

Introduction to public information and warnings

Speed read

- Effective communication of public information and warnings can save lives.
- Warnings interpret and explain both the impacts and consequences a hazard will have, and include a clear call to take protective action.
- Warnings are guided by 10 principles that outline why warnings are important and how they can be most effective.

Key points

- **Effective communication of public information and warnings is a critical element of emergency management.** Timely, targeted and tailored information and warnings empower people to make informed decisions, to take protective action, and to reduce the potential impacts and consequences of a hazard.
- **The Australian government, state and territory governments, and their emergency service organisations and statutory bodies hold responsibilities for issuing warnings.** Community members and organisations also play a shared role in communicating warnings.
- **Design and use of warnings should be guided by the Total Warning System,** underpinned by clear governance arrangements, operate within an integrated incident management system, and be supported by delivery systems.
- **Not every hazard event requires a warning.** Determining when a warning is required, and the nature of that warning requires a guiding structure and process.
- **The Australian Warning System** was adopted in March 2021 and aims to provide nationally consistent warnings to Australian communities so that people know what to do when they see a warning.
- **Consider the diversity of communities at risk when developing and tailoring public information and warnings.** Some groups and places may have specific information needs to be supported or met.
- **Warnings serve and support broader risk management actions** ranging from hazard reduction and response to ongoing community education and resilience building.
- **Warning systems and protocols should continuously adjust** in response to new technology, trends, research and feedback from community engagement.

Warnings Principles

Warnings in Australia are guided by the following 10 principles:

- 1 Life-saving:** Warnings can save lives and protect people from harm. They prompt and encourage protective action to minimise the social and economic impacts of an emergency. Warnings are an essential element of effective emergency management.

2	Empowering: The provision of warnings enacts a national commitment to building shared responsibility for disaster resilience, by empowering people to make decisions about their own safety.
3	Trusted, authoritative and verifiable: For greatest effect, warnings must come from a trusted source and be verifiable through multiple channels. Warnings should therefore be easily and widely shared to recognise the diversity of potential trusted sources. The official authority issuing a warning should always be clearly stated.
4	Scaled based on risk: Scaled warning frameworks should guide the delivery of all warnings and support the consistent risk assessment of a hazard, its impact and its consequence.
5	Timely, targeted and tailored: Warnings should be timely, targeted to communities at risk and tailored to provide detail and relevance. Specific consideration should be given to harder to reach and vulnerable members of the community.
6	Conveying impact: Warnings should describe the expected impacts and consequences of an approaching or current hazard, to assist people to understand and be motivated to take protective action.
7	Including a call-to-action: Warnings should include practical calls-to-action using language tailored to the level of risk, ranging from advice and persuasive recommendations to authoritative direction.
8	Clearly communicated: Warnings should be easy to understand and use a consistent structure to provide information. Both written and visual information should be considered to assist with clearly conveying risk and encouraging protective action.
9	Readily accessible: Warnings should be disseminated via multiple channels, tailored to suit each channel, and consider accessibility for diverse audiences. Ease of sharing and rapid dissemination should be supported with use of nationally agreed technical standards, and dissemination strategies should be in place to adapt to failure of technology or other systems.
10	Part of a bigger picture: Warnings are one component within a systems-based approach to community safety. Community engagement, education and awareness programs better prepare communities to receive, understand and act upon warnings.

Take action

- Download or print [Australia's Warning Principles and Total Warning System](#) to review and use.
- Watch the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC Video Series [Driving change: the evolution of communications and warnings in emergency preparedness, response and recovery](#) to learn about recent research and how it can be applied by practitioners.

More information

- [Public Information and Warnings](#) (AIDR 2021)
- [AIDR's Warnings Collection](#) brings together key guidance material, research, information and professional development resources to support provision of effective warnings in Australia.
- The handbook companion document [Guideline 1: Warning Message Construction: Choosing your words](#) (AIDR 2021) provides details on key elements that should feature in the construction of every warning.