

National community safety announcements for flood risk communication



PROCEDURAL

GUIDELINE

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Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council Limited (ABN 52 060 049 327)

Level 1, 340 Albert Street
East Melbourne Victoria 3002

Telephone: 03 9419 2388
Facsimile: 03 9419 2389

afac@afac.com.au
afac.com.au

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About AFAC and AFAC Doctrine

AFAC

The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) is the Australian and New Zealand National Council for fire, emergency services and land management. It is a collaborative network of fire, emergency services and land management agencies that supports the sector to make communities safer and more resilient.

AFAC Doctrine

AFAC develops doctrine to support the practice of emergency management. The information in doctrine publications is evidence-based and drawn from academic research and the collective expert knowledge of member agencies. Doctrine is regularly reviewed and represents the official AFAC view on a range of topics.

Doctrine does not mandate action; rather, it sets aspirational measures. Publishing nationally agreed views, shared approaches and common terminology enhances cooperation and collaboration within and between agencies and jurisdictions.

Types of AFAC Doctrine

AFAC Doctrine is classified as follows:

Capstone doctrine – includes publications, such as 'strategic intents', that are high-level accounts of the concepts of emergency management operations and service delivery. They describe the principles of what is practical, realistic and possible in terms of protecting life, property and the environment.

Fundamental doctrine – includes 'positions', which AFAC Members are expected to support, as well as 'approaches' and some 'frameworks'. Fundamental doctrine may become agency or jurisdictional policy on a matter if adopted by individual services or jurisdictions.

Procedural doctrine – includes 'guidelines', some 'frameworks', and 'specifications'. AFAC Members are expected to be aware of procedural doctrine. A guideline is an advisable course of action, a framework provides a linking of elements to create a supporting structure to a system, and specifications are a detailed description of a precise requirement to do something or build something.

Technical doctrine – includes 'technical notes', 'training material' and the *Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System* (AIIMS). Technical doctrine provides guidance of a technical nature: the how to do something, or the technical meaning relative to a situation.

About this document

This is a guideline – procedural. The guideline is supported by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC (BNHCRC) reports *Development of a National Set of Community Service Announcements for Flood Risk* (2021) and *Flood Risk Communication – Final Project Report* (2021).

Source of authority

The AFAC National Council endorsed the *National community safety announcements for flood risk communication* on 28 October 2021.

Purpose

This guideline presents nationally agreed and evidence based key messages. The messages are designed to provide communities with information and advice about protective actions they can take when impacted by flood water. These messages can be adapted for community service announcements for Australian broadcasters to play during emergencies and disasters.

Scope

The *National community safety announcements for flood risk communication* focusses on public information and should not be considered a warning. While the announcements are based on best practice principles for message construction, they do not account for the specific requirements when communicating to target groups, such as culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Statement of Engagement

Key messages have been developed by a working group nominated by the AFAC SES Community Safety Group and the AFAC Community Engagement Technical Group. The working group included representation from each SES agency and from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Bureau of Meteorology. This project was commenced following the conclusion of the BNHCRC Flood Risk Communication research project and has incorporated key findings from this research.

Audience

This guidance is intended for AFAC Members and media outlets. The key messages were designed for radio broadcast and may be utilised by broadcast stations.

Definitions, acronyms and key terms

Community service announcement (CSA) – A short message that support activities, events or charitable causes, and is differentiated from other forms of messages and advertisements as it is broadcast for public good and without commercial charges. CSAs are not warnings.

Public information – information provided to the public immediately before, during and after an emergency to reduce the potential impact of an emergency or hazard (AIDR 2021).

Warning – point-in-time information about a hazard that is impacting or is expected to impact communities. Warnings describe the impact and expected consequences for communities and include advice on what people should do (AIDR 2021).

Acknowledgements

AFAC acknowledges the contribution made to this work by AFAC Members through the AFAC SES Community Safety Group and the AFAC Community Engagement Technical Group.

The project was led by Dr Mel Taylor, Honorary Associate Professor Macquarie University.

AFAC would like to also thank the ABC's Emergency Broadcast Leads, Pat Hession and Theresa Rockley-Hogan, for their active role in assisting the working group develop the messages and pre-record messages for public testing.

Introduction

Community service announcements are utilised during rolling emergency radio broadcasts before, during and after emergency events, such as floods, severe storms, cyclones and bushfires. CSAs are used between broadcasting segments at local and state levels in addition to emergency service warnings and announcements and on-the-ground reporting. CSAs provide public information and are not warning messages and this doctrine should not be used in place of official warning messages. This doctrine provides a list of nationally consistent and agreed to community service announcements for floods and severe storm events. The messages were co-developed with the ABC and AFAC Members and have undergone qualitative review by community members. This doctrine provides a set of 26 key messages that can be used in the event of a flood and severe storm event in consultation with the local jurisdiction and emergency service agency to ensure consistency in messaging.

Development

In September 2020, a working group comprising of representatives from each jurisdiction's State Emergency Services (SES) agency, ABC, the Bureau of Meteorology, AFAC and Macquarie University convened to co-develop a set of flood safety messages.

The BNHCRC Flood Risk Communication research project (2017-2021), focusing on driving into floodwater and playing or recreating in floodwater, provided the foundational knowledge for the messages. Other research in relation to flood fatalities and flood events also informed the development of these messages, see bibliography for further details.

A survey was designed and distributed to working group members to rate the importance of 13 main content areas. Content areas include:

- Driving during floods
- Playing/recreating in floodwater
- Flash flooding
- Preparing to relocate/evacuate
- What to do if unable to leave/evacuate
- SES/ES warnings/orders/activities
- What to do with animals
- Information about flood/weather warnings
- Preparing for flood in home
- General floodwater risks
- Preparing business for flood
- Cleaning up after floods/staying safe

Members were asked to consider the importance of the main content areas to public safety and usefulness to the community. The results of the survey identified the areas to be included in the final set of CSA messages and provided the foundation for the draft CSA messages developed by the working group. During their development, agencies were encouraged to provide any support and resources related to the priority areas identified.

Following this, a set of 26 provisional CSAs were developed. Focus groups were conducted with members of the public to test these provisional messages and following testing, the qualitative data received was reviewed and incorporated into the CSAs. In total, 39 participants took part in seven focus groups, with representatives from each state and territory.

Using this data, the working group refined the messages and agreed to a set of nationally consistent flood risk communication messages to be used in the event of a severe storm or flood by the ABC.

How to use this document

This guidance provides nationally agreed key messages designed for radio broadcast. The messages were developed following the BNHCRC Flood Risk Communication research project and the methodology to develop this is detailed in the BNHCRC *Development of Community Service Announcements for Flood Risk* report.

The CSAs included here are designed to be approximately 30- 60 seconds in duration and may be combined to play consecutively by the broadcaster. CSAs have been developed to be spoken in a friendly, but authoritative, voice to gain listener attention and provide consistent nationally agreed information. Importantly, these messages are not warnings or official directives, but should be regarded as public information. It is important that the local State Emergency Service agency is consulted on which messages will be broadcast to ensure that this messaging complements and reinforces emergency services' communications during the flood/storm emergency.

Appendices

FLOOD PREPARE TO LEAVE

If you know a flood is coming, leave your home early and go somewhere safer- like to a friend or relative's house.

Before you leave there are some things you can do to keep you and your household safe.

- Identify the safest route to your nearest safe location, and leave well before roads are impacted by floodwater.
- Move vehicles, outdoor equipment, garbage, chemicals and poisons to higher locations.
- Put indoor items that you want to protect in higher locations.
- Put plans for your pets and other animals into action to keep them safe.
- Don't forget to take your medications with you.
- And let friends, family and neighbours know what your plans are.

Get more advice on how to prepare for floods from your state or territory emergency service, and stay safe as you prepare your property and leave.

FLOOD PREPARE HOME

Floodwater can cause a lot of damage in your home.

Take simple steps ahead of time to reduce the impacts of flooding.

Sandbags can reduce the amount of water entering your home when used and laid correctly.

A great way to stop sewage flowing back into your home is to place sandbags inside plastic bags and then use them to block toilets and cover drains and sinks.

You can protect furniture and valuables by moving them higher, either to an upper level in your home, or by moving them up off the floor onto the kitchen bench, tables or whatever you have handy.

Know your trigger to leave, and leave while you can get out safely.

FLOOD PREPARE ANIMALS

You are responsible for your animals in an emergency.

In floods it can take several days, or even weeks, for floodwaters to clear and your animals are relying on you to keep them safe.

If you have pets and other animals it will take you longer to evacuate in a flood or other emergency. Leaving early is the safest option.

Plan to take your animals with you.

Consider what items you may need for them- such as leads, carriers, toileting supplies, medicines, and food.

Don't forget to talk to neighbours and friends about what you want them to do for your animals if you can't get home, and how you could help them if they can't come home.

Information to help you prepare your animals for floods is available from RSPCA, Department of Agriculture, and the 'Get Ready Animals' website

FLOOD/STORM AVOID DRIVING

It's dangerous to drive on flooded roads, causeways and rural tracks.

Driving into floodwater is the main cause of death in floods.

Think about alternatives if your 'usual' roads are prone to flooding.

The best way to avoid driving in floodwater is to be prepared – that means wait for conditions to improve before heading out.

If you have to evacuate, plan the route BEFORE you leave, so you know where to go and how to get there safely.

Prepare to stay safe. Plan ahead.

FLOOD THINKING OF STAYING

In a flood, it's much safer and easier to leave early.

"A few days at home waiting for the floodwater to go down" won't be much fun.

Think about what it would be like in a flood...

Will you be stuck in your home if roads are under water? How long will it be before you can leave? Will your car still be there?

How will you manage without electricity, internet, or your mobile phone if power and communications are interrupted? How will family and friends know you're OK?

Will the toilet still work? Will food in your fridge still be safe to eat? And how bad will the smell of the floodwater and debris get?

For advice on how to prepare for floods, check out your state or territory emergency service website. While you still have power.

FLOOD UNABLE TO LEAVE

Leaving early is the best plan when there is the possibility of flooding.

If you're caught in *rising* floodwater and unable to leave, this is a life-threatening situation.

Seek shelter in the safest and highest place you can find and call triple zero.

Rising floodwaters can lead to properties becoming isolated. Outages in your electricity and disruption to sewerage and other amenities may occur.

If you are unable to leave, but still have running water, fill containers with fresh water so you have supplies available.

Remember, food kept in your refrigerator will become unsafe to eat if the electricity supply is lost.

If you are isolated due to floodwater cutting off roads or other access, do not try to evacuate. It could be more dangerous than staying and waiting for help.

For emergency assistance, call the SES on 132 500. In a life-threatening situation call triple zero.

FLOOD PREP LARGE ANIMALS

You are responsible for your animals in an emergency.

Horses and large animals take longer to load and evacuate. Plan for your animals and practice your plan.

In an emergency the safest option for you and your animals is to leave early.

In a flood situation, traffic routes need to be clear for evacuating residents and emergency service vehicles. Horse floats and large vehicles can slow down traffic and you could easily get caught when roads close.

Plan to leave early. Really early.

FLOOD DURING ANIMAL OWNER

In floods, people will often risk their lives to save animals.

Your pets, horses and livestock are important to you, but during a flood you shouldn't risk your own safety trying to rescue them.

If horses or other large animals are trapped by floodwater, conditions are likely to be dangerous for people too. Animals can behave unpredictably when frightened- and you should assume that floodwater is contaminated and stay out of it.

If YOU get injured, you can't help your animals or the people around you.

The safest and easiest thing to do is to leave early, and take your animals with you.

For emergency assistance, call the SES on 132 500. In a life threatening situation call triple zero.

FLOOD/STORM DRIVING RURAL ROADS

Driving into floodwater is the main cause of death in floods and storms and these deaths are often locals driving on local roads.

Unsealed roads will become slippery. Mud and debris add to dangerous driving conditions. Water on the road can hide deep potholes and damage to roads – including collapsed road surfaces and washed out drains. Poor lighting can make it even harder to judge the risks on wet roads.

Let someone know where you're going and when to expect you, and above all else, remember...

...just because you know the road well, doesn't mean it will be safe to drive when it's flooded.

FLOOD/STORM DRIVING DECISIONS

It's dangerous to drive on flooded roads, causeways and rural tracks.

Driving into floodwater is the main cause of death in floods.

Researchers say many people who drive through floodwater claim to have done it after 'carefully considering the situation'.

Consider this. Water over the road can hide deep potholes or roads that are completely washed away. Even if you know the road well, or you're nearly home, it doesn't make the decision to drive through floodwater any safer.

Back it up and find a safe way to avoid floodwater.

FLOOD/STORM DRIVING CONDITIONS

During heavy rain, conditions can be unpredictable and 'flash' flooding can develop quickly.

If you're driving during wet weather, slow down so you can see and respond more safely to the changing situation around you.

If driving conditions become dangerous, pull off the road and stop somewhere safe – ideally on higher ground away from trees.

When it's safe to continue, be aware of driving hazards, such as mud, debris, damaged roads and fallen trees.

Know and understand the dangers. It's OK to turn around from floodwater.

FLOOD/STORM DRIVING SOCIAL PRESSURE

It's dangerous to drive on flooded roads, causeways and rural tracks.

Often, people who drive into floodwater are just following what others are doing, or feel pressured by those behind them to keep driving.

Even if you make it through, others who see and follow, might not.

Remember, the safest and smartest decision for you, your passengers, and those around you is to stop and turn around.

Lead by example and turn around.

FLOOD/STORM FLASH FLOOD

Heavy rainfall can lead to *flash flooding* and there may be no time to warn you.

Some places are especially dangerous, like a dry creek bed that can flood in minutes. Never camp or leave your vehicle in these places.

If your home or business is prone to flash flooding, evacuate early- to reduce the chances of being cut-off or trapped.

Stay away from drains, ditches or other locations where stormwater flows.

If you're trapped by rising floodwater, go to the safest place available to you, for example the second storey of a sturdy building.

For emergency assistance, call the SES on 132 500. In a life threatening situation call triple zero.

FLOOD/STORM WALKING & CYCLING

During heavy rain, conditions can be unpredictable and 'flash' flooding can develop quickly.

It's easy to find yourself in a dangerous situation if you're outside in storms and heavy rain.

Moving water will make it hard for you to keep your balance when walking or cycling, or harder for vehicles to see or avoid you if you're on the road.

Seek shelter away from water and places it could flow to – like drains and drainage channels, underpasses or low bridges. Move somewhere higher and wait for conditions to become calmer.

Stay safe in storms and floods.

For emergency assistance, call the SES on 132 500. In a life threatening situation call triple zero.

FLOOD PREPARE LIVESTOCK & EQUIPMENT

Livestock and equipment are at risk during flood.

If your property has not been affected by flooding yet – but could be – NOW is the time to activate your emergency plan.

Move livestock and equipment to higher ground while it is safe to do so, BEFORE flooding impacts your property.

Ensure livestock have adequate feed to get through the initial few days. Remember, floodwater can take days or even weeks to clear.

If a safe paddock or refuge is unavailable, fix internal gates in an open position or cut internal fencing, to give animals an opportunity to escape danger.

Never leave external gates open, as animals loose on roads are a great danger to themselves, other drivers, and emergency services.

If livestock are trapped by floodwater, conditions are likely to be dangerous for people too. Don't risk your safety trying to rescue them. Seek additional help and advice.

For emergency assistance, call the SES on 132 500. In a life threatening situation call triple zero.

FLOOD PREPARE FLOODING UPSTREAM

If heavy rain and flooding have been recorded upstream, now is the time to implement your flood plan. How much time have you got to prepare and keep you and your loved ones safe?

Floodwaters can sometimes take a while to arrive, and floods can peak days, or even weeks after the rain has stopped. Blue skies are no guarantee for safety and local waterways can remain deceptively fast-flowing and dangerous after a flood peaks.

It's important to keep monitoring weather warnings and forecasts on the Bureau of Meteorology website, and be aware of warnings from your state or territory emergency service.

Stay aware of continuing or approaching dangers. Make sure your neighbours, visitors, and tourists are aware, so they can stay safe too.

DRIVING INTO FLOODWATER

Driving into floodwater is the main cause of death in floods. Many of these drivers were in four wheel drives and utes.

Floodwater over the road can look still, but can hide fast flowing water underneath. It can be hard to estimate how deep the water is, or how strong the current can be.

Water also hides the road surface, which can get washed away and large potholes and cracks can form.

An unstable road surface can collapse under the weight of your vehicle.

If you come across water over the road – turn around. Stay safe by never driving through floodwater.

FLOODWATER PLAYING

It's dangerous to play in floodwater.

Playing in floodwater is a major cause of children's deaths.

Never swim, jump, walk or ride boogie boards or bikes in floodwater.

Floodwater can cause injury, illness and death. It can contain things like chemicals, sewage, dead animals – and live ones too!

Floodwater can cover drains, pipes and debris that can trap you underwater.

Stay away from floodwater.

For emergency assistance, call the SES on 132 500. In a life threatening situation call triple zero.

FLOODWATER PLAYING CHILDREN

It's dangerous to play in floodwater.

Playing in floodwater is a major cause of children's deaths in floods. Floodwater can be deeper and flow faster than it looks.

It may sound like fun, but the reality is that playing in floodwater and stormwater can be deadly.

Being trapped in storm drains, sucked into pipes or washed away in stormwater are common causes of death. These things have happened to children who were playing in floodwater.

Don't let your kids play in floodwater. It's not worth the risk.

FLOOD/STORM WATER CONTAMINATED

Floodwater is dirty.

Exposing a scratch or a graze to floodwater can cause infection and serious illness- or even death.

So, what's in floodwater?

Dirt, mud, branches, rocks.

Chemicals, bacteria, poo.

Snakes, spiders, dead animals and much much more.

Assume all floodwater is contaminated. Avoid contact and protect yourself.

FLOOD/STORM PLAYING

Entering floodwater, even if you think it's fun, is a major cause of death during floods.

Think it through.

Floodwater can be deeper and faster flowing than it looks. Even shallow moving water can sweep you and your mates away. It can pull you into hidden obstacles, snag and tangle your clothing, and stop you seeing drains and pipes that you can be sucked into. On top of that, floodwater can be full of chemicals, garbage, dead animals, and SEWAGE.

Kayaking, canoeing, swimming, boating, jet skiing and any other types of water activity are not safe during floods, regardless of how strong or skilful you think you are.

Don't be a flood stat. Your best decision is to stay out.

For emergency assistance, call the SES on 132 500. In a life threatening situation call triple zero.

FLOOD/STORM AFTER CLEAN UP

After floodwater recedes, wait for authorities to announce that it's safe to return before you go back to your property. Before you start cleaning up, take a moment to stop and consider a few things.

- Talk to your insurer.
- Check that power, water, solar, and gas supplies are turned off.
- Make sure your property is structurally safe by checking damage to windows, walls, electricals and your roof. You may need assistance from qualified and licenced professionals.
- Wear protective clothing and be aware of slip, trip, and fall hazards.
- Clean and sanitise everything that can be saved.
- Take clean drinking water and food with you.
- Do not eat or drink any food items that have been exposed to floodwater.

Get more advice on how to clean up after floods from local authorities or your state or territory emergency service website.

EMERGENCY ALERT SMS

Emergency Alert messages may be sent when there is a threat near you.

These messages come through as a text on your mobile phone or a recorded message on your landline, and they tell you what you need to do to keep you and your family safe.

It's just one of the ways you could receive important information about what you need to do to stay safe during a flood.

If you do not understand the message, ask a family member, friend or neighbour for help.

During floods and storms, conditions can change quickly and you also need to take steps to know what's going on around you - in case you don't receive a warning.

It's important that you know where to go for information and that you continue to monitor alerts.

For emergency assistance, call the SES on 132 500. In a life threatening situation call triple zero.

FLOOD WARNING MINOR

Flood Warnings are issued by the Bureau of Meteorology to tell you about the risk of flooding in your area.

A *Minor Flood Warning* means minor roads may be closed, and low-lying bridges and access roads may be submerged.

In urban areas flooding may affect some backyards and buildings with low floor levels, as well as bicycle and pedestrian paths.

In rural areas you may need to remove livestock and equipment from low lying areas.

The flood situation can change quickly. It is important to monitor warnings for changes, even if weather conditions appear safe.

Monitor weather conditions and forecasts on the Bureau of Meteorology website or app, and warnings through your state or territory emergency service.

FLOOD WARNING MODERATE

Flood Warnings are issued by the Bureau of Meteorology to tell you about the risk of flooding in your area.

A *Moderate Flood Warning* means main traffic routes may be affected.

Some buildings may also be affected by floodwater above the floor level and the evacuation of flood-affected areas may be required.

In rural areas removal of livestock and equipment from low lying areas may also be required.

Heavy rainfall may lead to dangerous, localised flash flooding so you should avoid places where fast flowing water could flow to, such as storm water drains and creeks.

Monitor weather conditions and forecasts on the Bureau of Meteorology website or app, and warnings through your state or territory emergency service.

FLOOD WARNING MAJOR

Flood Warnings are issued by the Bureau of Meteorology to tell you about the risk of flooding in your area.

A Major Flood Warning means rural and urban areas are likely to be flooded and even major roads may be closed.

Many buildings may be affected by floodwater above the floor level and properties and towns are likely to be isolated.

Heavy rainfall may lead to dangerous, localised flash flooding so you should avoid places where fast flowing water could flow to, such as storm water drains and creeks.

Ensure you and your family can evacuate early, as major floods can cut exit routes before waters arrive at your property.

Monitor weather conditions and forecasts on the Bureau of Meteorology website or app, and warnings through your state or territory emergency service.

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