Australian Capital Territory

Emergencies (Concept of Operations for bush and grass fires in the Australian Capital Territory) Commissioner's Guidelines Amendment 2018

Notifiable instrument NI2018–713

made under the

Emergencies Act 2004, s 11 (Commissioner may make guidelines)

1 Name of instrument

This instrument is the Emergencies (Concept of Operations for bush and grass fires in the Australian Capital Territory) Commissioner's Guidelines Amendment 2018.

2 Commencement

This instrument commences on the day after notification.

3 Amendment – new part 7.3

I amend the *Emergencies (Concept of Operations for bush and grass fires in the Australian Capital Territory) Commissioner's Guidelines 2017* (NI2017-92) by inserting a new part 7.3:

7.3   Bush and Grass Fire Warnings and Public Information Protocol

To ensure a consistent approach to the delivery of warnings and public information, the provision of warnings and/or public information should be in accordance with the *Bush and Grass Fire Warnings and Public Information Protocol* in *Appendix 3*.

4 Amendment – Appendix 2

I amend the *Emergencies (Concept of Operations for bush and grass fires in the Australian Capital Territory) Commissioner's Guidelines 2017* (NI2017-92) by omitting Appendix 2 and substituting it with Schedule 1.

5 Amendment – new Appendix 3

I amend the *Emergencies (Concept of Operations for bush and grass fires in the Australian Capital Territory) Commissioner's Guidelines 2017* (NI2017-92) by inserting a new Appendix 3, as set out in Schedule 2.

Dominic Lane
Commissioner, ACT Emergency Services Agency
14 December 2018

Schedule 1

Appendix 2
Approved Incident Management Team Members

Persons to be considered for appointment as IMT members for level 2 and 3 incidents will be drawn from the register maintained by the ACT Emergency Services Agency.

Persons who possess the relevant competency and/or experience as at the date of this instrument are:

Incident Controller Level 3	
Allen, Tracey	ACTSES
Brown, Mark	ACTF&R
Cooper, Neil	ACTPCS
Flynn, Paul	ACTF&R
Jones, Pat	ACTF&R
Kilpatrick, Rob	ESA R&P
Lhuede, Nick	ESA R&P
Luther, Matt	ACTRFS
Maloney, Richard	ACTF&R
Murphy, Joe	ACTRFS
Phillips, Mark	ACTF&R
Schlizio, Jim	ACTF&R
Scott, Rohan	ACTRFS
Shonk, Matt	ACTF&R
Stevens, Brendan	ESA P&C
Turton, Ross	ACTRFS
Weston, Ron	ACTF&R
Whelan, Georgina	ACTSES
Wren, Howard	ACTAS
Zeitlhofer, Chris	ACTF&R

Incident Controller Level 2	
Bourne, Todd	ACTF&R
Brennan, Patrick	ACTF&R
Brewer, Glenn	ACTF&R
Brighenti, Danny	ACTF&R
Cameron, Russell	ACTF&R
Cochrane, Michael	ACTF&R
Cortese, Paul	ACTSES
Curtis, Leigh	ACTF&R
Evans, Sam	ACTF&R
Farquhar, Scott	ACTPCS
Fitzgerald, Mick	ACTRFS
Gale, Mal	TCCS
Gallop, Stuart	ACTF&R
Gore, Rob	ACTRFS
Harmey, Greg	ACTF&R
Henderson-Smith, Nathan	ACTSES

Schedule 1

Incident Controller Level 2	
Ible, Graham	ACTSES
Jones, Glynn	ACTF&R
Jones, Jason	ACTF&R
Maher, Neil	ACTF&R
Mason, Greg	ACTF&R
Mavity, Matthew	ACTF&R
Perks, Craig	ACTF&R
Phillips, Mark	ACTF&R
Shaw, Wayne	ACTF&R
Talbot, Brian	ACTF&R
Walsh, Jim	ACTF&R
Weston, Scott	ACTF&R
Wood, Jon	ACTAS

Operations Officer	
Barnden, Nathan	ACTRFS
Beresford, Cameron	ACTSES
Bourne, Todd	ACTF&R
Brennan, Patrick	ACTF&R
Bretherton, Simon	ACTPCS
Brewer, Glenn	ACTF&R
Brighenti, Danny	ACTF&R
Butt, Simon	ACTPCS
Cameron, Russell	ACTF&R
Cashmere, Scott	ACTRFS
Cochrane, Michael	ACTF&R
Condon, Chris	ACTRFS
Curtis, Leigh	ACTF&R
Davies, Julian	ACTRFS
Evans, Sam	ACTF&R
Farquhar, Scott	ACTPCS
Foley, Glenn	ESA G&L
Gallop, Stuart	ACTF&R
Galvin, Peter	ACTPCS
Harmey, Greg	ACTF&R
Ivill, Mick	ACTRFS
Jones, Glynn	ACTF&R
Jones, Jason	ACTF&R
Kilpatrick, Rob	ESA R&P
Lang, Scott	ACTAS
Lhuede, Nick	ESA R&P
Lundy, Rebecca	ACTAS
Maher, Neil	ACTF&R
Mason, Greg	ACTF&R
Mavity Matthew	ACTF&R
McLachlan, Adam	ACTPCS

Schedule 1

Operations Officer	
McNamara, Brett	ACTPCS
Meredith, Jason	ACTPCS
Molloy, Mark	ACTAS
Murphy, Paul	ACTRFS
Perks, Craig	ACTF&R
Phillips, Mark	ACTF&R
Potts, Greg	ACTRFS
Ribbons, Ben	ESA P&C
Scott, Rohan	ACTRFS
Shaw, Wayne	ACTF&R
Smith, Matt	ACTAS
Talbot, Brian	ACTF&R
Walsh, Jim	ACTF&R
Weston, Scott	ACTF&R
Wood, Jon	ACTAS

Planning Officer	
Cashmere, Scott	ACTRFS
Lawrey, Ryan	ACTPCS
Levine, Brian	ACTPCS
Lhuede, Nick	ESA R&P
McRae, Rick	ESA R&P
Potts, Greg	ACTRFS
Scherl, Tony	ACTPCS
Seymour, Scott	ACTPCS

Logistics Officer	
Blair, Jason	ACTSES
Butters, Matthew	ACTSES
Cashmere, Scott	ACTRFS
Cheng, Anthony	ACTSES
Colman, Matthew	ACTSES
Cortese, Jacinta	ACTSES
Cortese, Paul	ACTSES
Cowey, Joel	ACTSES
Davies, Julian	ACTRFS
Dawes, Colin	ESA G&L
Dowling, John	ACTSES
Eshman, Gillian	ACTSES
Gibbs, Clive	ACTSES
Ible, Graham	ACTSES
Kohan, Anthony	ACTSES
Lang, Scott	ACTAS
Manning, Adrian	ACTSES
McAlpine, Gordon	ACTSES
McEncroe, Doreen	ACTSES

Schedule 1

Logistics Officer	
Rozycka, Julia	ACTSES

BUSH AND GRASS FIRE WARNINGS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION PROTOCOL

ACT EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCY

VERSION 1.0

Document control

Release history

Version	Date	Author	Summary of changes
1.0	20 September 2018	Kaylee Rutland, A/g Manager, Emergency Media and Broadcast Services	Document creation

Reviewed by

Name	Title	Date
Pat Jones	A/g Chief Officer, ACT Fire & Rescue	6 February 2018
Joe Murphy	Chief Officer, ACT Rural Fire Service	20 February 2018
Emergency Services Operational Review Group		20 September 2018

Approved by

Name	Title	Date
Dominic Lane	Commissioner, ESA	October 2018

Related documents

Document name	Version
Bush and Grass Fire Messaging Alert Guidelines 2012-13	1.0
Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook – Public Information and Warnings	1.0
NSW RFS Warnings and Public Information Protocol	1.1.5
Emergencies Act 2004	
ESA Concept of Operations for Bush and Grass Fire	
Community Communications and Information Plan (CCIP)	

Contents

1   Purpose

The intent of the Bush and Grass Fire Warnings and Public Information Protocol (the Protocol) is to ensure a consistent approach to the delivery of warnings and public information for bush and grass fire incidents in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

This Protocol deals specifically with bush and grass fire incidents where warning or information is required to be sent to the community. It aims to combine a number of doctrinal publications to clarify and outline the aims and objectives of warnings and public information about bush and grass fire incidents. Members of all services and agencies involved in bush and grass fire operations are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the content of this Protocol and ensure the aims and objectives are embedded within their area of responsibility.

This Protocol is for the use of all services and agencies involved in bush and grass fire operations in the ACT. It is acknowledged that bush and grass fire incidents are dynamic by nature and as such this Protocol should be used as a guide only. This Protocol is for internal use within the ACT Government to provide guidance to agencies involved in bush and grass fire operations. Members of the public should not rely upon this Protocol as the nature, manner and order of delivery, and timing of warnings may vary with each incident, reflecting that fires can start quickly and threaten lives and property within minutes. In particular, persons should not wait for an official warning to take appropriate action, such as evacuating an area.

2   Introduction

Warnings and public information are a critical component of managing and reducing the impact of emergency incidents.

Warnings and public information have the potential to enhance public safety. The provision of timely and relevant information can assist members of the community in making informed decisions affecting their safety.

There have been significant enhancements to the delivery of warnings and public information during bush and grass fire incidents in recent years.

Following the 2003 Canberra bushfires, public information and warning systems relating to bush and grass fires and other emergencies was overhauled. The ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) established a 24 hour, seven days a week emergency media team; implemented best practise operating procedures for alerting the community; and entered into Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) arrangements with local media outlets. The purpose of these MOUs was to formalise relationships between the ESA and the media to facilitate planning and to help create a safer, more informed community.

Following the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, the *National Framework for Scaled Advice and Warnings to the Community* (the Framework) was introduced. This Framework provided a graduated scale of warnings and information for bush and grass fires across Australia. The Framework resulted in a nationally consistent approach to bush and grass fire danger ratings, alert levels and warning structures.

The Framework has undergone a number of changes since its introduction, as fire and emergency services embedded it in operations. In some states, there have been changes to the way the Framework operates and the types of hazards it applies to. In the ACT, the Framework applies only to bush and grass fire warnings and public information.

Bush and grass fire emergency warnings are delivered to the community and local media via tools such as the Single Point of Truth (SPOT). The SPOT, which is part technology and part process, disseminates warning information to SMS and email distribution lists, ESA's website and ESA's social media pages simultaneously.

In cases when the ESA requires the community to act quickly, the Emergency Alert telephone warning system is used to warn the community of emerging threats. The Emergency Alert telephone warning system issues warnings to landline telephones and mobile phones linked to registered service addresses (properties and houses) or mobile phones registered with mobile phone towers identified in a geographical area affected by an emergency. An **Emergency Alert** message may advise to evacuate an area, stay inside your home or provide other instructions.

3   Responsibilities

The ESA Commissioner (the Commissioner) has a statutory responsibility for community education and awareness about emergencies, and improving community preparedness for emergencies, including the preparation of plans. In exercising these responsibilities, the Commissioner is required to emphasise the importance of communicating information, advice and warnings to the community during an emergency. The Commissioner is supported in doing this by the operational and administrative support functions within the ESA, including media and community information officers.

The Commissioner is also assisted by Security and Emergency Management Senior Officials Group (SEMSOG).

The Commissioner has designated under the Community Communication and Information Plan that the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) will be responsible to ensure arrangements are in place for the coordination and deployment of ACT Government resources for the provision of community communication and information.

Specific operational responsibilities include:

Chief Officers - ACT Rural Fire Service ACT Fire & Rescue Service	› To ensure appropriate processes are in place for the activation of warnings and public information › To ensure adequate information is provided to allow for the activation of warnings
ESA Communication Centre (COMCEN) - Operator / Station Officer	› In conjunction with the Incident Controller, determine the alert level of an incident and identify the requirements for a warning to be communicated › Monitor the incident and adjust the alert level where necessary › Facilitate the flow of information through agreed processes (such as Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) updates, radio traffic or entry into ICON) to enable the facilitation of information and warnings
Incident Controller	› In liaison with COMCEN determine the alert level of an incident and identify the requirements for a warning to be communicated › Monitor the incident and adjust the alert level where necessary
ACT Fire & Rescue Service Commander ACT Rural Fire Service Duty Officer (DO)	› For level 1 incidents or where no Incident Management Team (IMT) is in place, liaise with the Incident Controller to determine the alert level of an incident and identify the requirements for a warning to be communicated › Monitor the incident and adjust the alert level where necessary
Public Liaison Officer / ESA Media On-call Officer	› Assist the Incident Controller in identifying the requirements for a warning to be communicated › Issue public warnings about bush and grass fires and threats in the ACT for the purpose of protecting life and property › Obtain authorisation from the Commissioner / Chief Officer to issue an Emergency Warning

4 What is a warning?

A warning is a message signalling an imminent hazard, which may include advice on protective measures[1].

For the intent of this Protocol, a warning is a message which relates to a hazard that is happening or is imminent, and is currently or likely to have an impact on the safety of a community.

This includes a message relating to an imminent bush and grass fire hazard which is likely to have an impact on the safety of a community (such as the loss of life).

By definition, more generalised alerts or information, such as fire danger ratings or total fire bans, are not considered warnings for the intent of this Protocol.

For clarity, it should be noted that in relation to bush and grass fire incidents in the ACT, an 'advice or warning' relates to the actual process of signalling a hazard. It does not correspond to incidents at the alert or information level of Emergency Warning, nor does it automatically correspond to the activation of the Emergency Alert telephone warning system.
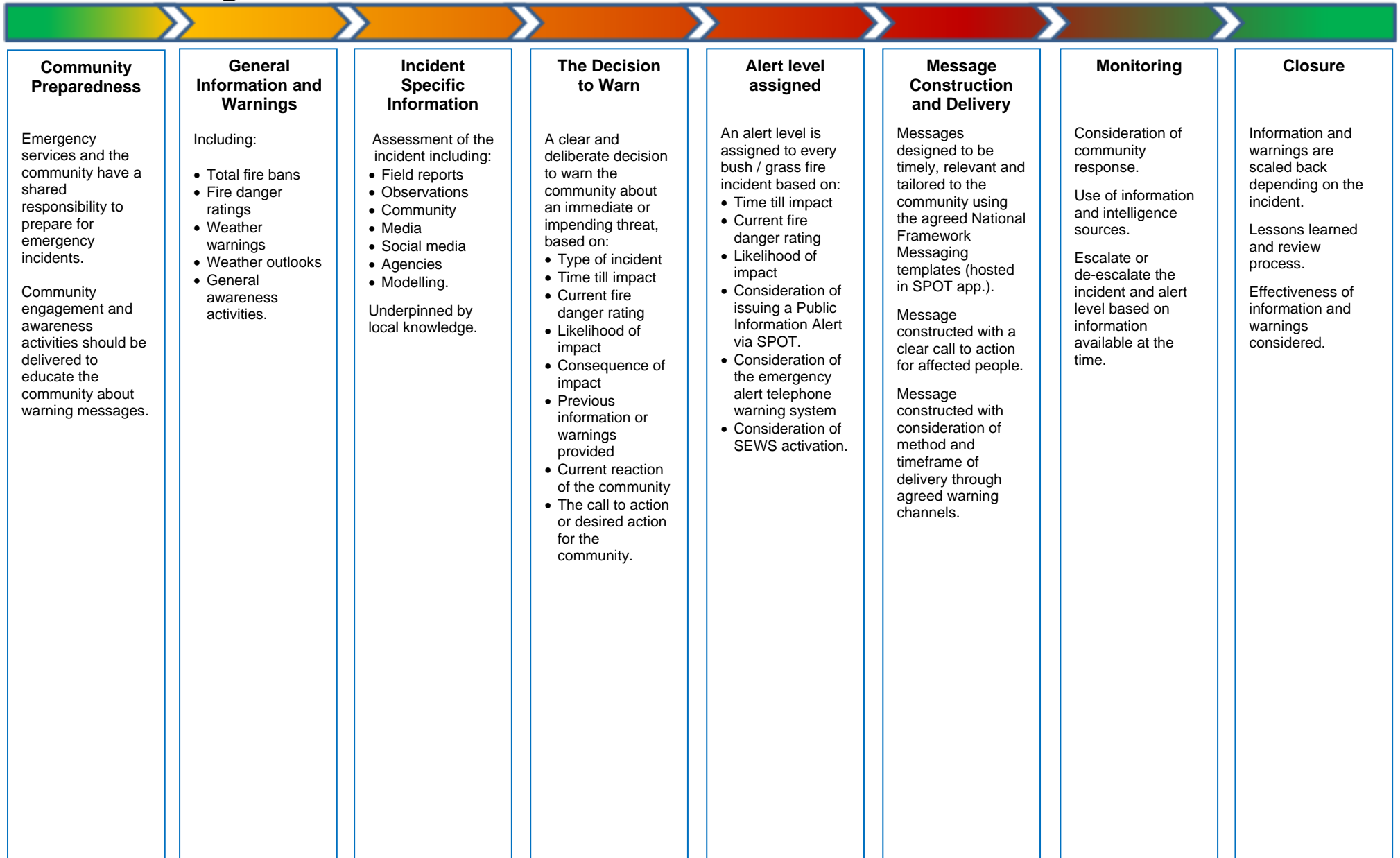
4.1 The warning process

It should be recognised that effective warnings and public information are based on a sound level of community understanding and preparedness.

The warning process has a number of stages, as outlined on the following page.

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[1] Emergency Management Australia, Attorney-General's Department, Australian Emergency Manuals Series: Glossary (1998), p 115

The Warnings Process

Community Preparedness	General Information and Warnings	Incident Specific Information	The Decision to Warn	Alert level assigned	Message Construction and Delivery	Monitoring	Closure
Emergency services and the community have a shared responsibility to prepare for emergency incidents. Community engagement and awareness activities should be delivered to educate the community about warning messages.	Including: • Total fire bans • Fire danger ratings • Weather warnings • Weather outlooks • General awareness activities.	Assessment of the incident including: • Field reports • Observations • Community • Media • Social media • Agencies • Modelling. Underpinned by local knowledge.	A clear and deliberate decision to warn the community about an immediate or impending threat, based on: • Type of incident • Time till impact • Current fire danger rating • Likelihood of impact • Consequence of impact • Previous information or warnings provided • Current reaction of the community • The call to action or desired action for the community.	An alert level is assigned to every bush / grass fire incident based on: • Time till impact • Current fire danger rating • Likelihood of impact • Consideration of issuing a Public Information Alert via SPOT. • Consideration of the emergency alert telephone warning system • Consideration of SEWS activation.	Messages designed to be timely, relevant and tailored to the community using the agreed National Framework Messaging templates (hosted in SPOT app.). Message constructed with a clear call to action for affected people. Message constructed with consideration of method and timeframe of delivery through agreed warning channels.	Consideration of community response. Use of information and intelligence sources. Escalate or de-escalate the incident and alert level based on information available at the time.	Information and warnings are scaled back depending on the incident. Lessons learned and review process. Effectiveness of information and warnings considered.

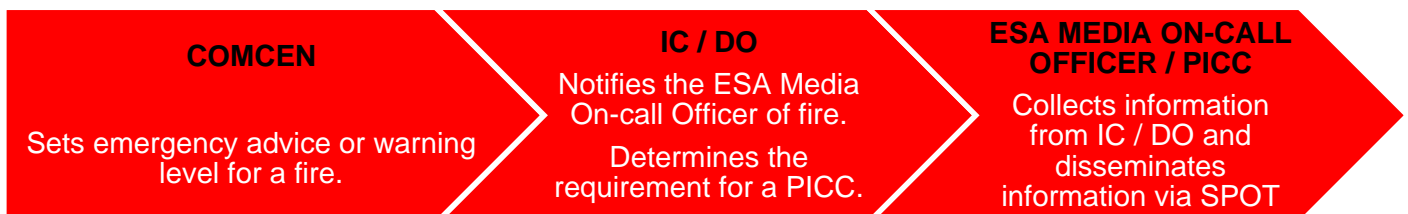## 4.2 Public information process

For level one incidents, the ESA Emergency Media and Broadcasting Unit is responsible for the provision of information to the public through the SPOT process as approved by a Duty Officer (DO) or Commander.

For level two incidents a Public Information Coordination Centre (PICC) (whole of government, refer to CCIP) may be required and will be established for level three incidents. The PICC provides the arrangements for effective communication by the ACT Government with the public and the media before, during and after major emergencies and incidents.

The PICC is established at the request of the Incident Controller. The Public Information function under the AIIMS structure may be delegated by the Incident Controller to a Public Information officer. The Public Information Officer will be responsible for information and warnings, media and community liaison.

Management of the operations of the PICC is by the Public Information Coordinator (PIC), who reports to the Incident Controller (IC), or Emergency Controller if that function has not been delegated.

A separate Sub Plan to the *ACT Emergency Plan* (the Community Communications and Information sub plan) is in place regarding the activation and operation of the PICC.

COMCEN	IC / DO	ESA MEDIA ON-CALL OFFICER / PICC
Sets emergency advice or warning level for a fire.	Notifies the ESA Media On-call Officer of fire. Determines the requirement for a PICC.	Collects information from IC / DO and disseminates information via SPOT

5   Aims and objectives of warnings and public information

Warnings and public information are critical to the prevention, preparation, and response recovery process.

Warnings and public information are key to emergency management and have real potential to save lives.

The purpose of a warning, by definition, is to inform the community of an impending or current threat, and to prompt an appropriate response or action. The action that is required of the community is usually contained in the warning message.

All information relating to incidents, especially warnings, should aim to be:

Timely	Issued to reflect the current situation, as it is understood, allowing people to take the necessary or desired action as required
Relevant	Issued with consideration to the warning area and community, including relevant descriptions of the threat and area covered
Tailored	Issued using a combination of warning methods and delivery tools, with consideration given to the community's capacity to receive, understand and respond to warnings

It should be noted that for some incidents, such as fast-moving fires, it may not be possible to issue timely, relevant and tailored warnings; however, the overriding priority should be on issuing information or warnings for the protection of life.

5.1 Principles of warnings and public information

The following principles are adopted from the *National Warning Principles and Process*, as endorsed by the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management in September 2008.

National Principle	How it's achieved in the ACT
1. **Coordinated**: a warning system should avoid duplication of effort where possible and support a shared understanding of the situation among different agencies involved in managing the incident	› ESA has legislated responsibility for issuing of alerts and warnings to the community › All agencies use the ICON system for bush and grass fires › Public information and warnings are distributed through the SPOT process, which feeds communication channels
2. **Authoritative and accountable**: warnings are to be disseminated on the decision of an authorised person. Authorities should be able to interrogate the system components for later analysis	› ESA has legislated responsibility for issuing of alerts and warnings to the community › This responsibility is delegated, where appropriate, through Service Standards
3. **Consistent/Standards based**: the information content is coordinated across all of the mechanisms used for warnings. Messages must be consistent across different sources if they are to be believed by the general population. Conflicting messages tend to create uncertainty and will delay responsive action. Any relevant identified standards will underpin the agreed System Framework	› An alert level is applied to all bush and grass fires within the ACT as soon as the incident is created › Use of standardised messaging including the *NSW Bushfire Alert Messaging Guidelines*
4. **Complete**: message content should include relevant pertinent details, including possibly a direction on the need to consult other sources, presented in a way that is easily and quickly understood by the population. This includes multiple languages in some cases, as well as the use of multi-media for those who are illiterate or people with a disability (eg. Hearing or vision impaired)	› Use of standardised messaging including the *NSW Bushfire Alert Messaging Guidelines* › Use of standardised messaging templates, such as the SPOT process and Emergency Alert › Use of a range of warning channels including online, media, face to face and translation services
5. **Multi-modal**: warnings are to be disseminated using a variety of delivery mechanisms and in multiple information presentation formats that will, in some circumstances, complement each other to produce a complete picture, with planning and processes to allow for maximum reach to all members of the community and to provide for redundancies in the case of critical infrastructure failure (eg. Power or telecommunications)	› Use of a range of warning channels including online, media, face to face and translation services › ICON used to generate situation reports, updates and major fire updates, with feeds to other systems

6. **Targeted**: messages should be targeted to those communities at risk in order to reduce the complacency that can result from people receiving warnings that do not apply to them – 'over warning'	❯ Use of standardised messaging including the *NSW Bushfire Alert Messaging Guidelines* ❯ Use of warning tools based on location, including Emergency Alert
7. **Interoperable**: has coordinated delivery methods, capable of operation across jurisdictional borders for issuing warnings	❯ ESA uses the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) ❯ Cross-border or inter-agency agreements including the use of ICON which ensures consistency of messaging and information with NSW systems.
8. **Accessible and responsive**: capable of responding to and delivering warnings in an environment of demographic, social and technological change. Recognise the criticality of adopting universal design and access principles, particularly in the development and acquisition of technologies	❯ ESA uses the CAP
9. **Verifiable**: the community is able to verify and authenticate the warnings to reduce incidents of accidental activations and prevent malicious attempts to issue false alerts to a population	❯ Use of standardised messaging including the *NSW Bushfire Alert Messaging Guidelines* ❯ All warning messages are disseminated from an authorised and trusted communication tool such as the SPOT process and Emergency Alert.
10. **Underpinned by education and awareness raising activities**: the system, any delivery mechanisms that constitute it and the language used in the warning messages it delivers, should be underpinned by appropriate education and awareness raising activities	❯ Emergency services conduct regular public awareness strategies relating to the issuing of warnings ❯ Consistent application of the warning framework ❯ Pre-season works
11. **Compatible**: with the existing telecommunications networks and infrastructure without adversely impacting on the normal telephone and broadcast system. The system should avoid any adverse operational, technical or commercial implications for the provision of current communications services to consumers and on the integrity of communications networks	❯ ESA uses the CAP
12. **Compliant with relevant legislation**: warnings should be compliant with relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation, associated regulations and policy	❯ The ESA has a legislative responsibility for the issuing of bush and grass fire alerts and warnings under the *Emergencies Act 2004*
13. **Integrated**: warnings should be integrated to ensure timely notification to multiple organisational stakeholders and communication channels	❯ Coordinated firefighting arrangements in place in the ACT ❯ ESA uses the CAP ❯ Use of the Common Operating Picture (ESA COP)

6 The bush and grass fire warnings and information framework in the ACT

In the ACT, a scaled system of warnings and information is used for bush and grass fires, in accordance with the *National Framework for Scaled Advice and Warnings To The Community.*

This framework has a number of important outputs, including:

> ❯ Standardised alert levels of Advice, Watch and Act, Emergency Warning
> ❯ A framework for assessing the Alert Level
> ❯ Messaging guidance including the consequence of a hazard impacting.

6.1 Alert levels

There are three alert levels used for bush and grass fire incidents in ACT.

Alert Level	Community Message
Advice	A fire has started. There is no immediate danger. Stay up to date in case the situation changes.
Watch and Act	There is a heightened level of threat. Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect you and your family.
Emergency Warning	An Emergency Warning is the highest level of Bush and Grass Fire Alert. You may be in danger and need to take action immediately. Any delay now puts your life at risk.

The following should be noted:

> ❯ In the ACT, an alert level is assigned to each bush and grass fire incident upon creation. All bush and grass fire incidents are assigned an alert level as soon as the incident is created in CAD.
> ❯ The alert level is attached to a fire incident, not a location or area.
> ❯ Alert levels should be adjusted upwards or downwards as the incident or threat to the community changes.
> ❯ Alert levels may be upgraded or downgraded, based on information that is available at the time (such as the availability of resources, likelihood that control of the incident may be achieved, or scale of the threat such as to a smaller community where warnings or information have been issued).
> ❯ Alert levels may be used in any order. That is, a fire may be at any level once detected, based on the current fire danger and time to impact.
> ❯ Bush and grass fire alert levels are displayed through channels including the ESA website, social media, RSS feeds and Fires Near Me application.

6.2   Assessing the alert level

The following inputs are used when assessing the alert level of an incident:

> Current fire danger rating – the fire danger rating or index at the time. The forecast fire danger for that day is not used.
> Time to impact – an assessment of how long, under the current conditions, before the incident impacts on a community.

Alert levels are assessed using the following matrix as guidance:

Current Fire Danger Rating	Time To Impact Less Than 2hrs	Time To Impact 2-6hrs	Time To Impact 6-24hrs	Time To Impact 24+ hrs
Catastrophic FDI 100+ GFDI 150+	EW1	EW2	WA1	A1
Extreme FDI 75-99 GFDI 100-149	EW3	EW4	WA2	A2
Severe FDI 50-74 GFDI 50-99	EW5	WA3	WA4	A3
Very High FDI 25-49 GFDI 25-49	WA5	WA6	A4	A5
High FDI 12-24 GFDI 12-24	WA7	A6	A7	A8
Low Moderate FDI 0-11 GFDI 0-11	A9	A10	A11	A12
				NO THREAT

Alert levels may be upgraded or downgraded by an Incident Controller, based on information that is available at the time. This includes the scale of the threat to the community, availability of resources, or likelihood of the incident being controlled. An alert level can be upgraded to Watch and Act by the ESA ComCen before resources are on site at the incident if the nature of calls received indicates that life or property is already at risk from a rapidly escalating bush and grass fire incident.

Where an incident is upgraded or downgraded in CAD, a rationale is required to be provided. This rationale will be entered into CAD narratives and reflected in the ICON situation report.

A number of other inputs may influence the decision to regrade a warning, including:

> Initial nature or volume of Emergency Triple Zero (E000) calls reporting the incident indicates there is already a threat to life or property
> Incident Controller's observations and experience
> Personal observations
> Local knowledge
> Forecasts and predictions
> Monitoring or prediction technologies
> Community response
> Information provided by media
> Agencies or functional areas
> Infrastructure in the area.

Incident Controllers / Duty Officers are strongly encouraged to upgrade incidents where there is expected to be a significant or increased impact on communities or deteriorating weather conditions.

Likewise, Incident Controllers / Duty Officers are strongly encouraged to monitor and reduce the alert level where as the threat eases or is brought under control. When an alert level is reduced, it is important that this is communicated to the community to avoid undue concern or over-warning.

Any change in alert levels is also to be communicated to all operational personnel on the fireground by ESA ComCen using the Priority Alert Tone (PAT) system, a voice message from the tactical operator responsible for the incident and a Mobile Data Terminal (message to all assigned appliances).

6.3 Messaging guidance and content

The messaging matrix provides a draft community message for each alert level (e.g. Emergency Warning 1-5).

It should be noted that each message has been prepared for bushfire incidents and should be adjusted if applying to incidents such as grass or scrub fires.

The ACT has adopted the *NSW Bushfire Alert Messaging Guidelines,* which are available in the general information area of ICON as its standard. These guidelines provide further information on each of these standard messages.

While the *NSW Bushfire Alert Messaging Guidelines* provide guidance on standardised messaging which can be used during an incident, these are not prescriptive. Messages should be adjusted where necessary to reflect the information available at the time.

At a minimum, messages should:

> Be simple, brief and quickly capture attention
> Be written in simple language which is free of jargon
> Contain specific information about locations (including the use of local placenames), and direction
> Contain specific information about the threat (including the type of hazard, timeframes and predicted severity of the incident)
> Be tailored to the community being warned
> Reflect the information that is available at the time

- Clear information on the recommended course of action for people in the warning area
- Identify the message disseminator
- Note what has changed since the last message, if one has been issued.

It is recognised that some warning products, such as the SPOT process and Emergency Alert telephone warning system, have limitations in the amount of information that can be provided. Where there is limited capacity, there should be particular focus on the warning disseminator, the type and location of the hazard, advice to the community, and point to a source of further information (such as the ESA website).

In some circumstances, there may be a need to issue warnings without detailed assessments of the incident or likely impacts. In these circumstances, the issuing of a warning to reduce the likelihood of loss of life should be an overriding priority.

The basic principle that any messaging should adopt is:

- What the ESA knows
- What the ESA does not know
- What the ESA is doing
- What the ESA wants the community to do.

Any message that is released must be approved by an Incident Controller or Emergency Controller.

7 Warning and information tools

A range of warning and information tools are used in the ACT.

It should be noted that no single warning method or tool provides guaranteed penetration, reception or response. Where possible, a combination of methods and tools should be used.

These include (but are not limited to):

Single Point of Truth (SPOT)	**About**
	❯ The SPOT is part process and part technology
	❯ Information about an incident or emergency is reported to an ESA Media Officer via COMCEN SMS, by an Operational Officer or the media
	❯ The ESA Media Officer will then disseminate a public information alert message via SPOT to the ESA website, social media, SMS and email distribution lists
Traditional media (including radio, television, online and newspapers)	**About**
	❯ Radio has extensive reach, particularly in our local area
	❯ Media, particularly radio, is often a preferred source of information for local communities during emergencies
	❯ Many media outlets now operate online services such as websites or social media channels
	Considerations
	❯ Local media provides an opportunity for information and warnings to be locally tailored
	❯ Some media operators, including commercial radio stations and the ABC, have responsibilities under Codes of Practice or policies to have procedures in place to enable to broadcast or emergency information
	❯ The ESA have MOUs in place with most media outlets in the ACT that outline a shared commitment to reporting accurate and timely emergency information to the community
	❯ Apart from having an ethical responsibility, media outlets will often have a commercial or reputational purpose for facilitating information and warnings
	❯ No media outlet is designated as an 'official' broadcaster of emergency information and the ESA will use a range of broadcasters, where possible, to deliver information and warnings
Emergency Alert telephony system	**About**
	❯ Allows the delivery of SMS messages to mobile phones based on handset location or billing address in a designated warning area
	❯ Allows the delivery of text-to-speech messages to landline telephones in a designated warning area
	Considerations
	❯ Emergency Alert is an intrusive warning method, as opposed to a passive system where people must source information
	❯ SMS messages are limited to 160 characters, limiting the information that can be provided
	❯ SMS messages are reliant on mobile coverage
	❯ System limitations include a limit to the number of concurrent campaigns across Australia, and coverage limitations on some telephone networks
	❯ Messages should always include the agency issuing the warning and a source of further information which is regularly updated (eg ESA website)
	❯ Emergency Alert is a one way messaging system

Social media	**About**
	❯ Social media is increasingly being used by the community as a source of information and is a key part of the warnings system
	❯ Social media is regularly used by the community to confirm information issued by emergency service agencies
	Considerations
	❯ Social media channels regularly operate on high capacity networks which are capable of handling large amounts of traffic from around the world
	❯ Social media requires constant monitoring and responses to community inquiries
	❯ A number of unofficial information and warning channels exist, which should be monitored for consistency and accuracy
Face to face (including door knocks or interactions with firefighters)	**About**
	❯ In some situations, a firefighter in attendance may be the most proficient and reassuring method to deliver information and warnings
	❯ During significant events, there may be more value in firefighters delivering information and advice to the community
	Considerations
	❯ Face to face interactions can help ensure people understand warnings and information and take action
	❯ Face to face interactions are labour and time intensive, and increase reliance on emergency services
	❯ Firefighters should be provided with and monitor any messages or warnings being issued and maintain situational awareness for the purpose of providing accurate information the community
Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS)	**About**
	❯ Can be used during radio and television broadcasts to signify an urgent warning
	❯ Consists of a tone/siren which is played before a scripted message from an emergency service
	Considerations
	❯ It can take time to prepare, send and activate a SEWS warning
	❯ Consideration of media markets and operations, such as networking and after hours contacts
Smartphone applications	**About**
	❯ The 'Fires Near Me' application provides a feed of incidents from the ACT/NSW incident management system
	❯ Users can select 'watch areas' to be notified about incidents falling in that area
	❯ Users are directed to the ESA website for major fire updates, as a source of frequently updated information
	Considerations
	❯ Smartphone applications including Fires Near Me are reliant on data coverage and can be prone to infrastructure failure
	❯ Not all members of the community have online access

8 Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is a key component of improving the delivery and reception of information and warnings.

When issued, warnings and public information should be monitored for consistency with legislation and policy, including:

> The appropriateness of the current alert level
> Fire conditions and fire behaviour at the time
> The response from the community
> Operational capacity to control the incident
> Timeliness of the delivery of warnings and information
> Any limitations, such as technology, which may inhibit the delivery of warnings.

9 Procedural checklist

Action	Actioned
Determine the incident alert level	
❯ Determine the alert level for the incident using the Bushfire Alert Messaging Matrix?	
❯ Is the alert level accurate of the situation as it is known?	
❯ Upgrade or downgrade the alert level if required, and provide a rationale.	
Current situation	
❯ Where is the fire now?	
❯ Where is the fire moving – consider locations and direction	
❯ What is under threat – consider communities, infrastructure and services	
❯ What is the likely impact?	
❯ What is the likely time to impact?	
Community message	
❯ What is known about the area of the ACT under threat?	
❯ What course of action is recommended for members of the ACT community to take?	
❯ When should the ACT community take this action and for how long?	
❯ What shelter or relocation options are available?	
❯ What is the trigger for the incident to escalate or require further warnings?	
❯ Has there been information or warnings provided?	
Recommendations	
❯ What warning tools are recommended to provide this information to the community? Consider SPOT, Emergency Alert or SEWS.	
❯ Consider community preparedness, receptiveness to information and warnings, available technology, time of day and any issues which may impact on delivery of warnings.	