

Impact

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The newsletter of Emergency Management in New Zealand



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Planning for Y2K

Welcome

With the new year barely begun, we have already been through two intense civil defence emergencies. John Norton makes some interesting observations in his column comparing the recent events in the Far North and in Pukekohe.

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Unless you have been sleeping, you will know that this is the year for Y2K. In our main feature we discuss Emergency Management and Civil Defence's role in assisting with utility contingency planning and with on-the-night monitoring of events as they unfold.

The new year also heralds the completion of the restructuring to our organisation. The appointment of Fergus Power as Manager Sector Support means that we now have our management complete and are ready to move forward. In this issue we meet Fergus and the rest of the team as well providing more information on the new structure and our new functions.

From everyone at Emergency Management and Civil Defence,

HOW TO CONTACT US

For more information on Emergency Management or any of the material contained within !MPACT please contact:

David Schnellenberg
Public Affairs Manager
Emergency Management and Civil Defence
33 Bowen Street, PO Box 5010
Wellington

DDI (04) 495.6828
Mobile: (025) 244.9356
Fax: (04) 473.7369
email: david.schnellenberg@dia.govt.nz

A Tale of Two

John Norton: Director, Emergency Management and Civil Defence.

No one could fail to be impressed by the media reports of damage to the Far North settlements of Panguru, Pawarenga and Whirinaki, following flash flooding on Thursday 21 January. If the reports were to be believed, a major catastrophe had occurred. Indeed some commentators were quoted as saying it was the worst damage they had ever seen.

There is no denying that people were made homeless and damage to individual property was severe. But what the media did not tell us was that the damage was also very localised. In Pawarenga for example, the damage was restricted to strips no wider than 150 metres. Yet the perception was that all Northland had been affected. This perception was so pervasive that it had a detrimental effect on Northland's tourism industry.

Within 36 hours of the initial downpour roads had reopened, and power was reconnected. However, the media continued to convey images of destroyed and isolated communities.

At the same time, in the south Manukau township of Pukekohe flooding also occurred. Unlike its Far North counterpart, the Franklin District Council had sufficient resources to cope with the emergency and did not declare a formal civil defence emergency. However damage was just as severe as in the Far North, with a similar number of affected people and damage to property.

After initial coverage, media attention in Pukekohe was almost negligible compared to that lavished on the Far North. In fact if media coverage is used to gauge the level of impact, one could be forgiven for

Emergencies

- *the media perspective*

thinking that the two events were at opposite ends of the spectrum. Not surprisingly public contributions to the Far North Mayoral Relief Fund have reached \$500,000, compared to \$44,000 in Pukekohe (correct at time of writing).

As we look back to the emergencies of last year, in the Waikato, Kapiti Coast, and Ohura, we see events of similar scale to the flooding in the Far North. Yet somehow it was the Far North that captured the media's prolonged attention.

In previous emergencies, our experience with media coverage led us to expect that coverage in the Far North would be mostly factual rather than editorial. This meant that we were initially unprepared for the intense interest the media showed in the Far North. Like every other emergency in the last 30 years, the Far North event was managed according to existing procedures, well known by local government, and which have proven to be effective in events of this local scale. Yet instead of being allowed to focus on assisting the Far North District Council in managing the response and recovery, our energies were diverted to defend ourselves from allegations that we had done nothing, or if we had it was too little too late. Following the initial response, delays by the Far North District Council to assess the damage, were blamed on the Ministry. Additionally we were accused of inflicting a new untried system on the Far North communities. Despite repeatedly explaining the truth, including our early offers of assistance, these myths were carried by the media for over two weeks after the initial downpour.

On occasion the media not only misrepresented the scale of the emergency, but also moved from the role of reporting to the role of advocate. In one instance, a television reporter rang our office to demand that the Ministry install a second phone

A strip of damage at Pawarenga



line for the Marae in Panguru to cope with the demand of friends and family wanting to make contact with people sheltering there.

For the devoted emergency management and civil defence personnel, both at a central and local level, the media coverage was not only frustrating but also undermining of their morale. It is not something that I as Director want to see repeated.

For my part, I will be endeavouring to put in place systems that prevent these deliberate distortions from occurring again. The media have an important role in society not only as a fourth estate, but also as a partner in the event of a civil defence emergency. I am very keen to develop good effective relationships with the media, for the benefit of the communities in distress.

We now realise that when an emergency occurs, it is not enough to wait until issues have been raised, before we provide an explanation. From now on we will be taking a more proactive approach. We will involve the media earlier to explain how the civil defence system works and the roles and responsibilities of local and central government. We will also be looking at ways we can co-operate with the media without compromising principles or inhibiting access to information.

Finally, I want to put on record my thanks and appreciation to the civil defence people who dealt with the emergencies in the Far North and in Pukekohe.

John Norton



Planning for Y2K?

Emergency management acknowledges that we are subject to events that can impact upon our communities at any time. Rarely do we know in advance the timing or nature of an event before it happens. Y2K presents perhaps one of the few opportunities to plan for an event when the timing of its occurrence is well known in advance.

IMPACT talks to Director John Norton on his views on Y2K and what Emergency Management and Civil Defence are planning.

It is clearly not the first time that John has been asked the question. 'Will it be all right on the night?' John pauses to consider. 'I get asked that question a lot.' Another pause. 'I am confident that the impacts will be manageable, although I can't give any definite answer as to what the impacts might be.'

Neither does it seem, can anyone else. For this reason Emergency Management and Civil Defence is undertaking a project that aims to minimise community disruption from any Y2K related incidents to our utility systems, such as providers of electricity, telecommunications and water.

Why only the utilities? According to John Norton, the government is addressing the Y2K issue on many fronts, mostly via the agency of the Y2K Readiness Commission. 'Considering our experience with the utilities in the Lifelines projects, which looked at the possible effects of hazards on infrastructure, it made sense for Emergency Management and Civil Defence to develop such a project.'

The project's objective is to co-ordinate cross sector contingency planning by utilities. However as John says, 'we do not have a role to ensure compliance of utilities to be Y2K ready. That is the responsibility of the utilities themselves. However we are able to co-ordinate the planning of the utilities so that if

something should happen they are better placed to manage it.'

The planning involves the development of three potential scenarios, each of differing severity.

The first scenario is the least severe of the three. In it, a utility suffers isolated systems failures resulting from Y2K problems, but the wider community is unaffected. John Norton: 'These failures could be quite major for the utility concerned, but in the context of disruption to the community, the impact is small.'

Increasing in intensity is the second or unfolding scenario. In this scenario two or three local utilities encounter unrelated but interdependent problems which result in significant impact to the local community. It is at this level that Emergency Management and Civil Defence takes a greater interest in the quality of the utilities' contingency plans. As John says, 'our concerns lie with the community.'

'If there is any likelihood of the community being impacted then there needs to be plans in place to deal to it as quickly and as effectively as possible.'

At the extreme end of the scenario scale is the high level scenario. It presents a technological nightmare where significant parts of the country are severely affected by failing utilities. Of the three possible scenarios it is, according to John, the least likely. 'Although the chances of the high level scenario occurring are low, it is prudent to plan for it anyway.'

Does that mean John is prepared to state which of the three scenarios he considers to be the most likely? 'Yes. In my opinion the unfolding scenario is the most realistic. Communities should plan for up to two days of disruption. The likelihood that the period of disruption will exceed two days is low but the possibility should be considered for critical systems. I should point out that a lot of work is going on and a lot of resource is being invested by the utilities to minimise inconvenience and disruption. Nevertheless it is still prudent to expect some level of disruption.'

All going to plan the planning framework should be

in place by the end of February, details complete in June and a possible test run in September.

'New Year's Eve is not the only date for possible glitches to occur,' says John. 'September 9 is another date for possible problems, as computer programmers used the date code of 9999 (9 September 1999) as an end date. It makes an ideal time to test the quality of the planning.'

The other major component of Emergency Management and Civil Defence's Y2K responsibility is to monitor events as they unfold on the night via a national utility monitoring centre. The centre will be located in Emergency Management and Civil Defence's National Emergency Operation Centre, underneath the Beehive. This, according to John Norton, has captured a lot of interest by the media and others. The system will involve a combination of existing regional civil defence communication systems as well as the utilities themselves.

'The system will be based on the Lifelines co-ordination centre developed by the Wellington Lifelines group for regional-scale emergencies. It will give us the opportunity to rapidly assess the level of community disruption as and when it occurs. We will also plan to provide regular updates as events unfold, to the wider world.'

Not surprisingly, New Zealand's position relative to the international date line has meant that our experiences on the night is likely to receive international interest. 'Already international emergency management organisations have expressed a willingness to observe our experience first hand. We will also have a role providing the media with information.'

Finally John offers some last reassurance. 'In the event that Y2K problems result in a major civil defence emergency, we will be prepared. Our operations and staff nation-wide will be on standby.'

Does that mean that John and his team will not be celebrating the arrival of the new millennium? 'Of course we will. Only we will do it a day later.' ①

END?



Alan Hodges (Director, EMA), John Norton, Hon Jack Elder (Minister for Civil Defence) and James Lee Witt (Director, FEMA)

Impact 2010

On the 9 - 11 March 1999, 50 delegates from Australia, the United States and New Zealand, met in Christchurch at a workshop to discuss the future trends of emergency management. Entitled 'IMPACT 2010, Managing Emergencies in the New Millennium', the workshop brought together leaders in emergency management from each country alongside senior people from local government, research sciences, funding and policy agencies. Among the attendees were the Director of Emergency Management Australia Alan Hodges, and the Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) James Lee Witt.

The workshop was broken into five work sessions. The first four looked at new philosophies for emergency management, as well as the development of new skills and tools that will be required in the next 10 years.

The final session focused on options for future co-operation, Y2K experiences and an agenda for future meetings.

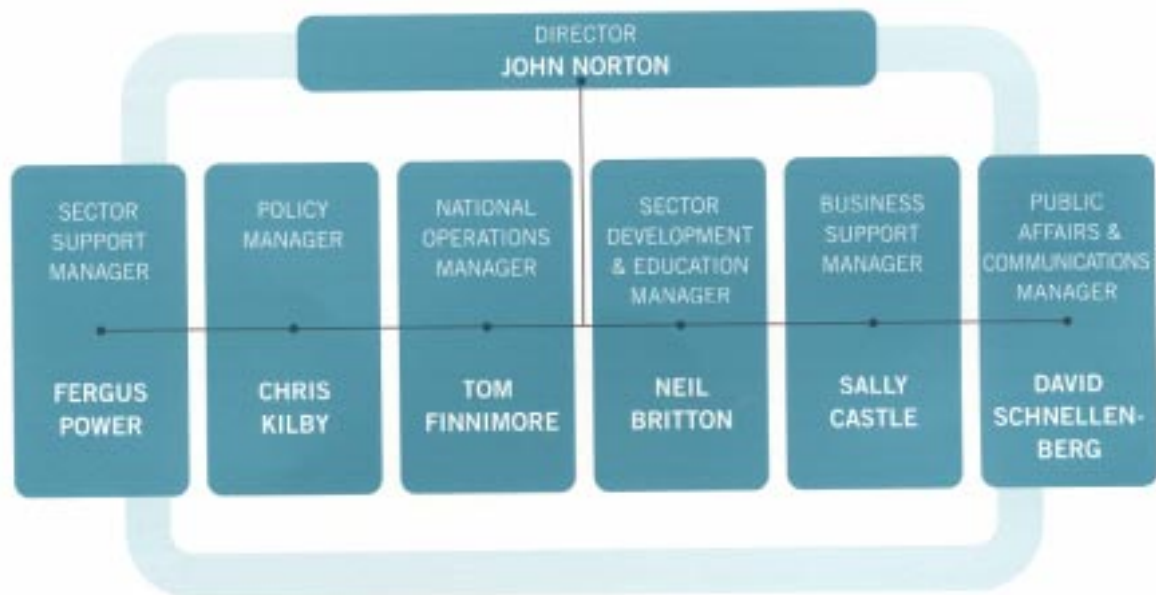
According to Emergency Management and Civil Defence Director John Norton, the workshop was an exciting opportunity for New Zealand.

'As we proceed to implement a new emergency management structure for New Zealand, IMPACT 2010 provided us with a ready forum to exchange ideas and debate issues on state-of-the-art concepts and technologies for emergency management,' John said.

'Because of the work ahead of us, we are uniquely placed to offer insights to our international guests. New Zealand already has an international reputation for developing cost effective and creative solutions to problems that are of a global concern. Our earthquake engineering is an example of that. Both Australia and the United States are keen to gain similar insights from our experience in emergency management.' ①

New Structure in Place

Restructuring of Emergency Management and Civil Defence has now been completed, following the filling of the Manager Sector Support position with the appointment of Fergus Power. Emergency Management and Civil Defence is now fully operational to move forward with the launch of the new Ministry, scheduled for later this year, and the implementation of the new emergency management structure.



The New Management Team

IMPACT takes the opportunity to introduce the new management.



Fergus Power, (04) 485 6839
Sector Support Manager

Originally trained as a scientist, Fergus brings to the position his experience in local government, resource management, environmental protection, emergency management, and with the United Nations. As controller for Kapiti Coast District

Council, Fergus managed recent flooding civil defence emergencies. Fergus leads our sector support staff in the implementation of the new emergency management strategy, and to strengthen our partnerships with stakeholders.



Chris Kilby, (04) 495 6842
Policy Manager

With a background in natural resource management, Chris brings to his position over twelve years of policy experience, gained both in New Zealand and overseas, at the OECD in Paris. He joins us from the Ministry of Transport.

Leading a small team, Chris is responsible for developing a strong policy role for Emergency Management and Civil Defence. His team will progress the new legislation, as well as providing ongoing strategic policy advice to the Minister and Government.