

EMG505- Work Based Project

Assessment Item 4

Report

Enhancing public information practice during the response phase, in Tasmania's emergency services (Tasmania Fire Service and State Emergency Service)



ABC, 2013

Ten Years on From the Victorian Black Saturday Bushfires - Public Information during Response, What have we Learnt?

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Research topic

Enhancing public information practice during the response phase, in Tasmania's emergency services (Tasmania Fire Service and State Emergency Service).

Section 1

Addressing previous feedback

Marker and subject coordinator feedback	My changes and revisions
Literature review summary - "The need for research to be continued or the need satisfied in your own report?"	This has been addressed in the introduction, conclusion and executive summary through detailing that for more conclusive results further research would need to be undertaken. This could include more in depth analysis through interviews and focus groups with TFS and SES staff, and interstate fire and SES agency staff that specialise in the public information response field.

Intended audience of report

The intended audience (primary audience) for the report is the TFS and SES Public Information Coordination Group (PICG). Consisting of the following stakeholders:

- SES Assistant Director Operations and Resources (TFS and SES Executive Leadership Team Sponsor)
- TFS Coordinator Community Development (Chair)
- Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management Media and Communications Officer
- TFS and SES Triple Zero Call Dispatch Centre (FireComm) Supervisor
- TFS State Operations Stations Officer
- SES Regional Manager (Northern Tasmania)

Secondary audiences identified (including potential audiences) include:

- TFS and SES Executive Leadership Team
- All public information practitioners at TFS and SES (including all survey participants)
- TFS and SES Operational leaders
- State, national and international public information response practitioners
- Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC)
- Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC) - Community Safety Group and National Warning Group

Style guide

The report complies with the Tasmania Fire Service Style Guide and Charles Sturt University presentation requirements.

Section 2 - Executive summary

Emergency management can be spoken about in terms of 'Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery' (PPRR) or the 'Comprehensive Approach' to managing disasters and emergencies. This report is focussed on public information in the response phase.

Identifying the current state of practice and challenges in the public information function of Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) and State Emergency Service (SES) emergency response. Proposing enhancements through a series of recommendations, based on a review of the literature and an online survey completed with public information response staff at TFS and SES.

Arguably, it was following the devastating Victorian Black Saturday Bushfires in 2009, where 173 people died, that the profile of public information during the response phase in Australia was raised. The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (Parliament of Victoria, 2010, p. 26) recommended (*Recommendation 14*) that fire agencies alter the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS) to acknowledge and give greater authority to public information, placing it on the same level as the operations, planning and logistic functions of incident management. It was from this point that public information during the response phase became a greater priority for emergency services (AFAC, 2017). The Royal Commission recommended that a public information unit be established as its own section during major response incidents. The recommendation also identified that if at any point a full incident management team was required during the response phase of a major incident, a public information unit was required (Parliament of Victoria, 2010, p. 26).

This recommendation set national priorities with fire and emergency services across Australia prioritising the issuing of alerts and warnings and protecting vulnerable people as their top operational priorities during the response phase of major incidents. The Royal Commission findings stated that public information during the response phase up until 2009 failed to "...reflect the quantity, demands and priority surrounding information management in the 21st Century" (Parliament of Victoria, 2010, p. 88).

At an international level one of the driving factors informing public information during the response phase includes the United Nations' Sendai Framework for Disasters and Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (United Nations, 2015). One of the objectives of the framework is to "substantially

increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments by 2030” (United Nations, 2015).

Areas identified in the literature to inform future enhancement include recognition and identification of:

- The importance of working within an integrated emergency management model across all hazards.
- The importance of prevention, preparedness and response being linked and a community resilience approach.
- Tackling the challenges including; technology being vulnerable, relationships between stakeholders and the community, increasing public expectations, gaps in understanding behavioural change, organisational culture, leadership and vulnerable populations.
- The importance of public information being planned and organised through the use of strong systems.
- Strong leadership and capable personnel identified as key factors to systematic success.
- Continuing to shift towards a greater focus on impact based warnings.

A series of themes are identified throughout the survey responses. The survey was distributed to all TFS and SES staff that work or have worked in the public information response field, a total of 94 staff (SES- 13, TFS- 81). A total of 31 respondents (32.98%) completed the survey, with 25 being from TFS (80.65%) and 6 being from SES (19.35%).

Indicative findings from the survey and literature review suggest recommendations across two themes; training and building capacity of our people; and systems for the enhancement of public information during the response phase within TFS and SES.

Recommendation 1 – Training and building capacity of our people

- As a matter of priority TFS and SES provide a public information workshop for public information staff prior to the end of 2018 and make this an ongoing workshop prior to each fire season.
- Plan and conduct accredited public information training in 2019.
- Recruit, raise and sustain additional suitable staff through an expression of interest process to build the capacity of public information over the next two years.

- Provide development opportunities, including a public information workshop by the end of 2018, exercises and mentoring opportunities.
- Increase the knowledge and familiarity of TFS and SES doctrine in the area of public information response.

Training was identified as a gap for staff working in the public information response field at TFS and SES. The gap identified by respondent's referred to a lack of training and the potential benefits of having structured yearly training to support staff.

Recommendation 2 – Systems

- Continue to implement, embed and formalise the state-wide TFS and SES Public Information Coordination Group that was approved in July 2018 to support the ongoing review and enhancement of public information systems.
- Establish guidelines and minimum standards around reference to policies.
- Establish a state on-call public information officer role for the bushfire danger period.

The report also investigates the fact that the analysis conducted has limitations. Some of the limitations include:

- For more conclusive results, further research would need to be undertaken.
- This could include more in depth analysis through interviews and focus groups with TFS and SES staff, and interstate fire and SES agency staff that specialise in the public information response field.
- Areas for further investigation were identified including the potential review and examination of the structure of public information within TFS and SES.

Section 3

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to identify current challenges in the public information function of Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) and the State Emergency Service (SES) emergency response and propose possible enhancements (recommendations). This is based on a review of the literature and a survey completed with public information response staff at TFS and SES.

Emergency management can be spoken about in terms of 'Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery' (PPRR) or the 'Comprehensive Approach' to managing disasters and emergencies. This report is focussed on public information in the response phase. For the purposes of this research, response is defined as "activities which activate preparedness arrangements and plans to put in place effective measures to deal with emergencies and disasters if and when they do occur" (Emergency Management Australia, 2004, p. 4).

Typically, fire and emergency services utilise the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS) for incident management during the response phase. AIIMS is defined as a system that "...has enabled Australian agencies to come together to resolve incidents through an integrated and effective response" system (Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council [AFAC], 2017). Through the application of AIIMS in training, policy and incident response, fire and emergency services have been able to build trust and confidence with the community and between services (AFAC, 2017).

Through a literature review and online survey, indicative findings suggest recommendations across two themes for the enhancement of public information during the response phase within TFS and SES: training and building capacity of our people and systems.

The report encapsulates a summary of a literature review that was undertaken for a literature review unit (EMG506) as part of a Master of Emergency Management at Charles Sturt University, a research method summary, summary of results and findings, and a recommendations and conclusion section.

Literature review summary

This section is a summary of a literature review that provides an evidence base for the research and a snapshot almost ten years on from the Victorian Black Saturday Bushfires. Specifically looking at what the emergency management industry has learnt.

The literature review investigated the current state of practice in public information during the response phase, including 'best practice'. Particular attention has been paid to the literature following the Victorian Black Saturday Bushfires in 2009. The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission findings recognised that public information during the response phase up until 2009 failed to meet the demands and priority surrounding information management in current day (Parliament of Victoria, 2010).

The literature between 2009 and 2018 shows that significant progress and enhancement has been made in the public information response field since 2009 in Australia. The literature review informs the enhancement of public information practice during the response phase, in Tasmania's emergency services (TFS and SES).

The literature can be synthesized into four themes; systematic influence, challenges, an evolving field that is rapidly changing, future directions and solutions. The review summarises the improvements of public information at TFS and SES. As well as identifying the need to continue with the enhancement into the future. Areas identified in the literature to inform the future enhancement of public information during response included:

- The importance of working within an integrated emergency management model across all hazards.
- The importance of prevention, preparedness and response being linked and a community resilience approach being taken.
- Tackling the challenges including; technology being vulnerable, relationships between stakeholders and the community, increasing public expectations, gaps in understanding behavioural change, organisational culture, leadership and vulnerable populations.
- The importance of public information being planned and organised through the use of strong systems.

- Strong leadership and capable personnel identified as key factors to systematic success.
- Continuing to shift towards a greater focus on impact based warnings.

Research method summary

The research design and approach selected for the project was a literature review and an online survey of TFS and SES staff that have worked in the public information response field.

Literature review

A literature review was selected to explore and demonstrate knowledge of research that has been conducted in the past. The literature review methodology places the research in the context of the topic of enhancing public information response practice within the TFS and SES. Providing a critical analysis almost ten years on from the Black Saturday Victorian Bushfires, the literature review looked at the following areas:

- Patterns and trends in the literature
- Gaps in the literature and seeks new lines of inquiry
- Similarities and differences in previous research and places the work into perspective
- Justifies the research
- Increases knowledge of the subject area
- Provides context for this report and how it relates to other work and the strategic picture.

The literature review methodology has pros and cons. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2012) discuss some benefits including; collection of information from a wide range of sources, takes a systematic approach which provides strength. Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) further discusses some of the limitations, which can include; limiting creativity, may over look grey literature (such as reports, websites), and reliance on databases.

Steps involved in the development and implementation of the literature review included the following topics.

1. Exploring the subject
2. Initiating the search
3. Storing and organising information
4. Selecting/deselecting information
5. Expanding the search: secondary data
6. Analysing and synthesising information
7. Presenting the literature review (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016).

Survey

For the purposes of the research the term survey is defined as ‘investigating the opinions or experience of (a group of people) by asking them questions’ (Oxford Dictionary, 2018). The ‘Public Information during response’ survey was distributed to staff at TFS and SES that do or who had worked in a public information response role. A Survey Monkey online survey tool was utilised.

Some of the advantages of the online survey approach include; ease of distribution and access, automated data collection, access to a targeted audience or population, time efficient and limited costs (Wright, 2005). Limitations can include; access issues, sampling issues, validity of the data, the survey and results are stored on the Survey Monkey server for a set amount of time (Wright, 2005).

A survey was selected as part of the methodology with the aim of providing an indicative look at public information response practice within the TFS and SES from the perspective of public information response practitioners across policy, state and regional public information, community liaison, media liaison, incident control and the TFS and SES communications centre (FireComm). A nonprobability sampling strategy was selected, specifically taking a purposive sampling approach. Purposive sampling (sometimes known as judgemental sampling) can be described as recognising that sometimes “...it’s appropriate to select a sample on the basis of knowledge of a population, its elements, and the purpose of the study” (Babbie 2002, p.178). In the case of the survey developed a specific population of people that have worked in the public information response area at TFS and SES were invited to complete the survey.

Steps involved in the development, implementation and review of the survey included:

1. Survey research: Researching what type of survey, a sampling method and discussion with subject matter experts.
2. Survey design: The survey consisted of eight questions with a mixture of open, closed and multiple choice questions (refer to appendix one – page 31).
3. Ethical approval with the Charles Sturt University, Ethics and Compliance Unit.
4. Surveying: A total of 31 responses were received (refer to Summary of results and findings- page 14).
5. Analysis and review (refer to Summary of results and findings - page 14).

Summary of results and findings

This section provides a discussion highlighting the indicative results and findings from the survey. A series of themes has been identified throughout the survey responses. An online survey was distributed by email to all TFS and SES staff that work or have worked in the public information response field, a total of 94 staff (SES- 13, TFS- 81). A total of 31 respondents (32.98%) completed the survey, with 25 being from TFS (80.65%) and 6 being from SES (19.35%). Representation from TFS and SES was as expected, based on the numbers of public information response staff (SES- 13, TFS- 81).

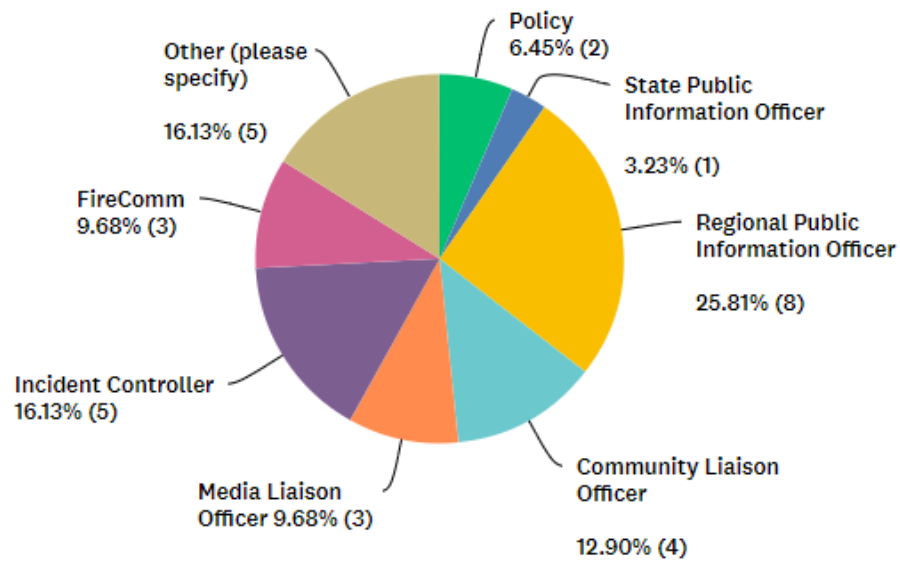
Figure 1 – Survey Questions

Question 1	Who are you employed with?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TFS • SES
Question 2	Where has the majority of your time been spent in the public information response phase of major incidents?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy • State Public Information Officer • Regional Public Information Officer • Community Liaison Officer • Media Liaison Officer • Incident Controller • FireComm • Other (please specify)
Question 3	Recognising that this role can be intermittent, please use the scale to indicate the period of years during which your experience has occurred, i.e. you are indicating the starting point from which you became involved in public information during the response phase in major incidents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise the scale from 0 to 10 years
Question 4	In public information response what is your level of familiarity with the policies/guidelines/doctrines listed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Information Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS) • Media Management Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS) • Community Alerts Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS) • Operational Priorities (in out-of-control bushfires) Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State and Regional Fire Operations Centres – Command and Control Arrangements Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS) • State Fire Command and Control Arrangements Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS) • Community Alerts for Floods Policy (SES)
Question 5	Select from the drop down in your opinion how far TFS/SES has improved or declined since public information was incorporated as its own section of the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS) in 2011?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declined significantly • Declined moderately • Neither declined or improved • Increased moderately • Improved significantly
Question 6	Please explain your answer to question 5, with examples if possible.	
Question 7	Based on your experience select what you see are the THREE current greatest challenges in public information response for TFS/SES.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community expectations • Organisational culture • Staffing capacity • Increased numbers of incidents • Technological support • National policy inputs • Training provision • Consistency of public information delivered
Question 8	Do you have any other comments in relation to the future enhancement of TFS/SES public information response?	

Respondents were asked where the majority of their time has been spent in the public information response phase of major incidents (Question 2). Respondents were given 8 options spread across the public information response area. The highest percentage of respondents were Regional Public Information Officers (25.81%) and Incident Controllers (16.13%). These two roles are the most active in the public information response area, so it is useful to have good response rates from these roles, in terms of indicatively informing where public information response is currently at and the potential enhancement into the future.

Figure 2 – Question 2 Survey Responses



With public information roles sometimes being intermittent, due to quiet and busy fire seasons. Question 3 asked participants to indicate their number of years of experience. Across the 31 survey participant, 2-years was the average amount of exposure. In some respects this indicates that the breadth of experience and exposure to public information response is limited. Potentially providing a case for the enhancement of public information capability at TFS and SES into the future.

Respondents were asked to advise their level of familiarity with TFS and SES public information response policies/guidelines/ doctrine (Question 4).

Across all TFS public information doctrine, there is a very high level of familiarity (82.93% or 26/31 respondents) of the doctrine. However, the level of familiarity varied across doctrine, important themes identified included:

- Public Information Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS) had a response of 30% (9) being slightly familiar and 30% (9) being moderately familiar. This is a little concerning with this being the primary piece of doctrine for public information. It is important that all operating in the public information response field are moderately familiar with this piece of doctrine as it is the TFS overarching piece of doctrine for public information response.

- Operational Priorities (in-out-of-control bushfires) Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS) had a response of 30% (9) being very familiar and 30% (9) being extremely familiar.

The operational priorities in-out-of-control bushfires consist of six priorities:

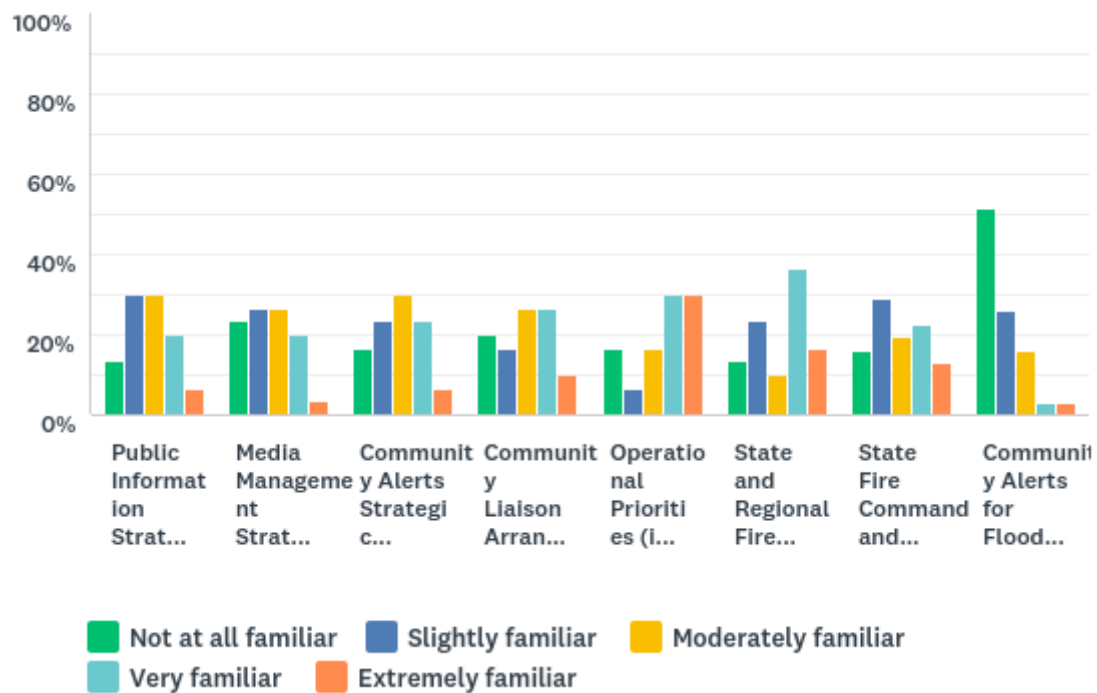
1. Issue warnings
2. Protect vulnerable people
3. Protect valuable community assets
4. Stop building to building ignition
5. Protect other community assets
6. Fight the fire once conditions moderate.

The high level of familiarity with the operational priorities indicates good leadership and communication that has been applied around the importance of the operational priorities.

- State and Regional Fire Operations Centres- Command and Control Arrangements Strategic Doctrine (TFS) had a response of 36.67% (11) of respondents being very familiar.
- Community Alerts for Floods Policy (SES) had a response of 51.61% (16) being not at all familiar and 25.81% (8) being slightly familiar. In line with the number of survey respondents from SES (6 or 19.35%) it is possible that all the SES respondents were slightly familiar to extremely familiar with this policy. It is important to note that SES in 2018 is going through a developmental phase in flood alerts and warnings. In 2019 SES intends to launch a new flood alerts and warnings system.

In terms of respondents not being familiar with TFS doctrine this was low (less than 20% or 6/31 respondents). In terms of the SES policy it was higher (51% or 16/31 respondents). In terms of the higher non-familiarity rate with the SES policy as mentioned this can potentially be explained by 80% (25) of the respondents of the survey being from TFS and 20% (6) being from SES.

Figure 3 – Question 4 Survey Responses

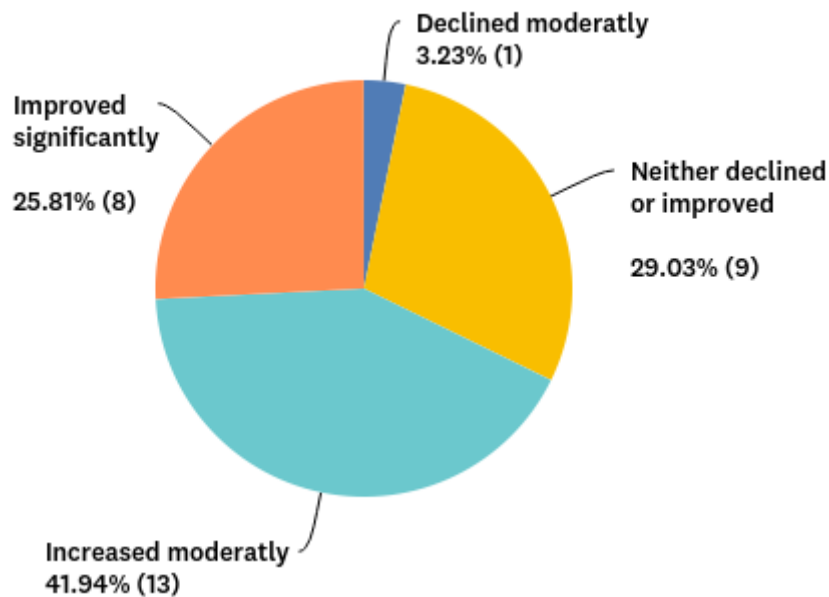


As part of Question 4, respondents were asked to comment if there were other policies/guidelines/ doctrine that they utilise in public information response. Four comments were received:

- Tasmania Police Media Guidelines, with the respondent commenting that they were extremely familiar with these guidelines.
- Emergency Alert guidelines for use in Tasmania.
- Manage Information Function at an Incident (PUAOPE021A) course documents.

Respondents were asked how far TFS and SES in their opinion has improved or declined since public information was incorporated as its own section of the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS) in 2011 (Question 5). They could select from the options of declined significantly, neither declined or improved, increased moderately or improved significantly. Responses were spread from declined moderately to improved significantly with 13 of the 31 (41.94%) respondents stating increased moderately and 9 of the 31 (29.03%) respondents stating neither decreased nor increased.

Figure 4 – Question 5 Survey Responses



Respondents were given the option to explain their answer to Question 5, 29 out of the 31 (93.55%) provided an explanation. The explanations are themed into three areas: training, future enhancement, and public information improvement since 2009. These are explored below:

Training

Out of the 31 responses to Question 5, 8 of the responses related to training. Training is identified as a gap for staff working in the public information response field at TFS and SES. The gap identified by respondents refers to a lack of training and the potential benefits of having structured yearly training to support staff. A sample of responses included:

“TFS appears to have dropped the ball of late. The structure is clear but the ability to resource, train and enhance knowledge and skills has been ignored. When things turn to custard, people fall back to their core learning, so Public Information tends to be paid lip service, especially in the early resourcing when first stood up. Good intentions, but actions don’t match up” (Respondent 18).

“No ongoing training available. Does not appear to be a priority” (Respondent 25).

“Training used to be conducted each year before the fire season, this doesn’t happen anymore and it needs to happen” (Respondent 27).

This sample of responses within the training theme indicate that there has not been a priority and focus on the training of TFS and SES personnel in the public information response field for several years. The sample of respondents indicated the importance of regular training, in that it provides a basis, currency and provides staff with a level of confidence when they maybe under pressure.

Future enhancement

Out of the 31 responses to Question 5, 9 of the responses provided constructive criticism and ideas for future enhancement. A common trend across survey respondents was that there needs to be a greater focus on coordination, training and the systems supporting public information during response at TFS and SES. A sample of responses included:

“TFS appears to not take seriously the requirement for the public information unit to be stood up and the importance of ongoing training and refreshing” (Respondent 3).

“Learnings from the Tasman fires on one hand improved communications in the IMT however there seems to be apprehension about giving warnings to residents. There needs to more work with staff who take on the IC role for them to understand the importance of the public information unit and how integral it is to be in the main control room...” (Respondent 16).

“The appraisal come from a fire perspective: The issuance of accurate and timely public warning communications is possibly the most important function of emergency management- a fuction that has been scrutinised in review and inquiry. Therefore, the formation of public information as an independent functional area within AIIMS provides for dedicated focus and prominence of this important function. This is an improvement. However, improvement to the function of public information is limited by the rudimentary and somewhat simplistic system by which time to impact and area of impact are determined. In addition, the information broadcast through public information is often of dubious quality and is poorly articulated” (Respondent 16).

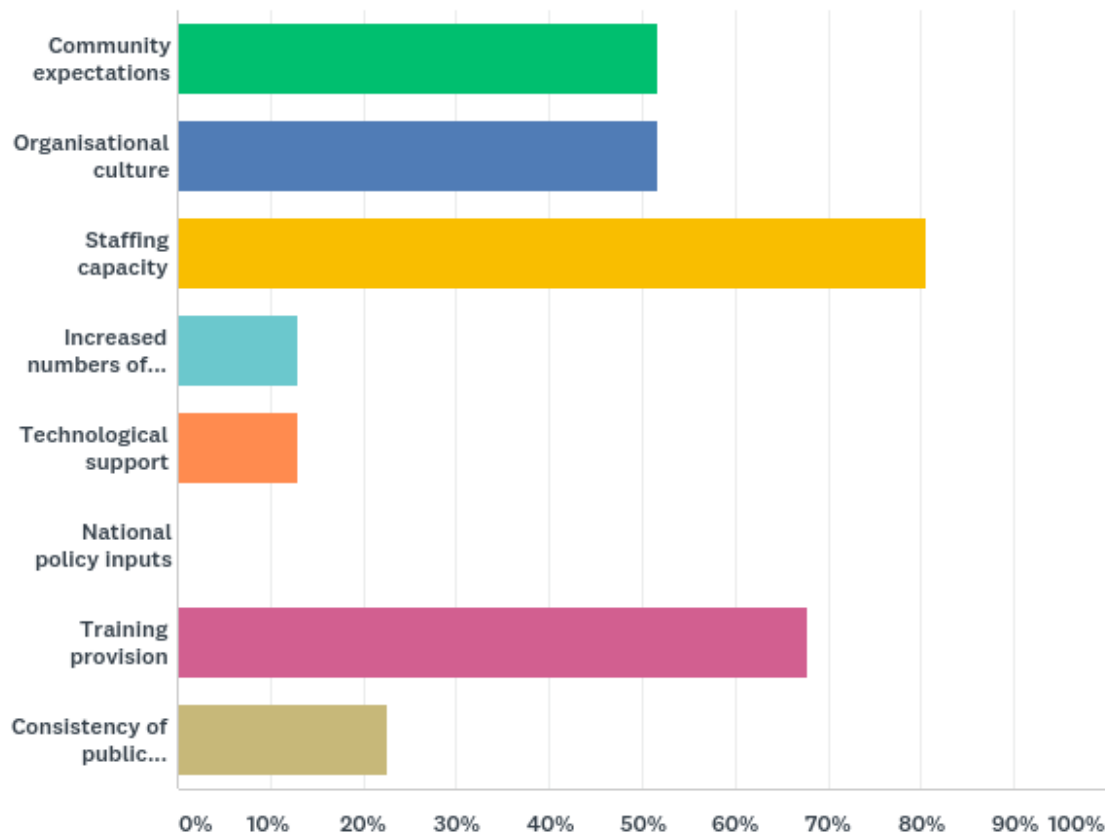
Public information improvements since 2009

The public information response area has come a long way in the last decade since the devastating Victorian Black Saturday Bushfire in 2009 (Anderson-Berry, Achillies et al., 2018, Emergency Management Victoria, 2014). Dufty (2014) identifies a shifting paradigm in emergency management from disaster response to early warnings, disaster resilience and a shared responsibility approach to emergency management.

Out of the 31 survey responses to Question 5, 9 of the responses related to the theme of public information improvements since 2009. In Question 7, respondents were asked 'Based on your experience please select what you see are the three current greatest challenges in public information response for TFS/SES?' There were eight options selected from themes identified in the literature that they could choose from to answer.

- 80.65% (25) respondents answered that staffing capacity was the largest issue, training provision for staff involved in public information response
- 67.74% (21), community expectations and organisational culture
- 51.61% (16), consistency of public information delivered
- 22.58% (7), increased numbers of incidents and technological support
- 12.90% (4) and national policy inputs (0).

Figure 5 – Question 7 Survey Responses



Specific to the literature, there are a series of challenges and barriers to the enhancement of public information response (Cao and Bryan et al., 2017). Some of the challenges identified included:

- Technology being vulnerable – (Burns, Robinson & Smith, 2010, Cao, Boruff & McNeill, 2017, Emergency Management Victoria, 2014).
- Shifting towards ‘joint public information systems’ – (Anderson-Berry et al., 2018, Basher, 2006, 2018, Hall, 2007).
- Relationships between stakeholders and the community – (Steelman & Mccaffrey, 2013).
- Gaps in understanding behavioural change – (Burns, Robinson & Smith et al., 2010, Leadbeater, 2010, Shevellar and Riggs et al., 2015, Steelman and Mccaffrey, 2013).
- Vulnerable populations, E.g. the elderly and tourists – (Mayhorn, 2005).
- Organisational culture (Pearson & Clair, 1998, Bunker & Smith, 2009).

Culturally, Hall (2007) discusses that we cannot achieve effective public information until the focus is placed on the leadership role of emergency management in providing effective early warning capability. A suggested solution to this is through increased integration with science and technology and commitment and involvement of all at risk to disasters, a 'shared responsibility' approach. Hall (2007) discusses the value of providing impact based warnings and the importance of and rights of the community being kept informed. Of note, is the identification of the shift in the emergency management paradigm from emergency response to prevention and preparedness being more integrated with response (Hall, 2007, p. 36).

The final question asked respondents 'Do you have any other comments in relation to the future enhancement of TFS/SES public information in response?' (Question 8). 11 comments were received and have been themed across five areas:

- training
- community engagement
- linkages between TFS and SES
- other ideas for enhancement
- commentary

Training

Similar to the responses to Question 6, where respondents were asked to explain their answer to Question 5, training came out as a key theme from respondents answering Question 8. Question 5 asked respondents to 'select from the drop down in your opinion how far TFS and SES has improved or declined since public information was incorporated as its own section of the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS) in 2011'. Options available for selection were; declined significantly, declined moderately, neither declined or improved, increased moderately and improved significantly.

Aligning with the literature, respondents emphasised their opinions on the need for prioritisation of accredited training in the public information response area. Bullock, Haddow et al. (2004) suggest that putting public information personnel and infrastructure in place is needed to execute robust, flexible and effective public information is critical. A sample of responses included:

“...that a nationally recognised training approach be developed and employed in the area to address consistency issues” (Respondent 5).

“Training is very haphazard, Public Information Unit Leaders all run it differently with different expectations, wording, and there is no consistency...” (Respondent 6).

“TFS and other partner agencies need to prioritise the training of suitable staff in the public information function” (Respondent 9).

“Training to bring PI and Community Liaison Officers up to speed and appropriately qualified is a must. Even if it means external training” (Respondent 12).

Community engagement

A theme of community engagement was identified in the responses to Question 8. Although not a strong theme, it is still worth reflecting on this area. A sample of a response included:

“More community engagement (with staff and volunteers) is required to provide education in the preparedness phase about incident management to residents so that their expectations are managed and they have a better understanding of what the alerts/warnings mean” (Respondent 7). This is supported by the literature in terms of the importance of reaching diverse and at risk groups (Emergency Management Victoria, 2014).

Linkages between TFS and SES (an all hazards approach)

The importance of an all hazards approach to public information response is discussed in the literature (Anderson-Berry, Achillies et al., 2018, Tarrant, 2006). Although not a major theme identified in the survey responses, the area of linkages between TFS and SES was identified as a small theme with the following responses.

In 2019, SES will be launching its flood alert system. One respondent stated that “it’s imperative that the new flood alert system is similar to the TFS alert system, as it’s tried and tested and the community is already familiar with the public information being disseminated in that way” (Respondent 3).

“a TFS/SES public information unit would greatly enhance timely and consistency in the delivery of public information across those areas in which TFS/SES are responsible management authorities” (Respondent 14).

Indicatively, from these two responses there is a message that the respondents believe there is benefit in alignment and collaboration between TFS and SES in the public information in response area.

Other ideas for enhancement

Three of the responses to Question 8 have been themed into the area of other ideas for enhancement.

One respondent commented that public information “...needs to be consistent and considered with the context of the broader emergency management arrangements that sit behind the front line incident response” (Respondent 2). This is consistent with the literature in terms of the future direction of alerts and warnings, which proposes that warnings need to continue to become more people focused, impact based and specific in terms of recommended actions for the public for a particular hazard.

The ‘2013 Tasmanian Bushfires Inquiry’ reflects the importance of prioritising public information and states that public information is important for many reasons. An example described is that “it provides context for alerts and warnings that are issued, options available and action that should be taken” (Parliament of Tasmania, 2013, p.166). McLennan, Ryan, Bearmans and Toh (2018) support the importance of warnings providing sufficient information. Arguing that the detail and currency of public information influence the public’s compliance with alerts and warnings (McLennan & Bearmans et al., 2018). Recommendation 68 from the inquiry recommended that “warning communities and people generally should not only be a priority when fires are burning out of control” (Parliament of Tasmania, 2013, p.165). This places the argument that detailed, accurate

and current public information is important for all incidents.

Connected with the response from Respondent 2, in terms of a more holistic and end-user focused approaches to public information, a further response was received in line with this theme. A second respondent provided multiple comments including; “make information succinct, relevant and interpretable. Provide information in a timely way with improved spatial and temporal resolution. Leverage technology. Avoid rhetoric and contradictory messaging. Empower and engage with unofficial information and messaging networks – this is where the future of community messaging lies” (Respondent 7). The literature relates to this in terms of alerts and warnings being in place to protect and guide people in terms of public safety (AFAC, 2016).

One respondent recommended a “seasonal briefing for incident controllers” (Respondent 13), with another respondent providing input on the structure of public information within TFS and SES, suggesting that, “a TFS/SES public information unit would greatly enhance timely and consistency in the delivery of public information across those areas in which TFS/SES are responsible management authorities” (Respondent 14). Although, outside the scope of this report, it is recognised that this is an area for potential further investigation.

Commentary

One of the responses has been themed as commentary, in that it is opinion provided from a survey respondent.

A respondent commented that public information during response “...is one area organisations will be crucified when things go wrong and they will. So resource it to match the risk, people are looking for information almost instantly now with electronically media and we find information is flowing out there often ahead of us but not necessarily accurate or useful, so we need to be ready, particularly with community meetings etc. From day one, people want to know what’s going on, or they will start to make it up!” (Respondent 10).

Recommendations and conclusion

This section details recommendations for consideration by the TFS and SES Public Information Coordination Group (PICG). Some of the recommendations can also be considered nationally, however due to the nature and scope of the study it is recognised that the findings are indicative only. Recommendations are across two themes:

- Training and building capacity of our people
- Systems

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Training and building capacity of our people

- As a matter of priority TFS and SES provide a public information workshop for public information staff prior to the end of 2018 and make this an ongoing workshop prior to each fire season.
- Plan and conduct accredited public information training in 2019.
- Recruit, raise and sustain additional suitable staff through an expression of interest process to build the capacity of public information over the next two years.
- Provide development opportunities, including a public information workshop by the end of 2018, exercises and mentoring opportunities.
- Increase the knowledge and familiarity of TFS and SES doctrine in the area of public information response.

Recommendation 2 – Systems

- Continue to implement, embed and formalise the state-wide TFS and SES Public Information Coordination Group that was approved in July 2018 to support the ongoing review and enhancement of public information systems.
- Establish guidelines and minimal standards around reference to policies.
- Establish a state on-call public information officer role for the bushfire danger period.

Conclusion

Almost ten years on from the devastating Victorian Black Saturday Bushfires, the report has undertaken a review of public information during the response phase as part of TFS and SES practice, as well as encapsulating and considering the literature. Contributing to the field through practice and theory building with a methodology that utilises a literature review and online survey.

The purpose of the research has been for its content and recommendations to be considered in terms of the future enhancement of public information during the response phase of emergency management as part of TFS and SES practice.

The research is limited in scope and for more conclusive results, further research would need to be undertaken. This could include more in depth analysis through interviews and focus groups with TFS and SES staff, and interstate fire and SES agency staff that specialise in the public information response field. Areas for further investigation identified included the potential review and examination of the structure of public information within the TFS and SES.

Through a literature review and an online survey, the report has discussed a series of challenges and potential areas for future enhancement. Including the importance of leadership and organisational culture in the development of public information during the response phase.

Conclusions centre on the themes of training and building the capacity of our people and systems. These themes emerged as predictors for the enhancement of public information response within the TFS and SES, as well as for other Australian fire and emergency services agencies into the future. Survey respondents emphasised their opinions on the need for prioritisation of accredited training in the public information response area. With Bullock, Haddow et al. (2004) suggesting that putting public information personnel and infrastructure in place is needed to execute robust, flexible and effective public information is critical.

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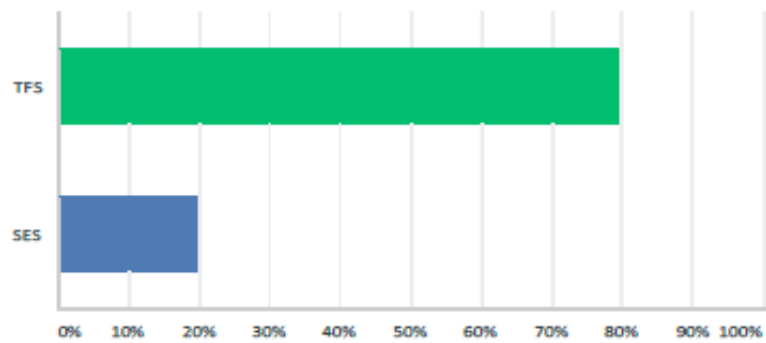
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Appendix 1 – Survey questions and data trends

Survey tool utilised: Survey Monkey

Q1 Who are you employed with?

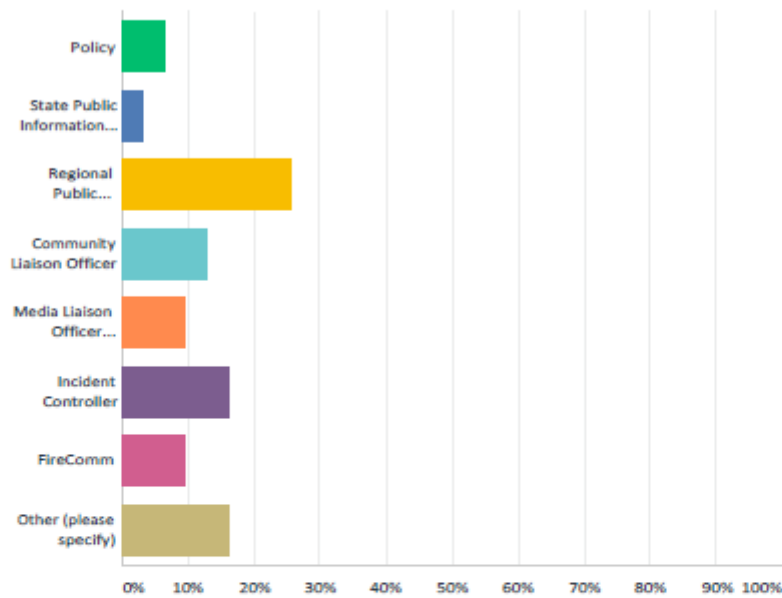
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
TFS	80.65%	25
SES	19.35%	6
TOTAL		31

Q2 Where has the majority of your time been spent in the public information response phase of major incidents?

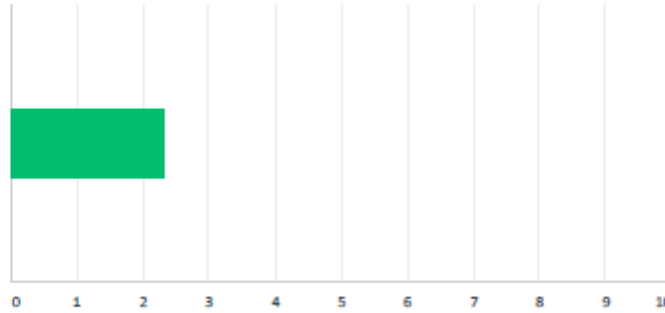
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Policy	6.45%	2
State Public Information Officer	3.23%	1
Regional Public Information Officer	25.81%	8
Community Liaison Officer	12.90%	4
Media Liaison Officer (including DPFEM Media & Communications)	9.68%	3
Incident Controller	16.13%	5
FireComm	9.68%	3
Other (please specify)	16.13%	5
TOTAL		31

Q3 Recognising that this role can be intermittent, please use the scale below to indicate the period of years during which your experience has occurred, i.e. you are indicating the starting point from which you became involved in public information during the response phase in major incidents.

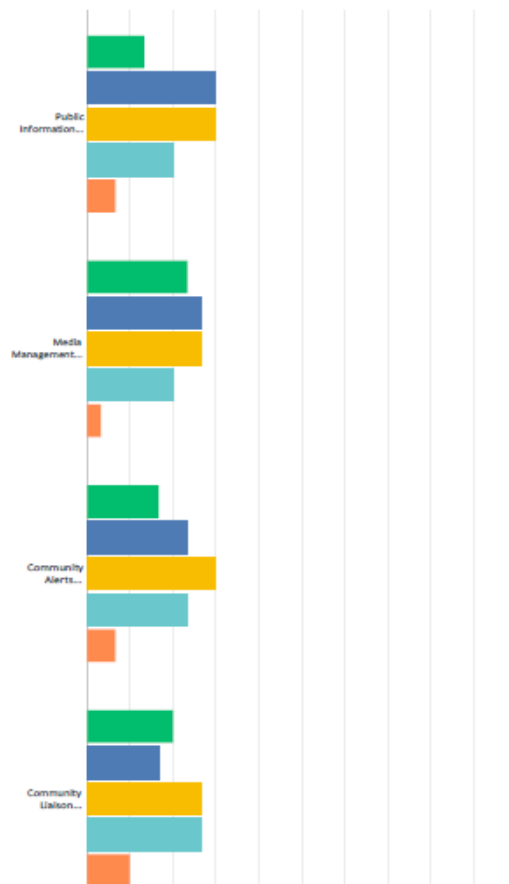
Answered: 31 Skipped: 0

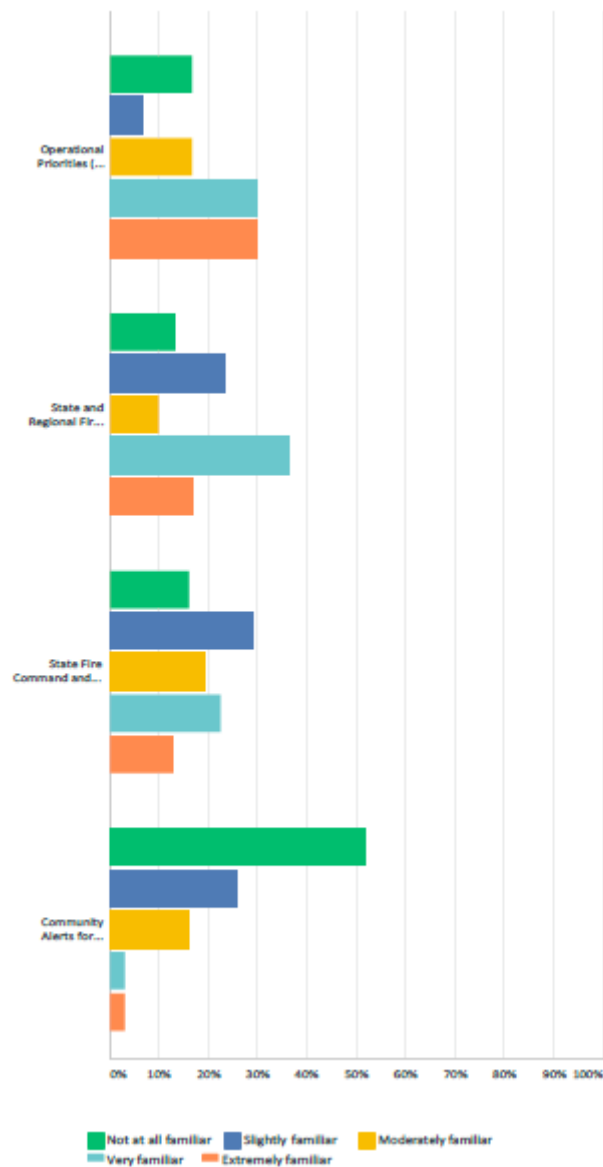


ANSWER CHOICES	AVERAGE NUMBER	TOTAL NUMBER	RESPONSES
	2	72	31
Total Respondents: 31			

Q4 In public information response what is your level of familiarity with the policies/guidelines/doctrine listed?

Answered: 31 Skipped: 0

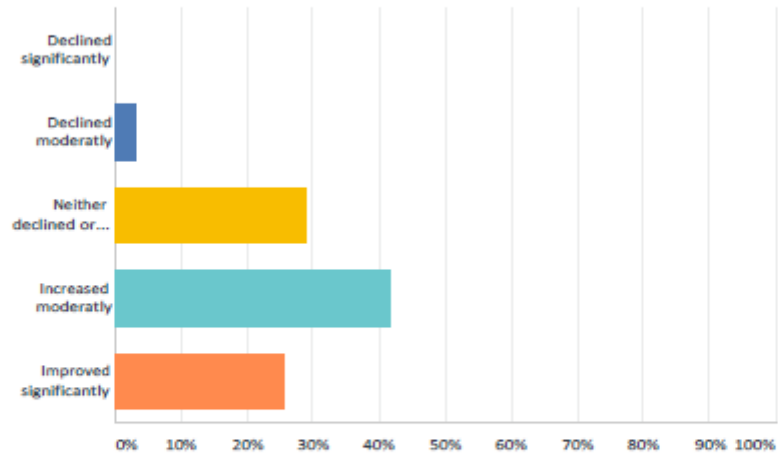




	NOT AT ALL FAMILIAR	SLIGHTLY FAMILIAR	MODERATELY FAMILIAR	VERY FAMILIAR	EXTREMELY FAMILIAR	TOTAL
Public Information Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS)	13.33% 4	30.00% 9	30.00% 9	20.00% 6	6.67% 2	30
Media Management Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS)	23.33% 7	26.67% 8	26.67% 8	20.00% 6	3.33% 1	30
Community Alerts Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS)	16.67% 5	23.33% 7	30.00% 9	23.33% 7	6.67% 2	30
Community Liaison Arrangements during Incidents Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS)	20.00% 6	16.67% 5	26.67% 8	26.67% 8	10.00% 3	30
Operational Priorities (in out-of-control bushfires) Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS)	16.67% 5	6.67% 2	16.67% 5	30.00% 9	30.00% 9	30
State and Regional Fire Operations Centres - Command and Control Arrangements Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS)	13.33% 4	23.33% 7	10.00% 3	36.67% 11	16.67% 5	30
State Fire Command and Control Arrangements Strategic Command Doctrine (TFS)	16.13% 5	29.03% 9	19.35% 6	22.58% 7	12.90% 4	31
Community Alerts for Floods Policy (SES)	51.61% 16	25.81% 8	16.13% 5	3.23% 1	3.23% 1	31

Q5 Select from the drop down in your opinion how far TFS/SES has improved or declined since public information was incorporated as its own section of the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS) in 2011?

Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Declined significantly	0.00%	0
Declined moderately	3.23%	1
Neither declined or improved	29.03%	9
Increased moderately	41.94%	13
Improved significantly	25.81%	8
TOTAL		31

Q6 Please explain your answer to question 5, with examples if possible.

Answered: 31 Skipped: 0

Public information response for major incidents (TFS/SES) Where are we at?

Please explain your answer to question 5, with examples if possible.

Answered 31
skipped 0

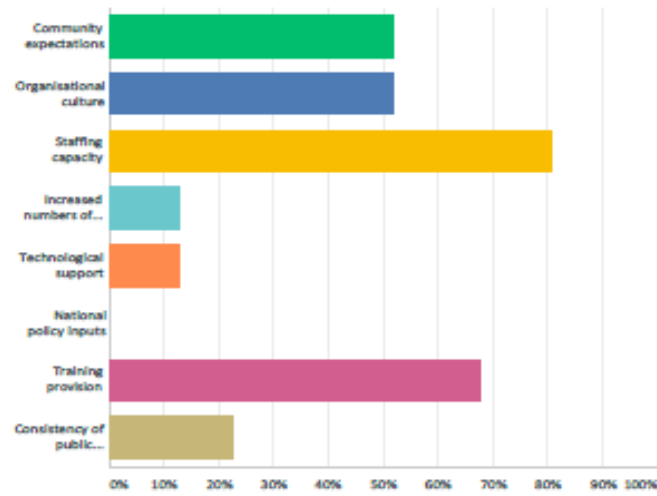
Respondents	Response Date	Responses
1	Jul 13 2018 09:11 AM	No experience prior to 2011
2	Jul 07 2018 10:06 AM	
3	Jul 06 2018 09:34 AM	TFS appears to not take seriously the requirement for Public Information unit to be stood up and the importance of ongoing training and refreshing.
4	Jul 05 2018 01:18 PM	Easier to communicate with public via the TFS website
5	Jul 04 2018 02:02 PM	During the last couple of events within SES we have introduced this function into our ROC's which has improved the way we responded. Further improvements would be gained with extra training with the function for SES staff and volunteers
6	Jul 03 2018 04:18 PM	I have only been with SES for 18 months and do not have an understanding of what it was like pre 2011
7	Jul 03 2018 02:34 PM	I have no involvement with the TFS public information. My only involvement has been in the 2016 Floods and recent STEWE event. I am also aware that new Flood Alert System is being developed based on the TFS alerts system.
8	Jul 03 2018 01:23 PM	lack of training to all staff
9	Jul 03 2018 01:21 PM	Have standard alerts issued, use liaison roles far more effectively. Recognize separation from media and information to proper community liaison and engagement
10	Jun 27 2018 11:52 AM	Inclusion of public information as a function, and as an operational priority has been an important advance. Use of the community liaison function in recent years has been particularly valuable for engaging with the community during incidents.
11	Jun 26 2018 10:23 AM	Lot more focus on public information training and getting information out to the public
12	Jun 25 2018 04:21 PM	I joined the TFS in 2011 and am unable to comment on PIS prior to this date.
13	Jun 22 2018 02:49 PM	Has allowed more timely information to be delivered to the public and stakeholders
14	Jun 21 2018 09:47 AM	Whilst I don't have pre-2011 experience I have observed a progressive streamlined and coordinated approach to Public Information and a progressive understanding of the benefits more broadly with strategic engagement with the community/ies impacted by fire.

15	Jun 20 2018 12:06 PM	IMT units are working more closely together to ensure public get timely warnings. Its not longer relied on FireComm to do all the work any more learnings from Tasman fires on one hand Improved communications in the IMT however there seems to be apprehension about giving warnings to residents. there needs to be more work with staff who take on the IC role for them to understand the importance of the PIU/PIG and how Integral it is to be in the main control room. Having the team out the back in a small room is not ideal.
16	Jun 20 2018 09:20 AM	This appraisal comes from a fire perspective: The issuance of accurate and timely public warnings and communications is possibly the most important function of emergency management - a function that has been scrutinized often in review and inquiry. Therefore, the formation of public information as an independent functional area within AAIMS provides for dedicated focus and prominence of this important function. This is an improvement. However, improvement to the function of public information is limited by the rudimentary and somewhat simplistic system by which time to impact and area of impact are determined. In addition, the information broadcast through public information is often of dubious quality and is poorly articulated.
17	Jun 19 2018 10:01 PM	The community is better informed on a more regular and specific basis. The information is much more accurate.
18	Jun 19 2018 04:42 PM	TFS appears to have dropped the ball of late. The structure is clear but the ability to resource, train and enhance knowledge and skills has been ignored. When things turn to custard, people fall back to their core learning, so Public Information tends to paid lip service, especially in early resourcing when first stood up. "Good intentions, but actions don't match up".
19	Jun 19 2018 02:58 PM	Public information improvement is demonstrated every fire season with information, messaging and warnings becoming the norm rather than the exception. The intent for dedicated member/group to focus on public information, warnings, key messages, community meetings to support the Ops and IC helps the overall direction of incident management.
20	Jun 19 2018 11:01 AM	The dedicated Unit can consider and action critical elements, with advice to, guidance and authorisation from the IC.
21	Jun 19 2018 09:25 AM	Operational management still do not fully understand the importance of media liaison and focus more effort on operations
22	Jun 18 2018 08:33 AM	Two and a half years after the 2016 bushfires AND the after action review identifying the shortfalls in the public information space the training STILL hasn't been provided for PI. How can it improve if the skills shortage still has not been addressed?
23	Jun 18 2018 05:54 PM	
24	Jun 18 2018 03:17 PM	no comment No ongoing training available.
25	Jun 18 2018 03:05 PM	Does not appear to be a priority
26	Jun 18 2018 02:25 PM	Increasing awareness and duty around the role and function of the public information unit.
27	Jun 18 2018 01:29 PM	Training used to be conducted each year before the fire season this doesn't happen any more and it needs to happen.
28	Jun 18 2018 01:06 PM	Moderately within TFS because whilst the messaging systems work well the TFS have yet to fully invest in the necessary human resources
29	Jun 18 2018 12:20 PM	It was earlier than 2011. I was working in the PIU in 2010
30	Jun 18 2018 12:20 PM	It has increased due to the development of TasAlert and a closer working relationship with the Media and Communications area
31	Jun 18 2018 11:59 AM	Public information is now a priority rather than a second thought

	Constructive criticism
	Training
	Public Information Improvements since 2009
	N/A

Q7 Based on your experience please tick what you see are the THREE current greatest challenges in public information response for TFS/SES.

Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Community expectations	51.61%	16
Organisational culture	51.61%	16
Staffing capacity	80.65%	25
Increased numbers of incidents	12.90%	4
Technological support	12.90%	4
National policy inputs	0.00%	0
Training provision	67.74%	21
Consistency of public information delivered	22.58%	7
Total Respondents: 31		

Q8 Do you have any other comments in relation to the future enhancement of TFS/SES public information response?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 17

Public information response for major incidents (TFS/SES) Where are we at? Do you have any other comments in relation to the future enhancement of TFS/SES public information response?

Answered 14
Skipped 17

Respondents	Response Date	Res
1	Jul 05 2018 01:18 PM	NA
2	Jul 03 2018 04:18 PM	It needs to be consistent and considered with the context of the broader EM arrangements that sit behind the front line incident response.
3	Jul 03 2018 02:34 PM	It's imperative that the new Flood Alerts System is similar to the TFS alerts system as it's a tried and tested and the community is already familiar with the public information being disseminated in that way.
4	Jun 26 2018 10:23 AM	No
5	Jun 21 2018 09:47 AM	Only that a nationally recognised training approach be developed and employed in the area to address consistency issues.
6	Jun 20 2018 12:06 PM	Training is very haphazard, PI unit leaders all run it differently with different expectations, wording, there is no consistency. Community engagement self deploy without PI knowledge or IC knowledge
7	Jun 20 2018 09:20 AM	More community engagement (with staff and volunteers) is required to provide education in preparedness phase about incident messaging to residents so that their expectations are managed and they have a better understanding of what the alerts/warnings mean. Make the information succinct, relevant and interpret-able. Provide information in a timely way, with improved spatial and temporal resolution. Leverage technology. Avoid rhetoric and contradictory messaging. Empower and engage with unofficial information and messaging networks - this is where the future of community messaging lies.
8	Jun 19 2018 10:01 PM	TFS and other partner agencies need to prioritise the training of suitable staff in the public information function This is the one area organization's will be crucified when things go wrong and they will, so resource it to match the risk, people are looking for information almost instantly now with electronic media and we find information is flowing out there often ahead of us but not necessarily accurate or useful, so we need to be ready, particularly with community meetings etc, from day one, people want to know what's going on, or they will start to make it up!!
9	Jun 19 2018 04:42 PM	
10	Jun 19 2018 02:58 PM	No
11	Jun 19 2018 11:01 AM	
12	Jun 18 2018 05:54 PM	Training to bring PI and Community Liaison officers up to speed and appropriate my qualified is a must. Even if it means external training.
13	Jun 18 2018 02:25 PM	Seasonal briefing for incident controllers A TFS/SES public information unit would greatly enhance timely and consistency in the delivery of public information across those areas in which TFS/SES are responsible management authorities.
14	Jun 18 2018 12:20 PM	

Themes

- Linking between TFS & SES
- Training a major issue identified
- Community engagement focus
- Other ideas for enhancement
- Commentary
- N/A