



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



WARNINGS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION PROTOCOL

NSW RFS OPERATIONAL PROTOCOL 1.1.5

Document control

Release history

Version	Date	Author	Summary of changes
1.0	24 May 2017	Anthony Clark	Approved version
2.0	23 November 2018	Anthony Clark	Updated following release of national Public Information and Warnings Handbook
3.0	1 November 2021	Anthony Clark	Updated following change to alert level icons and Emergency Alert capabilities
4.0	August 2022	Anthony Clark	Updated to incorporate Australian Fire Danger Rating System

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Related documents

Document name	Version
Bush Fire Alert Matrix	1.0
Bush Fire Messaging Guidelines	1.0
Public Information and Warnings Handbook (AIDR Collection)	
OMP 4.06 – Emergency Warning and Emergency Alert Checklist	

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1 Purpose

The intent of this Protocol is to ensure a consistent approach to the delivery of warnings and public information for bush fire incidents in NSW.

The Protocol seeks to combine a number of doctrinal publications to clarify and outline the aims and objectives of warnings and public information about bush fire incidents in NSW.

This Protocol is for the use of all agencies involved in bush fire operations in NSW.

Members of all agencies involved in bush fire operations are encourage to familiarise themselves with the content of this Protocol and ensure the aims and objectives are embedded within their area of responsibility.

While this Protocol deals specifically with bush fire incidents, it can be used for guidance for non bush fire incidents where warnings or information is required.

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 fire incidents in recent years.

Prior to 2009, information relating to bush fires was predominately distributed to the community through mass media, such as radio and television, local community activities, and the internet as its use and popularity increased.

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

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 NSW, the framework applies only to bush fire warnings and public information.

Technology, and the way the community uses technology, has also continued to evolve. This is evident through the increased use of online technologies including mobile applications and social media.

There has been rapid development of warning tools such as the Emergency Alert telephone warning system. This system was introduced in 2009 and has undergone several enhancements since, and is now commonly used to warn the community of emergency incidents such as bush fires.

Likewise, the NSW RFS website, which is the primary source of community information for bush fire warnings and information in NSW, has been significantly upgraded to allow greater capacity and redundancy, especially during peak periods.

There is evidence that communities are becoming increasingly accepting of these developments, however there is also evidence of an increased demand for relevant and timely information.

This Protocol incorporates a number of improvements which have been made to public information and warnings in NSW as part of the 2014 National Review of Warnings and Information, the NSW Bushfire Inquiry, implementation of the Australian Warning System, and the introduction of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System.

3 Responsibilities

Under the Rural Fires Act 1997, the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) has a legislative responsibility to issue public warnings about bush fires and bush fire threats in the State for the purpose of protecting life and property¹.

This means the NSW RFS issues warnings at the request of, and on behalf of, other agencies, in accordance with this Protocol and relevant procedures.

Specific responsibilities include:

NSW RFS Commissioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To issue public warnings about bush fires and bush fire threats in the State for the purpose of protecting life and property
Deputy Commissioner Field Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To issue information and messaging regarding pre-emptive threats including, but not limited to, Catastrophic fire danger
Director State Operations State Operations Controller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To issue public warnings about bush fires and bush fire threats in the State for the purpose of protecting life and property, as delegated
State Public Information Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Guidance on message construction, wording and warning tools ➤ To monitor public warnings delivered through agreed channels including the NSW RFS website, media, social media and the Bush Fire Information Line ➤ Coordination of information and messaging regarding pre-emptive threats including, but not limited to, Catastrophic fire danger
Incident Controller	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To determine the alert level of an incident and identify the requirements for a warning to be communicated ➤ The incident is monitored and the alert level adjusted where necessary
Public Information Officer (IMT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To assist the Incident Controller in identifying the requirements for a warning to be communicated, such as through the preparation of a Public Liaison Plan
Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To facilitate the flow of information through agreed processes (such as radio traffic or entry into ICON) to enable the facilitation of information and warnings
Other agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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 by the NSW RFS

¹ Rural Fires Act 1997 – accessed from http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/rfa1997138/

4 What is a warning?

A warning provides point in-time information about a hazard that is impacting or is expected to impact communities. It describes the impact and expected consequences for communities and includes advice on what people should do².

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

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

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 fire incidents in NSW, a warning relates to the actual process of signalling an imminent hazard. It does not simply correspond to incidents at the alert level of Emergency Warning, nor does it automatically correspond to the activation of the Emergency Alert telephone warning system. These should be considered as outcomes of the warning process.

4.1 Other warnings and alerts

While this Protocol focuses on formal warnings relating to incidents, it is also recognised that warnings a critical function in preparing the community for imminent or predicted threats such as periods of increased fire danger such as Catastrophic fire danger ratings.

For consistency, these types of messages are delivered based on an assessment of threat area, likelihood, timeframes and the expected community impact. As an example, a Catastrophic fire danger will generally trigger a broad scale information and warning effort involving a range of communication and warning tools such as media, online, Emergency Alert and websites.

While these messages are coordinated at a state level, they may be delivered through a range of mechanisms at a local and state level.

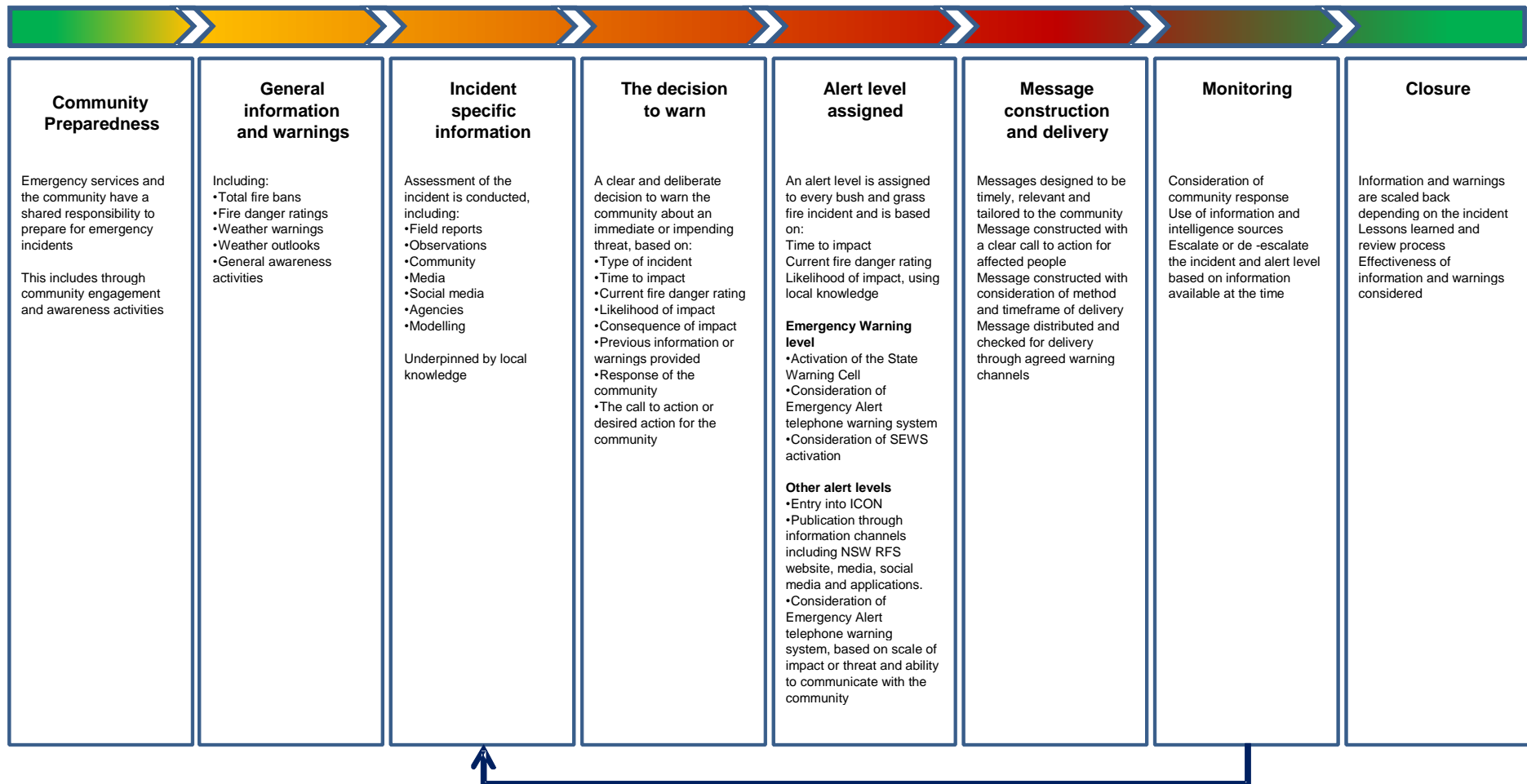
4.2 The warning process

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.

² Public Information and Warnings Handbook (AIDR Collection) – Retrieved from <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/5972/warnings-handbook.pdf>

The warnings process



5 Aims and objectives of warnings and public information

Warnings and public information are a critical part of the prevention, preparation, response and recovery process.

Warnings and public information are a key part of emergency management and have a real potential to save lives. This is particularly the case when traditional firefighting operations may be limited.

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 in a manner which reflects the current situation, as it is understood, allowing people to take the necessary or desired action if 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.

6 Principles of warnings and public information

Australia has established Warning Principles. These ten principles were adopted by the AFAC Commissioners and Chief Officers Strategic Committee in May 2018.

Australia's Warning Principles

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

The [Public Information and Warnings Handbook](#), and associated guidelines, outline the principles and approaches for warnings and public information nationally.

7 The Australian Warning System

The Australian Warning System is a national approach to information and warnings, including consistent names, icons and colours which are used for a range of hazards. Consistent 'action statements' are also being progressively adopted nationally as part of warning messages.




In NSW, the Australian Warning System is used for bush fire information and warnings. It builds upon changes which were introduced in 2009, including the three levels of bush fire alerts.

The *National Framework for Scaled Advice and Warnings To The Community*, introduced in 2009, also provides for a matrix for assessing the alert level, and messaging guidance.

8 Australian Warning System Implementation for bush fires in NSW

8.1 Alert levels

There are three alert levels used for bush fire incidents in NSW.

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 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 NSW, an alert level is assigned to each bush fire incident. All bush fire incidents carry an alert level.
- The alert level is attached to a fire incident, not a location or area.
- Alert levels should be adjusted as the incident or threat to the community changes.
- Alert levels may be upgraded or downgraded by an Incident Controller, 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 fire alert levels are displayed through channels including the NSW RFS website, media, RSS feeds and Fires Near Me application. It is important that consistent icons and naming is used.

8.2 Action Statements

Action statements, or ‘calls to action’, give the community clearer advice about what to do during an incident. These can be used flexibly across all three warning levels, and contextualised.

These action statements are used in Major Fire Updates, Emergency Alert messages and other products where suitable. They typically apply to an identified and specified location.

The nationally agreed action statements for all hazards are:

Advice	Watch and Act	Emergency Warning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare now • Stay informed • Monitor conditions • Stay informed/threat is reduced • Avoid the area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare to leave/evacuate • Leave/evacuate now (if you are not prepared) • Prepare to take shelter • Move/stay indoors • Stay near shelter • Walk two or more streets back • Monitor conditions as they are changing • Be aware of ember attack • Move to higher ground (away from creeks/rivers/coast) • Limit time outside (cyclone, heat, asthma) • Avoid the area/avoid the flooded area • Stay away from damaged buildings and other hazards • Prepare for isolation • Protect yourself against the impacts of extreme heat • Do not enter flood water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave/evacuate (immediately, by am/pm/hazard timing) • Seek/take shelter now • Shelter indoors now • Too late/dangerous to leave

8.3 Assessing the alert level

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

- Current fire danger rating / fire behaviour index – 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 alert matrix.

8.3.1 Bush Fire Alerts Matrix

Current Fire Danger Rating	FBI	Time to Impact			
		< 2hrs	2-6 hrs	6-24 hrs	24 hrs +
Catastrophic	100+	EW	EW	WA	A
Extreme	50-99	EW	EW	WA	A
High	24-49	WA	WA	A	A
Moderate	12-23	WA	A	A	A
No rating	0-11	A	A	A	A

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.

Where an incident is upgraded or downgraded, a rationale is required to be provided. This is entered into the ICON situation report.

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

- The 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 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 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.

8.4 Messaging guidance and content

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

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

The Bush Fire Alert Messaging Guidelines (available in the general Information area of ICON) provide further information on each of these standard messages.

While the Bush Fire 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;
- What has changed since the last message, if one has been issued;
- When the message will expire or next be updated.

Where there are limitations with some warning channels, and priority should be given on clear advice to members of the community and point to a source of further information (such as the NSW RFS 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.

8.5 Naming conventions

The naming of incidents is an important consideration which may impact on the community's understanding of the incident location or severity.

Incidents are typically named on their point of origin however if an incident spreads and moves over a broader area, the name of the incident should be reconsidered to provide a broader context to the community.

Name changes should only occur in limited circumstances to reduce community confusion. Other considerations include how long the incident has been occurring and any previous warnings that have been issued.

For major fire updates on the NSW RFS website, the name of the incident, Local Government Area, and the main action statement or area affected should be used (eg Browns Road Bush Fire (Wentworth LGA) – Stay Informed).

8.6 Other considerations

8.6.1 Cross border incidents

The NSW RFS publishes cross-border incidents for fires which are burning within 50km of the NSW border in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland.

These incidents are displayed on the NSW RFS website and the Fires Near Me NSW application.

Cross border incidents are reliant on those incidents being generated in the operational systems in the relevant jurisdiction, through a data feed to the NSW RFS.

The NSW RFS will link to the relevant agency's website for further information about that incident.

8.6.2 Warning areas

The NSW RFS is developing a capability to show warning areas through the NSW RFS website and Fires Near Me application.

Warning areas are a graphical display, overlaid on a map of the incident, which shows the geographic area in which a warning applies. A warning area is to be reviewed each time a major fire update is published to ensure accuracy.

The content of the major fire update is to reflect, in words, the geographic areas the warning applies to.

Warning areas will be primarily used for incidents at Emergency Warning level, however may be used for incidents at other levels, if required.

9 Warning and Information Tools

A range of warning and information tools are used in NSW.

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):

<p>Emergency Alert telephony system</p>	<p>About</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Allows the delivery of SMS messages to mobile telephones based on handset location (location based messaging) or billing address in a designated warning area. ➤ Allows the delivery of text-to-speech messages to landline telephones in a designated warning area. <p>Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Emergency Alert is an intrusive warning method, as opposed to a passive system where people must source information. ➤ SMS messages are capable of sending up to 612 characters. ➤ SMS messages are reliant on mobile coverage. ➤ There are system limitations including a limit to the number of concurrent campaigns across Australia, and coverage limitations on some telephone networks. ➤ Messages should always including the agency issuing the warning and a source of further information which is regularly updated (eg NSW RFS website or 1800 679 737 Bush Fire Information Line) ➤ Emergency Alert is a one way messaging system.
<p>NSW RFS website</p>	<p>About</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The NSW RFS website is the designated location for alerts and warnings relating to bush fires in NSW. ➤ Warnings are delivered through Major Fire Updates, which are managed centrally by the Public Information Unit. ➤ While not failsafe, the NSW RFS website has been designed to be high capacity and have redundancy in case of failure. ➤ Warnings relating to bush fires issued on behalf of other firefighting authorities are carried on the NSW RFS website. ➤ The NSW RFS website provides a number of feeds which enable warnings to be republished by third parties, while directing people to a regularly updated source of information. <p>Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Not all members of the community have online access. ➤ Online access may be limited by issues including network congestion or failure. ➤ Websites are not failsafe, therefore alternative sources of information such as social media may be required.
<p>Traditional media (including radio, television, online and newspapers)</p>	<p>About</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Radio has extensive reach, particularly in rural and regional areas. ➤ Media, particularly radio, is often a preferred source of information for local communities during emergencies.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Many media outlets now operate online services such as websites or social media channels. <p>Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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. ➤ 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 NSW RFS will use a range of broadcasters, where possible, to deliver information and warnings. ➤ Modern broadcast media practices mean there can often be periods where local content is not provided, such as through networked programming, particularly on weekends or outside of normal business hours. This should be factored into planning and notification processes. ➤ Where possible, media should be encouraged to direct people to a source of regularly updated information, such as the NSW RFS website, so that information remains current. ➤ The effectiveness of broadcast media may be limited by issues relating to utility outages, or people not be in a position to access information due to their location (eg outside of their home). ➤ Newspapers are generally limited in their ability to issue specific warnings.
<p>Social media</p>	<p>About</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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. <p>Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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. ➤ When emergency warnings are issued, the established NSW RFS social media channels are the designated the sources of information to be promoted. ➤ A number of unofficial information and warning channels exist, which should be monitored for consistency and accuracy.
<p>Face to face (including door knocks or interactions with firefighters)</p>	<p>About</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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. <p>Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Face to face interactions can help ensure people understand warnings and information and take action. ➤ Face to face interactions may be labour and time intensive, and increase reliance on emergency services.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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)	<p>About</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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. <p>Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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	<p>About</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The NSW RFS 'Fire Near Me' application provides a feed of incidents from the NSW RFS incident management system. ➤ Users can select 'watch areas' to be notified about incidents falling in that area. ➤ Users are directed to NSW RFS website for major fire updates, as a source of frequently updated information. <p>Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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 smartphones and/or access to the internet.
Third party warning disseminators	<p>About</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In many cases, third party warning disseminators have access to extensive expertise and technology, providing additional redundancy during major incidents. ➤ Services such as Google work with emergency services to ensure information provided is accurate and timely. <p>Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Third party warnings re-publishers are strongly encouraged to follow the national Code of Practice for Warning Re-publishers, in particular, by ensuring republished warnings are current and republished in a timely manner, are not altered, and updated as required.
Bush Fire Information Line (BFIL)	<p>About</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Bush Fire Information Line provides an opportunity for people to seek information about a fire incident and advice on what to do. ➤ The Bush Fire Information Line provides an automated service for basic information about incidents, total fire bans and property preparation. ➤ Callers can be escalated to a call centre and seek further information or advice. ➤ There are overflow arrangements for callers, to ensure calls are answered in a timely manner. <p>Considerations</p> <p>There may be considerable pressure on this service during a spike in activity, and there is a lead time in resourcing the call centre.</p>

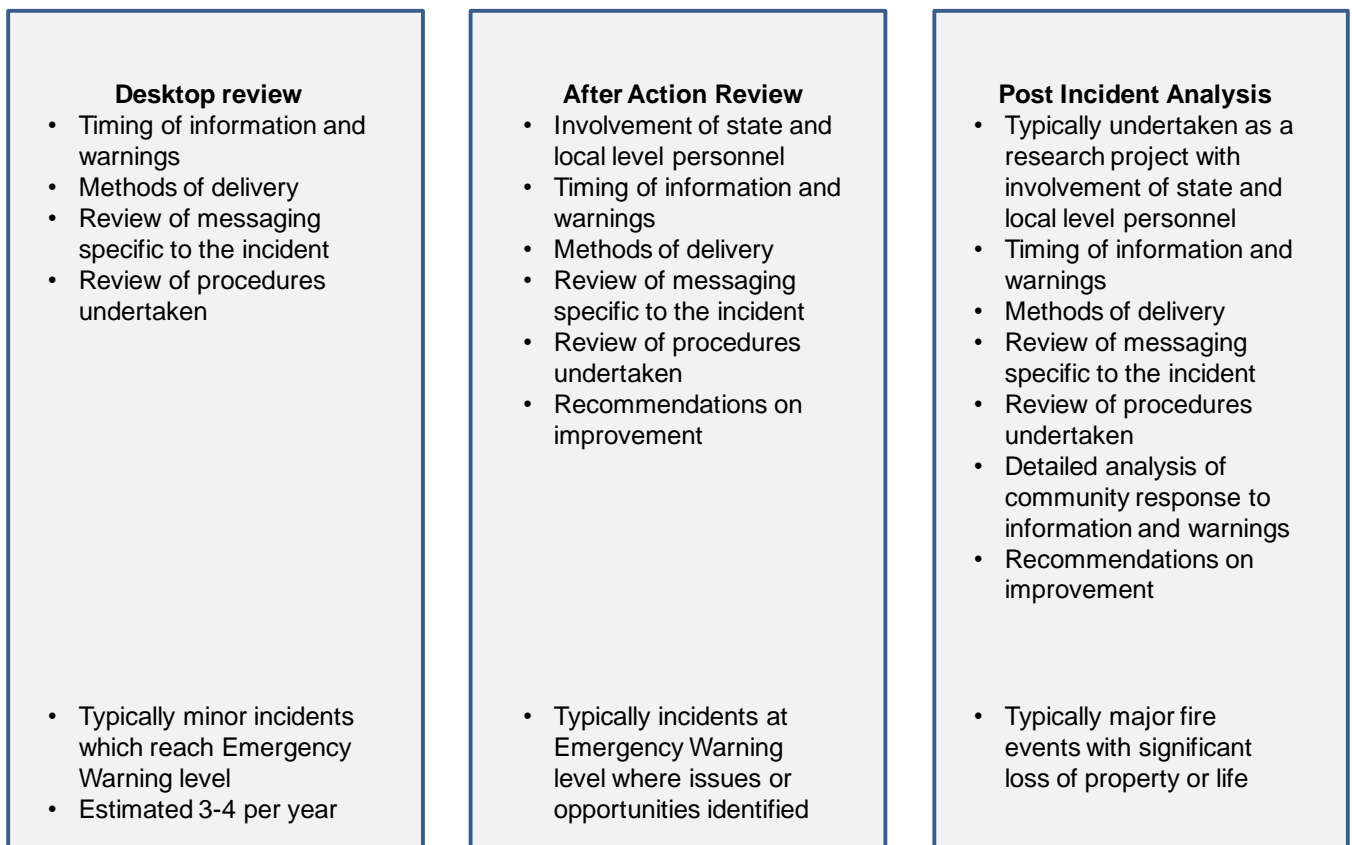
10 Monitoring and evaluation

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; and
- Any limitations, such as technology, which may inhibit the delivery of warnings.

The effectiveness of warnings should be reviewed to provide opportunities for improvement. The following framework may apply.



Incident severity

11 Operational Procedures

The dissemination of a warning to the community is a critical component of emergency management.

Where an incident is directly threatening or impacting a community, or is anticipated to do so, specific consideration must be given to an official warning.

11.1 Assessment of an incident for a warning

An Incident Controller must consider any requirements for the issuing of warnings or other information about an incident.

At a local level, the determination of an incident alert level is typically performed by an Incident Controller.

Where control remains in the field, the Incident Controller must be supported by the District Duty Operations Officer or the Operational Communications Centre Shift Supervisor.

The Incident Controller must determine the alert level of an incident as soon as practicable, based on information available at the time.

The Incident Controller shall use the NSW RFS Bush Fire Alert Level Matrix as a guide to determining the appropriate alert level. This matrix considers the current Fire Danger Rating and the estimated time to impact of the incident.

The Incident Controller can upgrade or downgrade the alert level as appropriate, based on actual fire conditions and behaviour, likely community impact or ability to control the incident. Where an alert level is upgraded or downgraded, a rationale must be provided in the ICON system.

The alert level should be reassessed within the following defined timeframes:

Alert Level	Timeframe for review
Advice	At 1100 and 1600 hours daily, or as the situation changes
Watch and Act	Every two hours, or as the situation changes
Emergency Warning	Every 30 minutes, or as the situation changes

This reassessment typically occurs through a Situation Report or Situation Update through the ICON system.

11.2 Notification and activation of state level warning systems

If the Incident Controller determines that the incident is at Emergency Warning level, then the Incident Controller must contact the State Operations Emergency Warning Conference (Red) Phone by telephoning 1300 000 733 to advise an incident is to be entered at Emergency Warning level. Prior to calling the Red Phone the Incident Controller must complete the [OMP 4.06 Emergency Warning and Emergency Alert Checklist](#) and upload it into ICON.

If the Incident Controller determines that the incident is at Watch and Act level, then the Incident Controller must contact State Operations (1300 677 737) to advise of a Notifiable Incident.

State Operations is responsible for maintaining and managing the Emergency Warnings Conference Call facility and membership. As a minimum the call will include the Incident Controller, the State Operations Controller (SOC), and/or their delegate, the State Public Information Officer, and/or their delegate.

This call will initiate the activation of warnings, including the Emergency Alert telephone warning system, website and other channels, and the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) if required.

The information provided to the State Warning Cell is also used to populate other warning tools including the NSW RFS website, social media and the Bush Fire Information Line.

Pre-emptive warnings may also be established, using clearly defined trigger points for their activation.