

A Cluster Approach for Civil Defence Emergency Management:

Enhancing multi-agency relationships

Introduction

Overseas events repeatedly teach us that nations fail to respond to and recover from disasters because of basic issues such as poor communications, lack of agency coordination and misdirection of effort. A series of reviews in the 1990's looked at how disaster management was being carried out under the Civil Defence Act 1983 - and concluded that we face the same problems here in New Zealand.

The recently enacted Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Act 2002 establishes a new approach to emergency management, including integrating planning and promoting interagency coordination. We all have roles to play during a disaster – individuals, businesses, emergency services and government departments alike, the problem is how best to coordinate our planning and efforts.

The 'CDEM Cluster Approach' seeks to address this need. It is simply a way of putting structure to existing multi-agency relationships where organisations with similar objectives are encouraged to work together to:

- Clarify goals, responsibilities and roles for disaster management
- Identify gaps in capability and capacity
- Address the gaps through action plans



Aim of the CDEM Cluster Approach

Each cluster participant benefits from coordinated CDEM planning through:

- Promotion to customers of reliability to continue service;
- Improved public and private sector understanding of agency roles and responsibilities;
- Strengthened internal planning arrangements (Business Continuity, Crisis Management, Emergency Response and Recovery plans);
- Enhanced external relationships with transparency and resolution of dependencies; and
- Efficiency of service during emergencies via reduced duplication and cost.

As a nation we all benefit through a more coordinated, effective response to disasters that reduces loss of life and injury, and protects our property and commercial activity.

What are CDEM Clusters?

A group of organisations or agencies working in a common or similar activity is often referred to as a 'sector' e.g. education sector.

The CDEM Cluster Approach is not new, being based on the concept of a group of agencies, either within or across sectors that interact to achieve common (disaster management) outcomes in a coordinated manner.

Some clusters are self-evident, for example, our traditional Emergency Services (Police, Fire and Ambulance) who have successfully worked together on combined initiatives, such as adopting a common incident management system and integrated communications centres. Other clusters, such as the diverse business community, may be less obvious or cohesive. Most clusters will include agencies other than central government departments including Non-Government Organisations



(NGOs), local government and others. It is recognised that many organisations fulfil these functions and the associated relationships within the framework of their day-to-day business. However these relationships have not usually been developed or applied in the context of management of disasters.

Proposed CDEM Clusters

The following clusters of agencies have been identified with a particular focus upon readiness for, responding to, and recovering from large-scale emergencies:

- CDEM Groups
- Emergency Services
- Health
- Welfare
- Transport
- Lifeline Utilities (by sectors)
- Public Information & Education
- Research & Science
- Business Community
- Socio-Economic
- Agriculture & Rural
- International Assistance

The cluster approach is not rigid – new clusters may emerge or others merge. There may be overlaps of functions or membership where appropriate. Clusters will develop so that their roles and membership best reflect the function(s) of the organisations working together. Clusters can facilitate routine coordination of risk-reduction activity and readiness planning on a daily, ‘business as usual’ basis. In a disaster it is envisaged that clusters may be activated to provide response and recovery coordination, advice or guidance. Therefore, clusters will not only have a pre-event role but also a role in response and recovery from actual events.

Forming and Managing CDEM Clusters

The most effective way to clarify debate over composition of individual clusters is to invite a potential cluster to meet together to discuss and decide for themselves the most appropriate structures, membership and

working processes for their cluster. Development and ownership of the clusters must rest with the cluster members and follow a simple, un-bureaucratic method of developing relationships in order to minimise workloads and maximise benefits.

The Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management (MCDEM) provides facilitation and support for Clusters to promote consistency of approach. Cluster Liaison staff are able to assist each cluster to develop relationships, facilitate meetings, activities and workshops as appropriate.

Establishment of CDEM Clusters

MCDEM initiates invitations for formative meetings of senior level representatives from agency service/functional areas. These meetings will set the direction and membership of the cluster-organisations, which are subsequently engaged at an operational level through working groups. As with all significant endeavours, resource and other constraints dictate that not all clusters are being developed at the same time - some clusters have been developing over the last three years whereas other clusters have not had the opportunity to form. Cluster development activity will also support the National CDEM Plan and regional CDEM Group Plans being introduced over the 2003-2005 timeframe.

Key Messages

To improve the nation's disaster resilience, MCDEM has initiated a 'CDEM Cluster Approach' whereby groups of agencies with related disaster management functions work together to:

- Clarify goals, responsibilities and roles for disaster management
- Identify gaps in capability and capacity
- Address the gaps through action plans

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