immediacy and seriousness of the threat, and the media industry's operational requirements and circumstances, including program streaming, and commercial considerations.

NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR THE BROADCAST OF EMERGENCY PUBLIC WARNINGS

These guidelines provide a simple, consistent and clearly defined process across all emergency services organisations and broadcast media outlets for issuing, verifying, updating and terminating broadcast requests. The guidelines address the following:

1. Organisational Arrangements
2. Issuing Emergency Warnings to the Public:
 - a. Content
 - b. Transmission
 - c. Commencement
 - d. Verification
 - e. Extension
 - f. Termination
3. Broadcast
4. Issues resolution
5. Training

1. Organisational Arrangements

Australian, State and Territory emergency management committees are responsible for ensuring that all emergency services organisations are fully aware of these guidelines and how they can fit into existing arrangements, processes and actions.

Broadcast media organisations are responsible for ensuring that their staff are aware of the guidelines and related levels chart to ensure that requests for the broadcast of emergency warnings to the public are effectively actioned when required.

Broadcast media and emergency services organisations should engage in regular dialogue to confirm the validity of actions and processes outlined in these guidelines.

2. Issuing Emergency Warnings to the Public

The decision to issue an emergency warning to the public rests with the appropriate control agency. The control agency is responsible for managing and/or coordinating resources to respond to an incident.

The control agency is responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the warning's content, for coordination of the warning with all other relevant emergency service organisations, and for terminating or extending the request to broadcast a warning.

Broadcast media outlets and emergency services organisations are jointly responsible for maintaining mutual contact directories within their State or Territory and operational areas/regions, and are to ensure continuity of information being exchanged over extended periods of time where staff are likely to work shifts.

2a. Content

The content of warnings provided to broadcast media outlets should take into account the delivery method of the message and, as a guide, should:

- be as short as possible to convey the priority information that the public would need:
 - a. Radio announcements are not likely to run for longer than 30-45 seconds and so should contain no more than 75-120 words, which clearly state:
 - i. Who the issuing authority is,
 - ii. What the incident is,
 - iii. Where the location of the incident is,
 - iv. What response is required of community at that location, and
 - v. How and where the community can gain additional information.

- b. Television crawlers are not likely to be longer than 100-120 characters including spaces between words.
- c. Television verbal announcements reflect the information above for Radio announcements.
- include a means for the public to obtain further information be that a phone number or website;
- provide a commencement and termination time, or clear termination (or update) notification arrangement; and
- assign an emergency warning broadcast level, based on the assessment criteria in the Broadcast Levels Chart.

2b. Transmission

The initial contact for a request to broadcast an emergency warning should be made verbally by a nominated delegate of the control agency by telephone or other means to the primary broadcast media outlets operating in the area or region affected by the incident. This is to inform the broadcaster that a warning to the public is about to be issued, and to confirm arrangements for transmittal, which may include verbal or written transmittal of message by fax, email or by hand as agreed during initial verbal notification.

2c. Commencement

The commencement time for transmission of an emergency warning to the public is to be agreed between the control agency and broadcast media outlet during their initial contact.

2d. Verification

The verification of emergency warning requests is necessary to avoid hoaxes or miscommunication. Where no robust jurisdictional arrangements exist, follow-up contact for the verification of a request to transmit a warning should be made verbally by the broadcast media outlet by telephone or other means.

Emergency management committees in each State and Territory should ensure that, a single point of verification exists for each control agency and that all relevant broadcast media outlets are in receipt of a 24 hour telephone contact number. This will enable broadcast media outlets to verify the validity of the request, including the level, content, commencement and termination, in a timely manner.

2e. Extension

Should the duration of the incident necessitate that a warning be broadcast beyond the initial agreed transmission time, then the nominated delegate of the control agency is to contact the broadcast media outlet and re-confirm an extension of the broadcast.

2f. Termination

The control agency initiating a request should follow-up with broadcast media outlets to terminate the broadcast of a warning when it is no longer necessary.

3. Broadcast

Broadcast media are expected to take all steps possible to activate the broadcast arrangements, as they correspond to their relevant industry Code of Practice and the assigned broadcast level/s.

Where a "Cyclone Watch" (or similar program) is declared by BOM, standing arrangements between BOM and State/Territory emergency services organisations supersede the National Guidelines for Broadcast of Emergency Public Warnings.

An incident may require the activation of the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS). Should this occur then the SEWS Guidelines supersede the Guidelines for Broadcast of Emergency Public Warnings. The activation of a SEWS alert is under the direction or guidance of the control agency issuing the warning/s.

4. Issues resolution

Any issues associated with the implementation of these Guidelines for the request and broadcast of Emergency warnings to the public will initially be addressed locally between the broadcast media outlet and the control agency. Issues that cannot be resolved at this level are to be referred to the relevant broadcast media network management in the first instance and then if required to the relevant industry peak body and the state or territory emergency management committee.

Where an incident is likely to cross State and/or Territory borders, the respective emergency management organisations in the affected States and Territories are responsible for liaising closely with one another to coordinate the broadcast of emergency warnings to the public.

5. Training

The National Guidelines and Broadcast Levels Chart will be tested for their functionality between a broadcast media outlet and State or Territory emergency services organisation prior to the development and production of a training package and materials for both State and Territory emergency management organisations and broadcast media outlets.

The delivery of training and materials to emergency management organisations will be incorporated into existing emergency management training and may incorporate information on SEWS. It will likely be delivered at the Emergency Management Australia facility in Mount Macedon, Victoria with a training package structured in a way that States and Territories may incorporate into their existing training programs.

The delivery of training and materials for broadcast media outlets will be incorporated into existing State and Territory media briefings and workshops. (Most States and Territories have annual media briefings for specific incidents, e.g. Northern Territory and Western Australia pre-cyclone season, and Victoria pre-bushfire season).

BROADCAST LEVELS CHART FOR EMERGENCY PUBLIC WARNINGS

Issuing Authority

These instructions apply to a range of incidents from low level emergencies that pose an emerging threat to life and property, to major emergencies that can cause a serious and immediate threat to life and property. Emergencies are generally regarded as situations in which there is an imminent or actual threat within the community, where life or property are at risk and the situation requires a significant coordinated response by the control agency (i.e. emergency or essential services organisations).

When issuing a request to broadcast a warning to the public, the control agency will assign a broadcast level based on the assessed imminence, likelihood and scale of the threat to life and property.

Requests are to be issued in accordance with the *National Guidelines for the Broadcast of Emergency Public Warnings*.

On receipt and verification of the broadcast request, the broadcast media outlet should, as a matter of urgency, take all reasonable steps to broadcast the warning in the agreed manner; an exception being the national broadcasters who may not be able to transmit warnings to local areas within a specific State or Territory or where the emergency does not impact on an entire State or Territory or nation as a whole.

Broadcast media outlets should not amend the wording of an emergency warning to the public in any way, without prior agreement of the control agency, that would alter the context and core message of the warning. The omission of auxiliary words such as 'the', 'a' and 'is' may be necessary for the broadcast of text crawlers for television but should only be omitted where it does not alter the context and core message of the warning to be broadcast. Guidance on content essential for broadcasters to transmit is contained in the *National Guidelines for the Broadcast of Emergency Warnings*, Section 2a Content.

The broadcast of emergency warnings to the public in languages in addition to English is at the discretion of the broadcast media outlet but is to be encouraged where practicable.

Level	Assessment criteria			Broadcast Mechanisms
	Scope of Threat	Likelihood	Imminence	Message: Awareness
Level 1 LOW	<p>Low to medium level threat to property damage within a predetermined and reasonably confined area.</p> <p>Minimal level of serious injury or death. Routine message would be requested.</p>	<p>Occurrence of event or threat is considered fairly likely.</p>	<p>Adequate time for affected public to take all required preparation measures and to anticipate response measures.</p>	<p>Radio: A 30 second announcement at a time that does not interrupt a program/ broadcast at discretion of local radio station, e.g. during scheduled news program.</p> <p>Television: Verbal announcement and/or crawler is at discretion of television station.</p>

Level	Assessment criteria			Broadcast requirements
	Scope of Threat	Likelihood	Imminence	Message: Reassure/Prepare
Level 2 MEDIUM	<p>Medium level risk of injury or death.</p> <p>Medium level threat of property damage over a wide area.</p> <p>Urgent message would be requested.</p>	<p>Occurrence of event or threat impacting on community is considered highly likely.</p>	<p>Community within anticipated path of emergency must commence preparations as a matter of urgency to protect life and property.</p> <p>Local emergency service organisations will have commenced direct public advice to threatened sectors.</p>	<p>Radio: 30-45 second announcement made (likelihood that request made to interrupt program/ broadcast). Text should be no longer than 75-120 words.</p> <p>Television: Use of crawler (no more than 100-120 characters). Verbal announcement during scheduled news broadcast.</p>

Level	Assessment criteria			Broadcast requirements
	Scope of Threat	Likelihood	Imminence	Message: Action
Level 3 HIGH (SEWS broadcast may be requested)	<p>Significant to actual likelihood of injury or death.</p> <p>High probability of severe property damage or destruction of primary utility infrastructure.</p> <p>Possible declaration of a state of emergency, or a national terrorist alert situation.</p> <p>If a terrorism alert, probable upgrade of national security threat level to high or extreme.</p> <p>Immediate message would be requested.</p>	<p>Danger current or imminent.</p> <p>Occurrence is considered certain.</p>	<p>Event requires immediate public response. Priority must be assigned to implementing actions which will protect life.</p>	<p>Radio: Announcement made immediately on verification by radio station.</p> <p>Television: Crawler to be used (no more than 100-150 characters).</p> <p>Verbal announcement made immediately on verification by television station.</p>

Contact Numbers	
Ambulance Service: _____ _____	Radio [insert name]: _____ _____
Bureau of Meteorology: _____ _____	TV: _____ _____
Emergency Management Committee: _____	Radio: _____
Fire Service: _____ _____	TV: _____ _____
Police Service: _____ _____	
State Emergency Service: _____ _____	
(Other): _____ _____	