



The Department of Human Services' Role in Emergency Recovery



VICTORIA

Victorian
Auditor-General

The Department of Human Services' Role in Emergency Recovery

Ordered to be printed

VICTORIAN
GOVERNMENT PRINTER
October 2010



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ISBN 978 1 921650 58 1

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Victorian Auditor-General's Office
Auditing in the Public Interest

The Hon. Robert Smith MLC
President
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Melbourne

The Hon. Jenny Lindell MP
Speaker
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Melbourne

Dear Presiding Officers

Under the provisions of section 16AB of the *Audit Act 1994*, I transmit my performance report on *The Department of Human Services' Role in Emergency Recovery*.

Yours faithfully



D D R PEARSON
Auditor-General

5 October 2010

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Audit summary

An emergency is an event that endangers personal safety or health, and may damage or destroy property or the environment. Emergencies include natural disasters, such as fire and flood, major disruptions to essential services, serious disease outbreaks and terrorist acts.

Government agencies try to prevent or minimise the impact of emergencies. However, when they occur, the state supports those affected and tries to restore normal conditions. This part of emergency management is the recovery phase and is defined in the *Emergency Management Act 1986* as 'assisting persons and communities affected by emergencies to achieve a proper and effective level of functioning'.

Recovery is a joint responsibility of all levels of government, as well as non-government organisations and the private sector. Together, they focus on restoring and rehabilitating the social, health and community, built, natural and economic environments of those affected, in partnership with the community.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for coordinating recovery operations. This includes preparing recovery plans, working with other government agencies, non-government organisations and the private sector to deliver recovery services, and provide training and support systems.

DHS recently activated its recovery plans during the February 2009 Black Saturday bushfires and the severe storm that caused major damage in March 2010.

This audit examined the effectiveness of DHS's emergency recovery management, including whether:

- planning is comprehensive, current and supported by testing, evaluation and training
- recovery operations are coordinated, efficient and effective.

Conclusion

DHS is effectively coordinating recovery operations and delivering recovery services. Departmental staff respond well to the needs of affected individuals and communities through timely emergency grants, housing and psychosocial services, like counselling. Overall, DHS has developed effective relationships with other recovery partners.

The Black Saturday bushfires severely tested DHS's capacity to coordinate and deliver recovery services. Service demand, widespread trauma and devastation, and the direct impact on many departmental staff presented major challenges. While this event highlighted areas for improvement, DHS's commitment of staff and resources and its speedy response in meeting extraordinary requirements was admirable.

DHS needs to support the good efforts of its staff in coordinating recovery by providing systems and enhancements that make their work easier. In the future, DHS needs to address gaps in planning, evaluation, testing, training, information technology and communications. It also needs stronger leadership and strategic direction to promote a consistent recovery approach across the state, to build capacity and capability, and to make the best use of available resources.

Findings

Recovery planning

Planning in partnership

DHS's approach to recovery planning has not fostered shared ownership of recovery with partner agencies. This poses a risk to cooperation and clear understanding of roles and responsibilities during a recovery operation. The state recovery plan, called the *State Emergency Recovery Arrangements* (the arrangements), requires annual review by the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee, using lessons from recent operations. To date, DHS has not actively involved committee members in reviewing the plan, though DHS plans to address this when it examines the arrangements in October 2010. At the regional level, plans are written for and revised by DHS staff, often without effective involvement of partner agencies.

Recovery plans

DHS's Emergency Management Branch (EMB)—a service shared by the Departments of Health and Human Services—developed the *State Emergency Recovery Operational Plan*, which aims to provide practical guidance on applying the arrangements. However, it does not meet this aim and merely restates information in the arrangements.

None of the audited regional recovery plans met all the requirements in the arrangements. Common gaps included lack of detail about the roles and responsibilities of regional stakeholders, guidelines for recovery operations that cross regional borders, financial arrangements, and working with a centralised body, such as a Ministerial Taskforce, in a state-level event.

The format for regional plans across the state is inconsistent, presenting a challenge to DHS staff and partner agencies working across DHS regions. This is despite EMB's attempts to create a consistent template. There is need for better coordination and cooperation between regional offices and the EMB.

Training and testing

DHS offers a good selection of recovery training programs to internal and external staff. Evaluations show participants are satisfied with training quality, and uptake is good. However, there is a gap in training at executive levels. Senior staff in decision-making roles in recovery operations often have not completed recovery training.

The arrangements require regular recovery plan testing. Only one of the four DHS regions audited complied. Testing should involve partner agencies and use hypothetical scenarios to assess whether DHS and its partners can deliver recovery services over an extended period. Existing testing only focuses on initial responses to emergencies and set up of emergency coordination and relief centres. DHS needs recovery plan testing to identify and resolve potential problems before an emergency happens.

Using evaluation to inform planning

Under the arrangements, state and regional recovery operations must be evaluated. While DHS generally meets this requirement, the EMB has not specified how to evaluate operations. Consequently, practices vary across the state, ranging from no evaluation, using only a multi-agency debrief, evaluations that focus on specific recovery services, through to extensive qualitative and quantitative studies. DHS has not always fed evaluation findings into recovery planning and needs a standardised approach to evaluation that includes links to planning.

Strategic direction

There is no DHS policy or set of strategic directions to guide the work of the EMB or DHS's regions in building recovery capability. This also means the EMB does not have a benchmark against which to monitor and report progress. This has created inconsistency, duplication and inefficiency in regional efforts to improve recovery capacity. The EMB is addressing this by developing a corporate plan and statement of strategic intent for emergency management across the organisation. DHS will need to use and monitor progress against the plan to promote a consistent approach to statewide recovery management and make sure resources are used effectively.

Recovery operations

Activating and coordinating recovery

Operations are timely and well coordinated. Policies and procedures, rapid staff deployment, and good relationships with partner agencies support the recovery services that DHS coordinates and provides.

Decision-making and issue resolution is done through clear committee structures that involve relevant recovery stakeholders. There is ongoing monitoring during recovery operations and reporting between regions and the EMB.

Recent recovery operations highlighted gaps in planning, training and support systems. Targets for numbers of trained staff ready to be deployed in a recovery operation are often unmet, and the actual targets are insufficient for some roles.

Communication and information management issues hamper recovery operations. During the Black Saturday bushfires recovery operation DHS did not have documented communication systems or staff in dedicated communication roles. There were also deficiencies in the DHS's emergency database and insufficient access to information technology equipment. DHS has since appointed a dedicated communications manager within the EMB and started mapping information management resources and needs. These are areas that warrant investment to streamline and enhance recovery operations.

Delivering recovery services

DHS effectively implemented its recovery plans after a severe storm in Victoria in March 2010. DHS regions responded quickly, organising staff to administer personal hardship grants, as well as working with councils to arrange temporary accommodation and the Red Cross to provide outreach services. DHS regions and the EMB maintained effective communication and reporting with each other and partner agencies throughout.

DHS was generally prepared and quickly activated a response to the Black Saturday bushfires. DHS deployed more than 550 staff in the first four months of the operation. Partner agency feedback praised DHS staff for their commitment and dedication throughout the operation.

In this event, the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) coordinated the overall recovery operation. VBRRA charged DHS with coordinating recovery of the social, health and community environment. DHS established services, such as the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service, relatively quickly. More than 5 500 people have used the service. Feedback from the complaints and compliments systems was mostly positive. Overall, DHS has delivered and coordinated numerous bushfire recovery services, including the administration of more than \$39 million in grants, about 1 400 housing needs assessments, and coordination of community hubs, where average weekly visits peaked at more than 1 000.

However, DHS was unprepared for the size of the event and needed to find new ways to deliver recovery services. Moves to plan against a tiered model, recognising small, medium and catastrophic emergencies, will help future preparation.

Regions were not prepared to work with a central authority, i.e. VBRRA, in a state-level event. There were tensions between regions wanting local autonomy and flexibility, and the need to provide statewide equity in service delivery.

Other problems included:

- delays in clarifying responsibilities for certain recovery activities, especially around water and fencing
- deployment of untrained DHS staff
- high overheads for delivering personal hardship grants related to problems with information technology systems.

Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Page
	The Department of Human Services should:	
1.	Develop practical, operational guidelines for implementing recovery at the state level.	14
2.	Improve regional recovery plans through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing a consistent format that meets <i>Emergency Management Manual Victoria</i> content requirements • revising plans biennially with recovery partners • routine review of regional plans by Emergency Management Branch. 	14
3.	Regularly test recovery plans with partner agencies.	14
4.	Create evaluation guidelines for recovery operations, including links to planning.	14
5.	Make sure relevant senior staff complete recovery training.	14
6.	Communicate strategic priorities to achieve state and regional level alignment in building recovery capacity and capability.	14
7.	Work with regions and partner agencies at the state level to create consistent, streamlined impact assessment processes and systems.	26
8.	Complete work on emergency communication and information management issues.	26
9.	Base targets for staff in emergency roles on regional needs and develop a staff deployment strategy.	26
10.	Work with the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee, regions, and other partners to facilitate understanding and ownership of roles and responsibilities for common recovery services.	26

Submissions and comments received

In addition to progressive engagement during the course of the audit, in accordance with section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994* a copy of this report, or relevant extracts from the report, was provided to the Department of Human Services with a request for submissions or comments.

Agency views have been considered in reaching our audit conclusions and are represented to the extent relevant and warranted in preparing this report. Their full section 16(3) submissions and comments however, are included in Appendix C.

1 Background

1.1 Introduction

The *Emergency Management Act 1986* (the Act), broadly defines an emergency as a real or forecast event that endangers or threatens personal safety or health, or damages or destroys property or the environment.

Emergencies can arise from natural disasters like fire or flood, major disruptions to essential services, epidemics, or major transport accidents. Risks from climate change, terrorism and new diseases highlight the importance of effective recovery planning and coordination.

Emergency management is categorised in phases—prevention, preparation, response, relief and recovery. Under the Act, government agencies coordinate responses, including planning and recovery assistance.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) recently used its recovery plans during the February 2009 Black Saturday bushfires and the severe storm that caused major damage in March 2010. This audit examines DHS's role in recovery.

1.1.1 Defining recovery

Most people affected by an emergency recover with minimal help. Others turn to friends and family for advice and assistance, while some need formal support from government services. Emergency recovery may also require restoration of infrastructure, the natural environment and the local economy.

The Act defines recovery as 'assisting persons and communities affected by emergencies to achieve a proper and effective level of functioning'.

Recovery is a joint responsibility between all levels of government, as well as non-government organisations, community agencies and the private sector. Together these entities focus on restoring and rehabilitating the following environments:

- social, health and community
- built
- natural
- economic.

Recovery timing

Prevention, response and recovery activities are not sequential phases or stages of emergency management. They can happen concurrently or even crossover, for example rebuilding houses destroyed by wildfire in a fire-safe way combines prevention and recovery.

Response activities begin as soon as an emergency happens and stop when people or properties are no longer under immediate threat, i.e. after rescue or evacuation.

Recovery activities begin during, or soon after, an emergency, and typically continue after response activities are completed. Recovery activities can continue for weeks, months or years after impact and gradually merge into normal community activities.

1.2 Policy and legislative framework

Victoria established the *Emergency Management Act 1986* after the Ash Wednesday bushfires in 1983.

The Act defines:

- an emergency
- emergency management structures
- roles and responsibilities
- planning requirements
- penalties for breaching the Act.

The Act requires the development of state response and recovery plans, which are set out in the *Emergency Management Manual of Victoria (EMMV)*. The EMMV takes a whole-of-government approach to state emergency management. It identifies the roles and committees responsible for emergency management in the state, and includes the *State Emergency Response Plan*, and the *State Emergency Recovery Arrangements* (the arrangements).

1.3 Roles and responsibilities

Emergency management is a joint responsibility between the Commonwealth and state governments, divisional/regional levels of government agencies, and municipal councils. The size or type of the emergency determines which government level or agency coordinates the recovery effort. The guiding principle is that the agency closest to the community coordinates recovery, providing they have the ability to do so. Figure 1A shows the coordinating agencies based on the extent and scope of the emergency.

Figure 1A
Emergency recovery – coordinating responsibilities

Extent of emergency	Coordinating agency
Single or bordering communities	Municipal council
Several communities or on a scale beyond council capacity	Regional DHS office
Multiple regions	DHS at state level
Dispersed populations events	DHS at state level

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, based on the *State Emergency Recovery Arrangements*.

Commonwealth responsibilities

The Commonwealth Government assists states and territories with recovery when they cannot reasonably cope during an emergency. The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, which is responsible for national disaster recovery, provides this assistance.

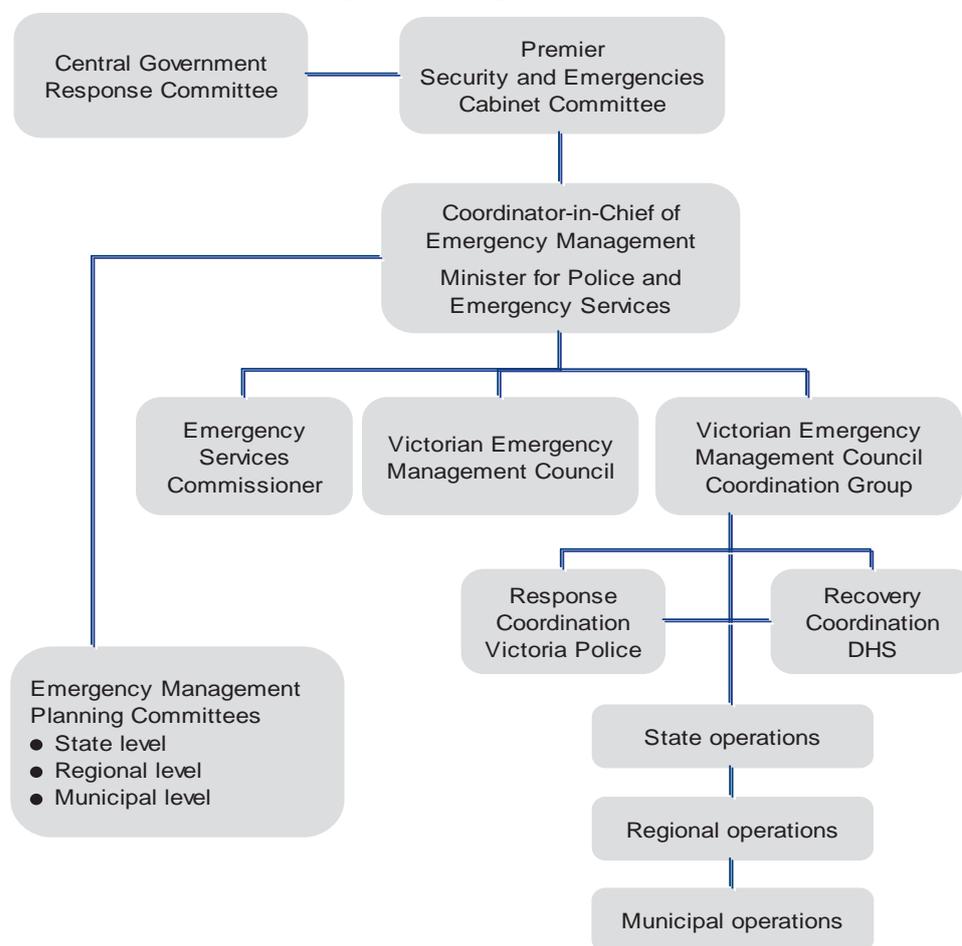
Arrangements under the *Emergency Management Act 1986*

The Act provides for the Coordinator-in-Chief, currently the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, to set up an advisory council—the Victorian Emergency Management Council (VEMC)—which oversees government agency emergency management.

The Act requires the Coordinator-in-Chief to prepare, review and update a state recovery plan in consultation with VEMC. This plan governs how to manage emergency recovery at state, regional and local levels.

The Coordinator-in-Chief is also charged with selecting an agency to lead recovery coordination. The EMMV documents the Coordinator-in-Chief's appointment of DHS as the lead agency for recovery. The Secretary of DHS appoints the State Recovery Coordinator, currently the Executive Director, Service Delivery and Performance, who is responsible for coordinating recovery activities and who prepares, tests and maintains the arrangements. Figure 1B outlines the management structure of Victoria's emergency services.

Figure 1B
Emergency management structure



Note: The 2009 Bushfire Royal Commission Final Report recommends giving the Chief Commissioner of Police the role of Coordinator-in-Chief of Emergency Management.
Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, drawn from the Emergency Management Manual Victoria.

The Department of Human Service's role in service provision

As well as coordinating state and regional level recovery operations, DHS manages and provides the following direct recovery services:

- administration of personal hardship grants
- housing assistance
- personal support
- case management
- psychosocial services, in partnership with the Department of Health
- funding for community development officers to support community engagement and connectedness after an emergency event.

For the recent recovery operations following the Black Saturday bushfires, the government established the Victoria Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) to coordinate recovery. DHS has worked with VBRRA to manage the social, health and community recovery aspects of this operation.

Working together

In coordinating recovery activities, DHS works with a range of partner agencies, including municipal councils, government departments like the Departments of Primary Industries and Sustainability and Environment, and various non-government organisations. This joint effort helps meet the diverse range of services communities and individuals need for emergency recovery.

Recovery should start as soon as possible after an emergency. This means communication between agencies coordinating the emergency response and recovery coordinators must be effective to guarantee smooth handover of operations.

To be successful, recovery operations must be supported by strong partnerships across government levels, government departments and agencies, and with non-government and other organisations.

1.4 Audit objective and scope

This audit examined the effectiveness of DHS's emergency recovery management, including whether:

- planning is comprehensive, current and supported by testing, evaluation and training
- recovery operations are coordinated, efficient and effective.

The audit reviewed the Emergency Management Branch (EMB), a shared service between the Departments of Health and Human Services, and DHS offices in three regional areas and one metropolitan area.

The audit was performed in accordance with Australian Auditing and Assurance Standards.

1.5 Audit cost

The cost of the audit was \$215 000.

1.6 Report structure

The rest of this report is structured as follows:

- Part 2 examines planning for recovery, including testing, training and evaluation.
- Part 3 assesses recent recovery operations.

2 Recovery planning

At a glance

Background

Recovery planning, testing, evaluation and training is set out in the *Emergency Management Act 1986* and the *State Emergency Recovery Arrangements*. The audit examined recovery plan content and currency, and how tests and evaluations inform them. It also assessed recovery training and strategic planning for recovery capacity.

Conclusion

Recovery planning is not comprehensive or always current. The Department of Human Services (DHS) does not use recovery plan tests and operation evaluations adequately to inform planning. While training content and frequency are good, more senior staff need to participate. DHS needs better strategic direction to support consistent recovery capacity across the state.

Findings

- DHS has developed a state recovery plan, as required, but does not have a comprehensive operational plan for recovery.
- Regional recovery plans are inconsistent and do not meet requirements.
- DHS's recovery plan testing is inadequate and its evaluation of recovery operations is inconsistent.
- Recovery training is good but senior staff participation is inadequate.
- There is no strategic direction guiding the development of recovery capacity.

Recommendations

The Department of Human Services should:

- develop practical, operational guidelines for implementing recovery at the state level
- improve regional recovery plans through:
 - developing a consistent format that meets *Emergency Management Manual Victoria* content requirements
 - revising plans biennially with recovery partners
 - routine review of regional plans by the Emergency Management Branch
- regularly test recovery plans with partner agencies
- create evaluation guidelines for recovery operations, including links to planning
- make sure relevant senior staff complete recovery training
- communicate strategic priorities to achieve state and regional level alignment in building recovery capacity and capability.

2.1 Introduction

Planning underpins emergency management. This includes plans to prevent and respond to emergencies, as well as plans to recover from them. The purpose of a recovery plan is to explain to individuals and agencies involved in recovery, how the operation will unfold. Plans should:

- include roles and responsibilities
- describe decision-making and communication arrangements
- be developed in partnership
- be regularly updated.

Under the *Emergency Management Act 1986* (the Act) a state recovery plan must be developed. This plan is the *State Emergency Recovery Arrangements* (the arrangements), part 4 of the *Emergency Management Manual Victoria* (EMMV). Regional recovery plan requirements are included in the arrangements.

To oversee planning, state and regional emergency recovery planning committees are established. The Department of Human Services (DHS) chairs the committees, which include representatives from emergency service agencies, government departments, municipal councils and other recovery stakeholders.

Under the arrangements, recovery plan testing and operational evaluations are required to inform planning. DHS is also responsible for training personnel who provide recovery services or manage recovery activities.

Planning is also necessary at a strategic level to identify DHS and sector priorities for building recovery capacity and capability.

This part of the report examines whether:

- planning is comprehensive and current
- testing, evaluation and training support recovery coordination.

2.2 Conclusion

Recovery plans at state and regional levels exist, but processes for reviewing and updating them do not meet requirements in the arrangements. DHS does not sufficiently involve recovery partners in reviewing and revising recovery plans. However, it plans to address this in an October 2010 review of the arrangements.

DHS's *State Emergency Recovery Operational Plan* does not provide a practical guide for applying the arrangements. Regional recovery plans are inconsistent, do not follow all content requirements in the arrangements, and lack effective monitoring by the shared Departments of Health and Human Services Emergency Management Branch (EMB).

DHS is not meeting its requirement to test recovery plans and, while undertaking evaluation of operations, methods are inconsistent and findings are not always used to inform planning. Although it provides good quality recovery training frequently, it needs to strongly encourage senior staff to take part. Without strategic direction recovery resources are not being used optimally and efforts to build recovery capacity and capability are inefficient.

2.3 State recovery planning

2.3.1 The *State Emergency Recovery Arrangements*

The State Recovery Coordinator is responsible for developing and maintaining the arrangements, through delegations set out in the Act. The current State Recovery Coordinator is the Executive Director, Service Delivery and Performance, DHS.

The State Recovery Coordinator is responsible for regularly updating the arrangements, and the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee is required to review them annually. The arrangements specify that reviews should incorporate lessons learned from debriefs of recovery operations during the previous year.

The arrangements have not changed since 2005. The most recent review of the arrangements was in October 2008, meaning DHS did not meet annual review requirements in 2009. DHS has also not actively engaged the planning committee in the review process. This risks a lack of coordination during an operation, as partner agencies may not fully understand recovery and their role and responsibilities. DHS is not routinely using lessons from recent recovery operations in assessing the plan, which hampers continuous improvement.

DHS is starting to approach recovery planning in a more comprehensive way. Plans for an October 2010 review of the arrangements include:

- consultation with DHS regions and external recovery partners
- the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee's review of drafts and approval processes
- consideration of the Bushfire Royal Commission's recommendations and DHS evaluations of recent recovery operations
- ongoing DHS staff updates about progress.

This approach meets requirements in the arrangements, draws on experience and encourages greater ownership of recovery by relevant stakeholders.

2.3.2 The *State Emergency Recovery Operational Plan*

DHS is meeting its obligation under the arrangements to develop a state recovery plan. This is a high-level document describing recovery and principles for its planning and management, as well as requirements at state, regional, and municipal levels. Recognising that the arrangements do not explain recovery coordination in practical detail, in January 2010, DHS developed the *State Emergency Recovery Operational Plan* (the operational plan). DHS tabled this document at the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee in March 2010.

The operational plan should inform DHS staff and state-level recovery partners about how recovery works in practice. However, it merely restates text from the arrangements. The only original text are brief paragraphs describing recovery services, such as outreach and community development, and a more detailed explanation of temporary accommodation. The following details are missing from the plan:

- decision-making processes in recovery, including interactions between committees and central and regional offices
- funding processes for recovery operations
- communication flows and information management systems
- training and recovery plan testing requirements
- references to relevant policies on delivery of recovery services.

This is a missed opportunity to provide a comprehensive resource explaining how DHS coordinates recovery.

2.4 Regional recovery planning

2.4.1 Regional recovery plans

Under the arrangements, the State Recovery Coordinator must appoint Regional Recovery Coordinators in each DHS region. The Regional Recovery Coordinators are responsible for preparing and maintaining regional recovery plans. The arrangements, and other parts of the EMMV dealing with planning, include content requirements for regional-level plans and guidelines for their development and review.

The regional recovery plans of the four audited DHS regions were assessed against these requirements. Appendix A summarises the outcomes. None of the audited plans met all the requirements in the EMMV. While the plans varied in their level of compliance, some common gaps emerged.

Plans did not include, or lacked detail on:

- arrangements for coordinating recovery in events that cross regional borders, for example, decision-making processes and deployment of staff across regions
- financial arrangements, including cost sharing across regions, processes for recovery funding, and reimbursement arrangements with municipal councils
- how the region will work with a Ministerial Taskforce or other centralised body in a state-level event
- how recovery services are delivered, agreements with agencies to provide services and information on how people can access them
- the roles, responsibilities and inter-relationships with regional-level recovery agencies.

Decision-makers need quick solutions in an emergency, and without a plan for major parts of recovery operations their burden is increased, and risks to operations created. By clearly identifying roles and responsibilities, setting guidelines for managing issues like cross-border events and determining service delivery systems, decision-making will be smoother and faster in an emergency.

2.4.2 The regional planning process

Under the arrangements, Regional Recovery Coordinators have to develop regional recovery plans with partner agencies. The Regional Emergency Recovery Committee must review the plan biennially. Of the four audited regions, one met these requirements, another partially, and two did not.

DHS staff develop and review regional recovery plans. They are usually written for an internal audience, and often partner agencies have to access them by request. Only one of the four audited regions actively engaged members of its Regional Emergency Recovery Committee in discussions about the plan and its review. Two regions had limited engagement with partner agencies through focus groups, and in presentations of the DHS-revised plan for comment and endorsement at the committee.

Regional recovery plans belong to the region. Although DHS is the coordinating agency, the audience is broader than the DHS regional office. Plans should include input and approval from partner agencies. By actively engaging regional partners in recovery planning, DHS can promote greater understanding of recovery and ownership of roles and responsibilities.

The EMB also asks regions to submit their plans centrally. Of the four audited regions, all had complied, though none had received any feedback on their plans. In 2009, the EMB attempted to standardise regional recovery plans by developing and distributing a template. To date, this has not happened, and none of the audited plans were consistent, or followed the template.

A standard approach to regional plans is necessary so that all required content is covered, plans have a consistent format, and to assist DHS staff and partner agencies working across regions. This would not prevent regions from including local content.

2.5 Using tests and evaluation to inform planning

2.5.1 Testing recovery plans

The arrangements specify that DHS should test recovery plans at state and regional levels at least once a year. DHS may focus on various parts of the recovery plan and should test links between levels of recovery management. Combining a recovery exercise with other emergency testing—for example testing the response plan—is acceptable, but discrete recovery aims and objectives must be set.

One of the audited regional offices was completing recovery testing at least once a year. It was involving partner agencies and using hypothetical scenarios to identify recovery needs, delivery capacity, and potential problems. This shows that testing requirements are manageable. The region and its partner agencies spoke of the benefits, including greater confidence during recovery operations.

This testing was not evident at the other three audited regional offices or at a state level. Although DHS routinely participates in multi-agency tests of emergency response plans, helps councils test the set up of their relief centres, and practices setting up its emergency operating centres, it is not meeting testing requirements for the recovery phase. It is critical for DHS to test recovery plans because it reinforces the roles and responsibilities of staff and partner agencies and identifies potential problems before an emergency happens.

2.5.2 Evaluating operations to inform planning

Recovery operation evaluation helps DHS identify what works and what does not. Together with its recovery partners, it can use this information to strengthen recovery plans, improve the effectiveness of operations and drive training and new initiatives.

The arrangements require that all recovery activities are evaluated at state and regional levels. Evaluation methods include formal debriefs, workshops and research into particular activities. Regions must submit their evaluations to the State Recovery Coordinator. Lessons from recent debriefs must be considered when reviewing the arrangements. DHS has recently commissioned statewide evaluations of the:

- recovery operation for the 2010 severe storm
- psychosocial services provided in response to the February 2009 Black Saturday bushfires
- case management services provided after the Black Saturday bushfires.

DHS generally meets the evaluation requirements in the arrangements. All affected regions and the central office did evaluations after the Black Saturday bushfires and the 2010 severe storm. However, evaluation approaches are inconsistent, for example:

- one audited region thoroughly evaluated its recovery operations after the Black Saturday bushfires, whereas the others only did debriefs
- DHS did not evaluate recovery activities in response to the H1N1 influenza pandemic and a major flood in 2007 at one of the audited regions.

DHS could also benefit more from evaluations, for example:

- two of the audited regions could not demonstrate follow-through on issues identified in debriefs after their 2009 bushfire operations
- at one region external partner agencies who contributed to the debriefs said they did not get feedback about the outcomes
- the audited regions said they did not get EMB feedback on their evaluations.

There are no guidelines for evaluating a recovery operation to promote consistency and links to recovery planning. At the state level, DHS has not used evaluations to inform reviews of the arrangements in the past five years, though it intends to use recent evaluations for the planned October 2010 review. Links between the review of regional recovery plans and evaluations were missing at three of the audited regions. These are missed opportunities to learn from experience and to prevent issues from happening again.

2.6 Recovery training

The arrangements define DHS's obligation to provide ongoing recovery training and education. This obligation extends to all agencies involved in recovery services or management.

DHS provides a good range of recovery training courses. Courses include broad education about recovery principles and management; specific recovery services, such as grants administration and personal support; and technical skills, such as the use of DHS's Request, Incident and Emergency Management System. DHS advertises and runs courses regularly, giving DHS staff and partner agencies easily accessible training. More than 1 500 internal and external staff have attended recovery-related training courses since 1 January 2009. Evaluation feedback shows course participants are satisfied with the quality of training.

Training uptake by partner agencies is high. Agencies train together and DHS staff and partner agency members say that this strengthens working relationships and therefore benefits recovery operations.

There is a gap in the uptake of recovery training among senior DHS staff. This is particularly common at the executive level, among those who have decision-making responsibilities during a recovery operation. This presents a risk to the effectiveness of recovery operations. In their *Bushfire Preparedness Action Plan 2009–10*, DHS outlines its plan to develop and implement a compulsory executive orientation program for emergency management. DHS has not put this into practice yet.

2.7 Strategic direction

Recovery is an area where the centralised DHS EMB must coordinate with eight regional offices, and central and regional offices must coordinate with multiple recovery partners. To make sure everyone is working towards a consistent, best possible recovery model, clear strategic direction and guidance is necessary.

There is no overarching DHS policy or strategic guidance on recovery. The last relevant policy document was published in 2005, *Strengthening Emergency Management Capability and Capacity 2005–07*. In the absence of clearly communicated and agreed priorities, regional DHS offices have developed their own work plans. Positively, this has led to some valuable innovations. On the negative side, it has led to duplication of effort, inconsistency across the state, lack of communication about developments, and in some cases, disengagement between regional and central offices.

Recognising the need for a more unified and strategic approach to recovery and other aspects of emergency management, DHS has drafted a statement of strategic intent and a corporate plan for emergency management in the health and community services for 2009–12. Given the EMB is a shared service between DHS and the Department of Health; these documents must be approved by both departments and this process is ongoing.

Despite delays in releasing these strategic documents, DHS needs to work with its regional offices to determine and establish priorities for building recovery capacity and capability, not only internally, but also with recovery partners. This is essential for optimal use of resources and knowledge, as well as statewide consistency.

Recommendations

The Department of Human Services should:

1. Develop practical, operational guidelines for implementing recovery at the state level.
 2. Improve regional recovery plans through:
 - developing a consistent format that meets *Emergency Management Manual Victoria* content requirements
 - revising plans biennially with recovery partners
 - routine review of regional plans by Emergency Management Branch.
 3. Regularly test recovery plans with partner agencies.
 4. Create evaluation guidelines for recovery operations, including links to planning.
 5. Make sure relevant senior staff complete recovery training.
 6. Communicate strategic priorities to achieve state and regional level alignment in building recovery capacity and capability.
-

3 Recovery operations

At a glance

Background

The Department of Human Services (DHS) is responsible for coordinating recovery operations that try to restore normality to emergency affected individuals and communities. This part examines the coordination, efficiency and effectiveness of DHS's recovery operations.

Conclusion

Overall, DHS coordinates recovery operations well. DHS activates recovery plans quickly and can manage and deliver high volumes of recovery services. DHS recognises it can improve recovery operations through better communication and information management systems, and in the way it plans for large-scale emergencies.

Findings

- DHS activates recovery plans and emergency operations centres quickly. Its recovery committees are effective.
- Impact assessment, communication and information resources are underdeveloped. DHS has started to address this.
- During recent emergency events, DHS demonstrated it can coordinate and deliver high volumes of recovery services.
- Some staff that took on recovery roles during the Black Saturday bushfires were not properly trained, highlighting the need for better training and deployment.
- The Black Saturday bushfires highlighted the need to clarify roles and responsibilities for some recovery activities, and for DHS to be better prepared for large-scale recovery operations.

Recommendations

The Department of Human Services should:

- work with regions and partner agencies at the state level to create consistent, streamlined impact assessment processes and systems
- complete work on emergency communication and information management issues
- base targets for staff in emergency roles on regional needs and develop a staff deployment strategy
- work with the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee, regions, and other partners to facilitate understanding and ownership of roles and responsibilities for common recovery services.

3.1 Introduction

Recovery operations aim to support affected individuals and communities through coordination and delivery of services that meet their needs. This relies on assessment of the emergency's impact, coordinating structures to determine and deploy the necessary services, and systems to support communication and information.

The *State Emergency Recovery Arrangements* (the arrangements) devolve recovery responsibility to the agency closest to the community, the municipal council. However, regional Department of Human Services (DHS) offices take on a coordinating role when an emergency affects multiple councils or exceeds a council's management capacity. Central DHS coordinates recovery during a state-level event that affects multiple regions. Recent recovery operations involving DHS include the severe storm in March 2010 and the February 2009 Black Saturday bushfires. Appendix B provides a more comprehensive list of DHS's recovery operations.

This part of the report reviews recovery operations, focusing on coordination, efficiency and effectiveness.

3.2 Conclusion

Overall, DHS is coordinated, efficient and effective in managing recovery operations. DHS is prepared at high-risk times and acts quickly when needed, sending out staff, activating emergency operations centres and convening recovery committees. Recovery committees are effective in identifying and addressing issues in a multi-agency forum and DHS's strong relationships with its partners support recovery operations. DHS provides and coordinates many services during an operation through staff who volunteer to take on recovery roles. It monitors and reports on operations regularly.

Recovery operations can improve through better communication and information management systems. DHS has recognised the need for dedicated communication resources to avoid the confusion and communication delays that happened during Black Saturday recovery operations. Existing information systems do not fully support operations, and DHS could make better use of available technologies.

The recovery operation for the Black Saturday bushfires highlighted gaps in DHS's recovery planning. DHS regions had no contingency for working with a central authority. Regional offices wanting local autonomy and flexibility struggled with state-level directions aimed at delivering a consistent recovery model and equitable services. Past recovery planning and experience focused on local and regional-level events, and DHS had not designed service systems for such a large emergency. The scale meant it had to develop new solutions for services, such as case management and handling material aid. DHS has since adopted a tiered model that caters for small, medium and catastrophic emergencies to prevent this from happening again.

3.3 Activating recovery

Effective recovery starts as soon as possible in an emergency and typically overlaps emergency response efforts. DHS is able to activate recovery services quickly.

3.3.1 Being prepared

DHS has put a lot of effort into preparing for code red fire days, providing procedures and education, and establishing effective relationships with emergency services. It prepares staff deployment rosters in anticipation of summer fires, activates emergency operations centres (EOC) on code red days and has early warning systems.

DHS demonstrated its preparedness during the Black Saturday bushfires. The Emergency Management Branch (EMB) had advised regional offices the day before the emergency to prepare their EOCs, confirm contact arrangements with the Country Fire Authority (CFA), and review staff rosters. Of the four audited regions, three had their EOCs activated or on stand-by on the morning before the fires broke out. The fourth, which was in a metropolitan area, activated its EOC the next day. The central DHS Emergency Coordination Centre was also activated before the fires.

DHS sent emergency liaison officers to CFA and municipal council control centres from the first day of the fires. Liaison officers provide communication links between response agencies, councils and DHS.

Similarly, the central EMB and DHS regional offices were well informed and responded quickly during the 2010 severe storm. These efforts mean that information about the emergency flows to DHS as soon as possible, fast tracking assessment of recovery need, staff deployment, and services.

3.3.2 Working with response

Emergency response focuses on combating an emergency and providing rescue. Victoria Police is the coordinating agency for response. DHS works with response agencies to arrange handover of coordination when the response phase ends.

DHS has a template to document response to recovery transition processes. In practice, the template is used infrequently and transition planning is done through committee forums and liaison arrangements between agencies. When agency relationships are strong and the timing for transition is clear, this works well. However, DHS and response agency representatives report occasional problems during transition, such as handover delays or unexpected withdrawals of response resources. The formal signing of a transition plan by both agencies would mitigate this.

3.3.3 Impact assessment

An impact assessment identifies the emergency's effect on the community and indicates the scale of recovery services needed. The assessment documents the number of houses damaged and people needing accommodation, the extent of fencing and livestock destroyed, and impacts on public health. Municipal councils, response agencies, and government departments other than DHS, collect this information at various stages after an emergency. DHS collates the data and often adds to it.

Impact assessment data can be delayed because of the nature of an emergency, for example, it can take time to reach and assess properties in a flood. However, the way agencies collect and share data can also cause delays. Agency impact assessments vary depending on the focus of their respective roles, for example, agriculture, infrastructure or people. This can lead to data gaps and need for reassessment. Agencies' capacity and expertise in assessing emergencies also varies.

As the end user of impact assessment information, DHS regions are addressing these problems by developing their own ways to prevent inconsistencies and inefficiencies. This includes development of regionalised databases and, in one region, training tools and guidelines for partner agencies. Instead of developing separate solutions, a statewide, inter-agency approach for collecting and recording impact data is needed.

3.3.4 Staff deployment

DHS staff volunteer to take on a range of roles in a recovery operation, temporarily leaving their daily jobs. These roles include grants administration, providing personal support, acting as liaison officers, logistics management and leadership roles. This means that ongoing volunteer recruitment, training and management is necessary to meet recovery needs in an emergency.

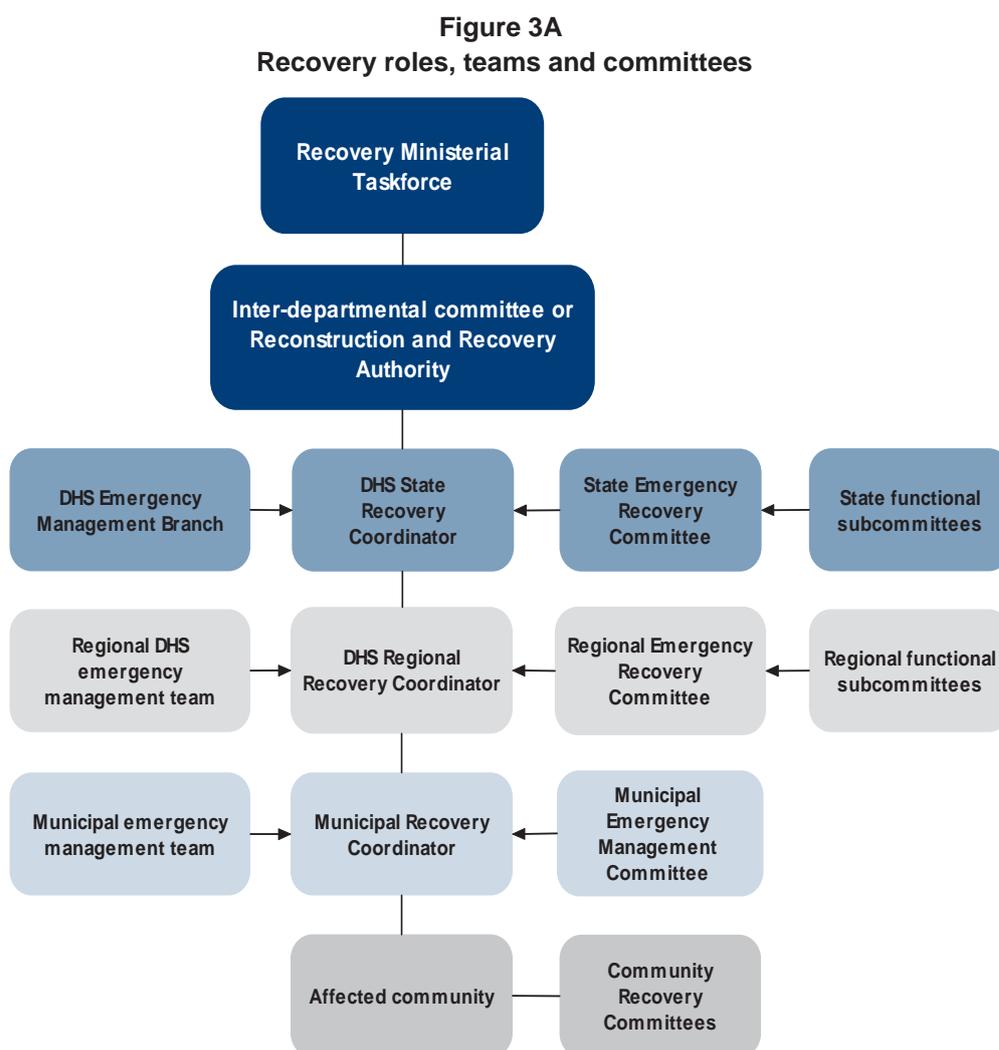
The EMB sets regional targets for the number of staff trained and ready for deployment, in specific emergency roles. However, these targets are often not met, and for some roles the targets are inadequate. Targets are not set according to scenario modelling, which would account for regional needs, such as size. Regional data records on volunteers are often outdated and/or not consistent with central information.

DHS needs more senior-level support in recruiting and keeping volunteers. Evaluations of the Black Saturday bushfires showed that management became reluctant to release volunteer staff as the recovery efforts continued. While DHS has identified a need to establish emergency management as core business, it has yet to act on this.

3.4 Coordinating and communicating

3.4.1 Roles and structures

DHS uses staff, teams and committee structures to coordinate recovery. Figure 3A illustrates these in context with municipal councils and the community.

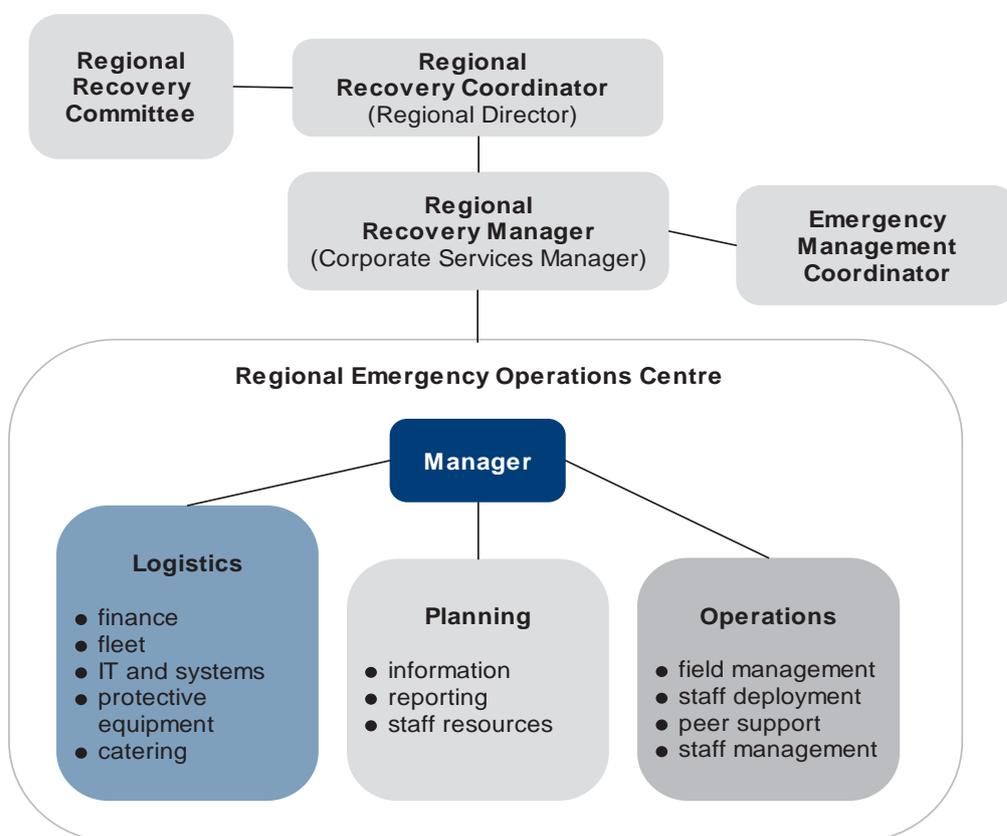


Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

During a recovery operation, DHS convenes its recovery committees, at regional and/or state levels. DHS uses committee members from existing emergency recovery planning committees and brings in other members depending on the nature of the operation. Often the recovery committee creates subcommittees to address specific needs, for example, for social needs, health and wellbeing, or restoration of the environment and infrastructure. The committees are vital to inter-agency coordination and problem solving.

Staff with dedicated emergency roles, including recovery roles, are those in the central EMB, and eight Emergency Management Coordinators, one in each DHS region. Additional DHS staff with recovery roles hold other positions in the organisation and activate their recovery roles as needed. During an emergency, depending on its scale, a regional office will activate its Regional Emergency Operations Centre (REOC) and emergency management team. In a state-level emergency, DHS central office activates the Emergency Coordination Centre and its team. State and regional operating structures are consistent. Figure 3B illustrates regional arrangements.

Figure 3B
Regional recovery coordination structure



Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

These roles and coordinating structures work well. The EMB has worked with regions to standardise emergency management team roles with clear position descriptions and tasks. Three of the four audited regions could demonstrate the quick activation of REOCs and regional recovery committees in response to recent emergencies. Committee minutes, REOC reports and feedback from external members of regional recovery committees, show that these structures effectively identify and address issues, communicate upwards to the state-level, and coordinate recovery efforts.

An exception was the audited metropolitan region's response to the Black Saturday bushfires. It was slower than other regions in activating recovery plans particularly in convening its recovery committee and subcommittees. External recovery committee members said there was confusion around roles early on, and felt the DHS region could have addressed this better. These comments are supported by internal staff feedback in the post-operation debrief. The region's relative lack of experience in emergencies probably contributed to this, which it could have avoided by testing its recovery plan.

3.4.2 Communication and information management

Managing key messages and tracking information is essential during a recovery operation. This requires clear communication pathways and systems for capturing and sharing information.

Managing messages

DHS and external staff consistently raised communication as an issue in the Black Saturday bushfires debriefs. DHS staff and partner agencies struggled with conflicting information, delays in receiving information, and information gaps.

DHS faced several communication challenges in this event, including:

- a change in the lead recovery agency during the event, with the introduction of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority, (VBRRA) and the transition of responsibilities over February and March 2009
- changing messages related to state and Commonwealth government decisions, for example, about grants eligibility
- limited access to communication technology and equipment for staff in the field.

In an emergency context, these challenges are predictable, and better planning could address them. During the event, DHS did not have dedicated communication staff within emergency management teams or a generic communication plan to adapt and activate, or clear communication management systems.

In 2009, the EMB commissioned a review of communications and following a recommendation, appointed a Crisis Communications Manager. DHS plans to develop a communications strategy and strengthen communications within regions and their emergency management teams.

Managing data

DHS's data system for emergencies is the Request, Incident and Emergency Management System (RIEMS). DHS uses RIEMS to document emergency incidents, record persons affected by emergencies, and log grants applications and payments.

DHS staff said that RIEMS is time consuming and does not meet needs. To address this gap DHS regional offices have developed and maintained other systems to record and manage information, such as staff rosters and external contacts. One of the flaws in RIEMS, identified during the Black Saturday bushfires, was its failure to show pending or paid grants. This led to duplicate grant requests and payments, and additional administrative burden. Through a system upgrade, DHS has fixed this issue for future recovery events.

In recognition of the problems with RIEMS and emergency information management, DHS has commissioned a project to map current systems and identify gaps. It is important that DHS completes this and follows up on recommendations so recovery operations can benefit from better communication technologies and data management.

3.5 Recovery services

Recovery services include financial and accommodation assistance, counselling and personal support, restoration of infrastructure, and rebuilding a community's economy and social connections.

DHS does not directly provide all these services but works with municipal councils, other government departments and private sector bodies who do. Areas where DHS is involved in direct service provision are:

- personal hardship grants
- housing
- psychosocial support, for example, personal support and counselling
- community development
- recovery centres or community hubs
- case management.

This section looks at DHS's delivery of recovery services using two case studies—the 2010 severe storm and the Black Saturday bushfires.

3.5.1 2010 severe storm

Melbourne, northern central Victoria and the Goulburn Valley experienced hail, heavy rainfall and strong winds from March 5 to 7, 2010. This storm resulted in:

- more than 7 500 calls to emergency services
- damage to homes, causing 242 households to relocate
- more than 100 000 insurance claims, worth about \$880 million.

The EMB started reporting to regional offices from 6 March 2010, providing updates from emergency service reports. Regional offices worked with municipal councils over that weekend and started activating recovery services, including:

- sending out grant officers to municipal councils to provide more than 450 emergency grants to displaced families
- making major grants available to families experiencing significant hardship
- assisting councils in providing accommodation for displaced families

- working with affected councils to arrange more than 4 000 Red Cross outreach visits in the eastern region, which was hardest hit, and identifying those needing help
- working with partner agencies to develop and distribute community messages.

DHS regional and central offices provided regular reports and briefings throughout the event, monitoring grant payments and outcomes for displaced families and addressing any issues. Representatives from municipal councils and other agencies complimented DHS on its efforts during this event. They reported that communication and assistance was timely and helpful. DHS has commissioned a statewide evaluation of this operation.

3.5.2 2009 Black Saturday bushfires

The Black Saturday bushfires began on 7 February 2009. They affected 20 municipalities with a combined population of 130 000, burnt 400 000 hectares of land, destroyed or damaged about 3 400 properties and claimed 173 lives. The size and severity of the emergency required a large-scale, ongoing recovery effort.

Achievements

DHS's ability to get services on the ground rapidly, given the demand, changing circumstances, and time pressures, was a major achievement. Due to the scale of the recovery operation required, DHS created the Bushfire Recovery Services Unit (BRSU) to coordinate service delivery and support affected regions.

Staff deployment

DHS deployed staff as soon as the fires started. In the first four months after the Black Saturday bushfires DHS deployed more than 550 of its staff across the state. Training courses held throughout February and March 2009 helped to sustain numbers of available trained staff.

Multi-agency debriefs consistently highlighted the dedication and commitment of DHS staff who demonstrated their preparedness to work in challenging and unfamiliar environments using a collaborative approach.

Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service

On 10 February 2009, the government announced a case management service open to anyone affected by the bushfires, with promised contact from a case manager within 24 hours. DHS, in partnership with Centrelink, started this service within three days, setting up an information system and working with provider agencies and the Commonwealth to secure case managers. Within a month, 4 000 people registered with the case management services. By mid-2010, more than 5 500 people had used the service.

While DHS was unable to meet the 24-hour target until May 2009, client satisfaction with the case management service has generally been good. Two-thirds of comments were positive. By 30 July 2010, more than 4 400 cases were completed and closed.

Social, health and community recovery

Under the governance arrangements for the Black Saturday bushfire recovery operation, DHS was made responsible for the social, health and community aspects of recovery. This includes personal hardship grants, housing, the establishment of temporary villages and psychosocial support, such as counselling and mental health services. DHS managed community service hubs, one-stop-shops for service access and provided administrative support for the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund. It also funded councils to employ Community Development Officers, to work with the community to deliver projects and events to re-establish social connection.

Figure 3C gives examples of recovery services that DHS provided and/or coordinated. This reflects the large-scale contribution DHS has made, and continues to make, to this recovery operation. When VBRR disbands in mid-2011, DHS will continue to provide some recovery services. Depending on demand, case management and community service hubs will continue until March 2011 and housing services into 2012.

Figure 3C
Examples of Department of Human Services
Black Saturday recovery services as at 2 September 2010

Recovery service	Quantity (Cost \$mil)
Personal hardship grants	
Emergency—to meet immediate needs e.g. food, clothing	8 310 (\$6.3)
Major—to meet ongoing needs	2 915 (\$16.9)
Temporary living expenses grants	1 083 (\$4.5)
Re-establishment grants	1 832 (\$12)
Housing	
Households needing DHS accommodation assistance	1 347
Housing needs assessments completed	1 400
Peak number of households in temporary accommodation	438
Number transferred to permanent arrangements	324
Psychosocial support	
Number of redeemed counselling vouchers	1 900
Support groups established	12
Community information sessions provided	32
Numbers of counsellors trained in psychosocial recovery	365
Community services	
Community Development Officers	17.5 EFT
Community service hubs	10
Peak average weekly visits to hubs	1 100

Figure 3C
Examples of Department of Human Services
Black Saturday recovery services as at 2 September 2010 – *continued*

Recovery service	Quantity (Cost \$mil)
Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service	
Total cases—active and closed	5 515
Peak number of case managers	380
Peak number of provider agencies	70

Note: This table is not a complete list of all recovery activities that the Department of Human Services coordinated or provided.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, using Department of Human Services data.

Challenges

This emergency required a recovery operation of immense scale and complexity. As a result, DHS experienced several challenges highlighting areas for improvement.

New governance structures

Due to the scale of the emergency and its impact, the government created VBRRRA to lead and coordinate the recovery operation. VBRRRA gave DHS coordinating responsibility for the social, health and community aspects of recovery. DHS set up the BRSU to do this, which moved to the same location as VBRRRA.

VBRRRA officially began on 10 February 2009 and gradually took over recovery responsibilities from DHS during February and March 2009. This change created confusion around role delineation. In its July 2009 meeting, the State Emergency Recovery Committee was still trying to clarify roles and connections between the two agencies. Regional Emergency Recovery Committee minutes also show confusion about roles and communication channels. Resolving these questions quickly would have helped staff with decision-making and problem solving.

Under the arrangements, access to recovery services must be equitable in widespread emergencies. The Black Saturday bushfires affected six of the eight DHS regions. VBRRRA and BRSU made equity in service provision a priority.

This caused tension in some regions. Those with limited recovery experience appreciated centralised authority, but experienced regions felt disempowered and doubted the centralised approach was meeting local needs. This was a major theme in post-bushfire debriefs and multi-agency focus groups run during our audit.

Future recovery planning at state and regional levels needs to consider ways of providing service equity while also supporting the recovery principle of devolved responsibility. This will help keep local and regional levels engaged in recovery planning and restore their sense of ownership of this core service.

Delivering recovery services

Several challenges affected the efficiency of recovery services. Previous recovery planning and experience focused on local or regional-level emergencies. DHS did not have ready-to-go service delivery systems to meet the needs of an emergency this size. Pre-existing arrangements for services, like case management and handling of material aid, were insufficient. DHS is now developing a tiered model for recovery response that will help it plan for small, medium and catastrophic emergencies.

There was confusion about agency responsibility for repairing fences, providing water, approving sites as safe, and removing toxic waste, such as burnt treated pine, which slowed service provision. Water and fencing issues arose in previous recovery operations but were not resolved. Engagement with recovery partners about these predictable issues in planning would have prevented delays.

DHS employed some staff in recovery roles that they had not properly trained and/or briefed for the task. This put stress on these staff, their colleagues, and the community members they served. This was partly due to the large numbers of staff needed. However, findings from DHS debriefs showed that there were not enough liaison officers. Decisions were also made to use untrained senior staff over more junior staff with emergency training. Debriefs showed that senior staff were not always equipped to manage in an emergency environment. This shows that DHS needs to base training targets on scenarios and establish better deployment strategies.

RIEMS's inability to display pending and paid grants resulted in duplicate payments and extra administration burden. Lack of IT equipment for grants officers out in the field, as well as changes to grants also increased administration. As a result, it cost more than \$1 million to process \$18 million in grants. DHS aims to address these issues through a review of grants administration, due in October 2010. The objectives include review of grants policy and delivery and ways to simplify their administration.

Recommendations

The Department of Human Services should:

7. Work with regions and partner agencies at the state level to create consistent, streamlined impact assessment processes and systems.
8. Complete work on emergency communication and information management issues.
9. Base targets for staff in emergency roles on regional needs and develop a staff deployment strategy.
10. Work with the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee, regions, and other partners to facilitate understanding and ownership of roles and responsibilities for common recovery services.

Appendix A.

Assessment of regional recovery plans

Figure A1
Comparison of audited regional recovery plans
against requirements in the *Emergency Management Manual Victoria*

	Content or process requirement	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4
1.	The plan must detail coordination arrangements across the four functional areas of recovery—social; health and wellbeing; economic; natural and built environments.	Not met	Met	Not met	Partly met
2.	The plan must detail regional-level recovery agency roles and responsibilities.	Partly met	Partly met	Partly met	Met
3.	The plan must detail communication arrangements between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • municipalities in the region • regional-level recovery agencies • state-level recovery management • the affected community. 	Partly met	Partly met	Partly met	Met
4.	Plans document ways to link affected individuals into existing services provided by existing agencies.	Not met	Not met	Partly met	Met
5.	Plans establish understandings and document agreements to address issues arising from cross-region events, for example cost sharing, resource use.	Not met	Not met	Not met	Met
6.	Planning arrangements should be conscious of the responsibility to support recovery activities for events that may occur outside regional boundaries.	Not met	Not met	Not met	Partly met
7.	Plans need to include provisions to ensure equity of recovery services in such circumstances, for example through a single point of contact and referral services.	Not met	Not met	Not met	Partly met
8.	Plans should details structures that bring together agencies to address recovery-related issues.	Partly met	Met	Met	Met

Figure A1
Comparison of audited regional recovery plans
against requirements in the *Emergency Management Manual Victoria* – continued

	Content or process requirement	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4
9.	The plan recognises the possibility of the establishment of a Ministerial Taskforce and has in place strategies to support and work cooperatively with the Taskforce.	Met	Not met	Not met	Not met
10.	The plan includes agreements with response agencies that have responsibility for community briefings.	Met	Met	Met	Met
11.	Plans reference the documented agreements between agencies that address entry into the recovery service system, including agreement protocols for agencies undertaking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • impact and damage assessment • outreach services • 1800 numbers • management of recovery centres to facilitate collection and distribution of information about the event and community impact. 	Not met	Partly met	Not met	Not met
12.	Plans detail agreed arrangements and protocols for expenditure where it is likely that reimbursements will be sought.	Partly met	Not met	Not met	Not met
13.	Review of the plan occurred in consultation with regional stakeholders identified in the plan.	Not met	Met	Partly met	Not met
14.	The plan has been formally reviewed by the Regional Emergency Recovery Planning Committee in the past two years.	Not met	Met	Met	Not met
15.	Plans are developed in conjunction with stakeholders that are likely to provide recovery services.	Not met	Met	Partly met	Not met

Note: Results were correct at time of auditing. Some regions had actions in place at this time to review plans and may now meet requirements for formal review.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, from the *Emergency Management Manual Victoria* and audited regional recovery plans.

Appendix B.

Department of Human Services recovery operations

Figure B1
Examples of recent recovery operations

Year	Recovery operation
2010	Pakistan floods Locust plague Severe storm
2009	Pacific tsunami Windstorm H1N1 influenza pandemic Black Saturday bushfires Heatwave
2008	Windstorm Methane gas leak Cranbourne (Brookland Greens)
2007	Footscray chlorine fire Yallourn open cut mine flood Gippsland floods Burnley Tunnel accident Kerang train crash Power outage
2006	Great Divide fires Java earthquake
2005	Stawell bushfires Bali bombings
2004	Asian tsunami Grampians floods
2003	Ballan derailment Melbourne storm and floods Victorian bushfires
2002	Bali bombing Drought

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, using Department of Human Services data.

Appendix C.

Audit Act 1994 section 16— submissions and comments

Introduction

In accordance with section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994* a copy of this report was provided to the Department of Human Services with a request for submissions or comments.

The submissions and comments provided are not subject to audit nor the evidentiary standards required to reach an audit conclusion. Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with the agency head.

Submissions and comments received

RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Human Services

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Department of Human Services

Secretary

50 Consolet Street
GPO Box 4057
Melbourne Victoria 3001
DX210081
www.dhs.vic.gov.au
Telephone: 1300 650 172
Facsimile: (03) 9096 9220

Mr D D R Pearson
Auditor-General
Victorian Auditor-General's Office
Level 24
35 Collins Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Pearson

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the performance audit report on The Department of Human Services' role in emergency recovery under section 15(1)(a) of the Audit Act 1994. The Department of Human Services has reviewed the report and a response is enclosed.

The Department has accepted all of the recommendations in the report. I would like to thank the Auditor-General's Office for their work, and especially the recognition within the report of the complexity of the recovery process and the responsiveness and commitment of The Department of Human Services staff.

It should be noted that, in the recovery response to the 2009 bushfires, Victoria faced an emergency of a scale never before experienced. In response, the Department quickly developed new or more extensive service responses and adapted these services to the needs as they arose. This ability to respond and adapt is key to the delivery of effective recovery operations. The findings of the audit will help the Department improve its emergency management capability as well as further consolidate relationships with partner organisations and key agencies involved in recovery operations.

Should you wish to discuss the content of the letter, please do not hesitate to contact Pam White, Executive Director, Service Delivery and Performance on 9096 8444.

Yours sincerely

Gill Callister
Secretary



**RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Human Services –
continued**

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**DHS response to recommendations provided in the performance audit report on
The Department of Human Services' role in emergency recovery**

1. Develop practical operational guidelines for implementing recovery at the state level

Accepted. Part Four of the Emergency Management Manual Victoria (EMMV) is currently being updated to provide more operational level information. A list of sub-plans will also be linked to the EMMV to provide further information.

2. Improve regional recovery plans by:

- **Developing a consistent format that meets Emergency Management Manual Victoria content requirements**
- **Revising plans biennially with recovery partners**
- **Routine review of regional plans by EM**

Accepted. A common regional template is available and will be reviewed and applied at the regional level. A biennial review process will also be established.

3. Regularly test recovery plans with partner agencies

Accepted. Recovery exercise process to be developed and implemented at the State, regional and municipal level.

4. Create evaluation guidelines for recovery operations including links to planning

Accepted. Evaluation guidelines will be developed and implemented.

5. Make sure relevant senior staff complete recovery training

Accepted. The annual State level training program will include relevant senior staff.

6. Communicate strategic priorities to achieve state and regional level alignment in building recovery capacity and capability

Accepted. The Health and Human Services Emergency Management Corporate Plan 2009 – 12 has been signed by the Department of Human Services and we are working with the Department of Health to finalise endorsement.

7. Work with regions and partner agencies at the state-level to create consistent, streamlined impact assessment processes and systems

Accepted. The updated EMMV includes all the current post impact assessment processes and further work is planned with key agencies to align and, where possible, integrate these systems. The DHS/DH Emergency Management Information Management & Technology Strategy is currently being developed will also advise future direction of these processes.

8. Complete work to address emergency communication and information management issues

Accepted. The DHS/DH Emergency Management Information Management & Technology Strategy will identify data and systems issues.

9. Base targets for staff in emergency roles on regional needs and develop a staff deployment strategy

Accepted. A common regional template is available that will be reviewed (including base targets for staff) and applied at the regional level. A staff deployment strategy will also be developed.

10. Work with the State Recovery Planning Committee, regions, and other partners to facilitate understanding and ownership of roles and responsibilities for common recovery services

Accepted. The EMMV is currently being updated to provide more operational level information including clear definition of roles and responsibilities. A list of detailed sub-plans from other agencies will also be linked to the EMMV to provide further information.

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Sustainable Management of Victoria's Groundwater Resources (2010–11:11)	October 2010

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