



SEMC BULLETIN

COMMUNITY ALERT SIRENS

Background

Opportunity 9 of the “Report of the Special Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire” by Euan Ferguson AFSM (“the Report”) suggested that:

The State Emergency Management Committee to develop policy guidance for local governments regarding the installation of bushfire and emergency community warning sirens in ‘at risk’ communities.

Analysis

The Office of Emergency Management (OEM), on behalf of the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC), has thoroughly investigated and consulted on this proposal. Support for community alert sirens was low; with respondents citing issues of infrastructure responsibility, siren effectiveness, availability of more advanced methods (e.g. Emergency Alert) and potential message confusion as barriers to implementation of such systems. That said, a small number of respondents recognised there may be some value in the use of sirens, in combination with other methods. Following consultation, an options paper was considered by the State Bushfire Coordinating Committee (SBCC) on 24 May 2017 for consideration. The SBCC subsequently recommended that the SEMC not establish State emergency management policy in relation to community alert sirens.

SEMC Policy Position

Subsequent consideration by the SEMC in August 2017 supported the SBCC recommendation; and additionally supported the publication of an information note to guide local governments should they wish to adopt a community alert siren.

Guidance note

Where a local government wishes to independently pursue the installation of a “community alert siren”, the following principles should be considered:

- 1) Establish the need: by undertaking a needs assessment to determine if community requirements can be met through the use of current or other available mechanisms, such as Emergency Alert, mobile phones, local radio services.
- 2) Determine what the risk-benefit ratio is: through analysis and research¹ to determine if a community alert siren is the most effective mechanism considering topography, required coverage, community demographic and nature of the built environment. The Local Government will be solely responsible for the community alert system, including, implementation, maintenance, activation and ongoing review.
- 3) Inform the relevant Local Emergency Management Committee: at the start of the process, and to advise of the outcome of deliberations.
- 4) Determine a funding model for implementation and maintenance: this must be independent of SEMC or OEM related grant programs.

¹ Research may include available guidelines from other Australian jurisdictions.