EMERGENCIES
IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

A guide for the news media

Contents

What is this guide and why is it important?

In an emergency, the provision of accurate, timely and appropriate information can save lives, prevent injuries and protect community assets.

The media's contribution is critical and the dissemination of emergency public information is most effective when authorities and the media work cooperatively.

Hazard Management Agencies (HMAs) are prescribed as responsible for managing specific types of emergencies: WA Police (the Commissioner of Police) is the HMA for Land Search. In some circumstances, the HMA may delegate the management of the incident to a Controlling Agency, though this is not common. A full list of HMAs and their 'hazards' is given later in this guide.

HMAs/Controlling Agencies know the media have an important role in providing the public with up-to-date coverage of an emergency and also request the media cover emergencies in a safe, ethical and cooperative manner.

This guide aims to help news professionals understand WA's emergency management procedures, the HMA/Controlling Agencies' responsibilities and how to best obtain and relay accurate information.

It also includes preparedness tips for media organisations themselves.

What is a Controlling Agency?

Essentially, it's the agency in charge of managing the response to an incident. The Controlling Agency is the agency with responsibility, through legislation or by agreement with a HMA and one or more agencies, to control the response activities to an incident. In most instances, the Controlling Agency and HMA are the same agency/organisation.

HMAs in WA include:

WA Police (Commissioner of Police)

Department of Fire and Emergency Services (Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner)

Department of Health (State Health Coordinator and State Human Epidemic Controller)

Public Transport Authority

Department of Transport – Marine Safety (Marine Safety General Manager)

Brookfield Rail

Public Utilities Office (Coordinator of Energy)

Department of Agriculture and Food WA (Agriculture Director General)

What is an emergency?

The *Emergency Management Act 2005* states an emergency is "the occurrence or imminent occurrence of (specific prescribed) hazards, which is of such a nature or magnitude that it requires a significant and coordinated response". The 'hazards' include natural and man-made events including bushfires, cyclones, storms, acts of terrorism and pandemics.

Every day, agencies deal with many incidents as part of their normal operations. However, where an incident escalates to become an emergency (i.e. meets the above definition and requires a significant and coordinated response), then the emergency response arrangements under the State's emergency management framework could be activated.

Under the State's Emergency Management Plan, incidents are broadly classified into three levels according to the potential or actual severity of the incident. The above is a guide only and determination of the incident levels and escalation to the next level is at discretion of the Incident Controller.

Examples of incident levels are provided below.

Level	Explanation	Example
1	Minor and usually local incident which can be managed by one agency. The incident area is limited and there is a limited impact on the community and critical infrastructure.	A small grass fire may be responded to by a volunteer Bush Fire Brigade, managed by the Local Government. The Local Government is the 'Controlling Agency' for that fire and responsible for putting it out.
2	Serious incident which may require support from several agencies, has a medium-term impact on critical infrastructure and the community or there is more than one incident area involved. Generally, the impact is at a district level.	A moderate oil spill at a coastal bay may require not only the response of the Department of Transport but also Health, Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) and the Department of Parks and Wildlife, using district-level resources.
3	Incident with State-level implications which requires the significant coordination of numerous agencies and resources from State, Federal or even international level. There may be several incident areas and a significant and ongoing impact to the community.	A terrorist attack resulting in deaths and injuries, disruption to critical infrastructure and an impact upon the State generally. Multiple agencies involved in the response, with state level resources.

Note: The above is a guide only and determination of the incident levels and escalation to the next level is at the discretion of the Incident Controller.

When is an emergency response activated?

When an incident is assessed as Level 2 or 3, the HMA/Controlling Agency's Incident Controller must make an incident level declaration to ensure all agencies involved in the response are aware of the conditions and the potential for escalation.

If a Level 2 incident has the potential to escalate to a Level 3 incident, or a Level 3 incident is declared, the Controlling Agency will contact the HMA who will determine whether or not the incident is of such a nature and magnitude that it requires a significant and coordinated response (i.e. it is an 'emergency' as defined under the *Emergency Management Act 2005*). If it does require such a response, then the response arrangements in the State EM Framework (including the State Emergency Management Plan and relevant State Emergency Plan for the hazard) are activated.

Who is responsible for an emergency response?

There are 27 prescribed hazards in the emergency management legislation. For each, the State Emergency Management Committee has delegated responsibility to a particular agency to develop and maintain a plan. More information about these plans can be found at www.oem.wa.gov.au

The HMA/Controlling Agency may require the assistance of other emergency management agencies that have specialised expertise. These include such agencies as Department of Health and

St John Ambulance managing injured people, WA Police undertaking Disaster Victim Identification and the Department for Child Protection and Family Support managing emergency welfare needs of the community during emergencies.

The HMA or Controlling Agency is in control (i.e.: in charge of managing the overall response) while combat and support agencies will command their own personnel in support of the HMA/Controlling Agency.

Hazard		Legislated Hazard Management Agency	Relevant Contact
1	Road Crash	Commissioner of Police	WA Police
2	Air Crash	Commissioner of Police	WA Police
3	Terrorist Act	Commissioner of Police	WA Police
4	Land Search	Commissioner of Police	WA Police
5	Marine Search	Commissioner of Police	WA Police
6	Radiation Escape (Nuclear Powered Warships)	Commissioner of Police	WA Police
7	Space Re-Entry Debris (SPRED)	Commissioner of Police	WA Police
8	Collapse (Structural)	Fire and Emergency Services (FES) Commissioner	Dept Fire and Emergency Services (DFES)
9	Cyclone	FES Commissioner	DFES
10	Earthquake	FES Commissioner	DFES
11	Flood	FES Commissioner	DFES
12	Storm	FES Commissioner	DFES
13	Tsunami	FES Commissioner	DFES
14	Fire	FES Commissioner	DFES

Hazard	Legislated Hazard Management Agency	Relevant contact
15 HAZMAT - Chemical	FES Commissioner	DFES
16 HAZMAT - Radiological	FES Commissioner	DFES
17 HAZMAT - Biological	State Health Coordinator	WA Health
18 Heatwave	State Health Coordinator	WA Health
19 Human Epidemic	State Human Epidemic Controller	WA Health
20 Marine Transport Emergency	Marine Safety General Manager	Dept Transport - Marine
21 Marine Oil Pollution	Marine Safety General Manager	Dept Transport - Marine
22 Gas Supply Disruption	Coordinator of Energy	Public Utilities Office
23 Liquid Fuel Supply Disruption	Coordinator of Energy	Public Utilities Office
24 Electricity Supply Disruption	Coordinator of Energy	Public Utilities Office
25 Animal and Plant Biosecurity	Agriculture Director General	Dept Agriculture and Food WA
26 Rail Crash (PTA Network)	Public Transport Authority	Public Transport Authority
27 Rail Crash (Brookfield Rail Network)	Brookfield Rail	Brookfield Rail

What are the SECG and State Disaster Council?

The SECG is the State Emergency Coordination Group. The SECG doesn't manage the response to an emergency (the responsibility of the HMA/Controlling Agency). The SECG's role is to provide coordination at a strategic level and provide advice and direction as required. It takes a 'helicopter view' to the response.

The SECG is also a link between emergency management agencies and the State Government.

SECG meetings can be called when requested by the HMA or by WA's State Emergency Coordinator (Commissioner of Police) in consultation with the HMA. The SECG must meet if a State of Emergency is declared.

The SECG is chaired by the State Emergency Coordinator or delegate. It might meet periodically during an emergency, depending upon the circumstances, and the location of the meetings can vary.

The State Disaster Council is chaired by the Premier and established when a State of Emergency is declared. The Minister for Emergency Services is also on the State Disaster Council and other members are co-opted on to the council as required. The State Disaster Council's function is to provide a formal link between the State Government and the SECG and provide advice and support at a governmental level in relation to the State of Emergency and other people as required.

State of Emergency versus Emergency Situation

These two terms are similar, but not the same.

An Emergency Situation can be declared by the HMA or the State Emergency Coordinator if the Part 6 special powers under the *Emergency Management Act 2005* are required to combat the emergency. These powers include directed evacuation, authority to close businesses, authorities' access to use privately-owned equipment (eg: bulldozers) and premises for the purposes of responding to the emergency and giving other directions to people.

A State of Emergency can only be declared by the Minister for Emergency Services and offers all of the powers provided in an Emergency Situation, but also powers to

a) direct other public authorities and

b) allow authorised officers under the *Emergency Management Act 2005* access to other general powers.

Journalists should note that an Emergency Warning (a notification to the public through the media) is not the same as an Emergency Situation / State of Emergency as described here.

The Emergency Public Information Function

The provision of effective, clear and timely information to the public, media and stakeholders, during an emergency, is known as the emergency public information function. Australian authorities tend to use similar emergency management command structures in which the Public Information Officer is a member of the Incident Management Team. The public information function encompasses information and warnings, media liaison and community liaison during both the response and recovery phases of an emergency.

The State Emergency Public Information Plan sets down arrangements in WA for the public information function. It can be read at www.oem.wa.gov.au
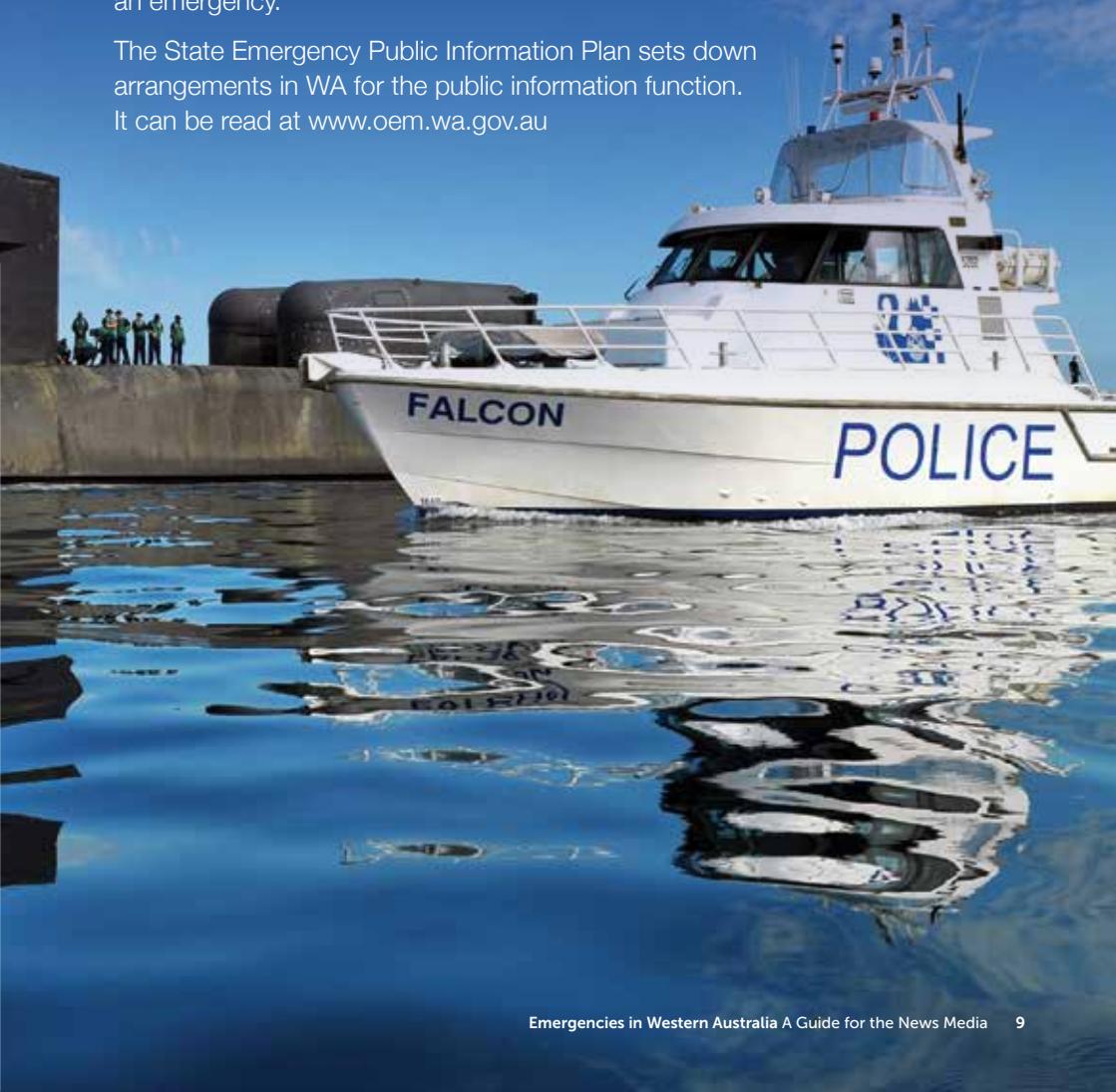
What can the media expect in the event of an emergency?

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

The methods of communication used by agencies during an emergency will usually be the same ones used by media liaison teams during normal operations (eg: media alerts, statements, conferences, etc).

However, early on in an emergency, authorities may prioritise those channels that reach the public fastest (eg: radio, social media, live television, online).

In large and long-lasting emergencies, a temporary media centre may be established to provide a 'one-stop-shop' for reporters. In such situations, the technical and other needs of newsrooms will be taken into account. In Perth, this would most likely be the Ord Room at the Water Corporation's John Tonkin Water Centre in Leederville. In a country town, it might be the town hall. If established, every effort will be made to ensure a media centre is as suitable as possible for news-gatherers.

Where the media have to operate in remote areas or other locations where access to services is limited, news teams will need to be as independent as possible and have their own equipment and resources rather than rely on authorities.

MEDIA STAFF LOCATIONS

Each HMA/Controlling Agency can structure its emergency media response how it likes, but it usually looks like this:

A media office
A central location from where cleared information is disseminated. Usually this is the regular media office. Media releases, conference alerts, social media and other updates will come from this office.

A forward command
Also called an Incident Control Centre. In a significant emergency HMAs/Controlling Agencies are likely to send one or more media officers to a 'forward command' location at the scene, or near it. Information provided to the media at the forward command will be operational in nature, not strategic.

A command centre
Also called an Operations Centre. A number of HMAs (Police, DFES, Health) have established command centres. Media staff located here will direct the public information function and generally won't liaise directly with reporters. However, they may liaise with newsroom Editors and Chiefs-of-Staff.

An evacuation centre
If there are significant community evacuations, an evacuation centre may be set up by the Department of Child Protection and Family Support. There may be media opportunities held here in conjunction with community meetings. Media are requested to respect the privacy and dignity of the community members present at evacuation centres at all times.

MULTI-AGENCY MEDIA COORDINATION

During emergencies, agencies strive to coordinate the release of their information so that it is as accurate as possible and media can maximise their own limited resources. Conferences may be 'all-in' with spokespersons from multiple agencies.

In State-level emergencies, coordination is the responsibility of the State Emergency Public Information Coordinator (normally the Director Media and Corporate Communications, WA Police).

However the HMA/Controlling Agency will continue to manage all key information that relates to an emergency, as there may be other considerations that other emergency management agencies and other organisations involved in the response are not aware of.

Example One:

WA Police is managing a Marine Search emergency. A distinctive item of clothing is found floating in the search area. While DFES volunteer marine rescue groups may confirm they are involved in the search, it would not be appropriate for them to discuss what they have found during the search. As the HMA, WA Police would want to ensure family members are aware of such a discovery first.

Example Two:

DFES is managing a major bushfire emergency. WA Police is assisting through the operation of road blocks. While WA Police may confirm it is supporting DFES in this way, it would not be appropriate for WA Police to provide a list of current road blocks as there could be other agencies or private contractors managing other road blocks, of which it is not aware. As the HMA, only DFES should release such information, to ensure the most accurate and timely road block information is provided to road users.
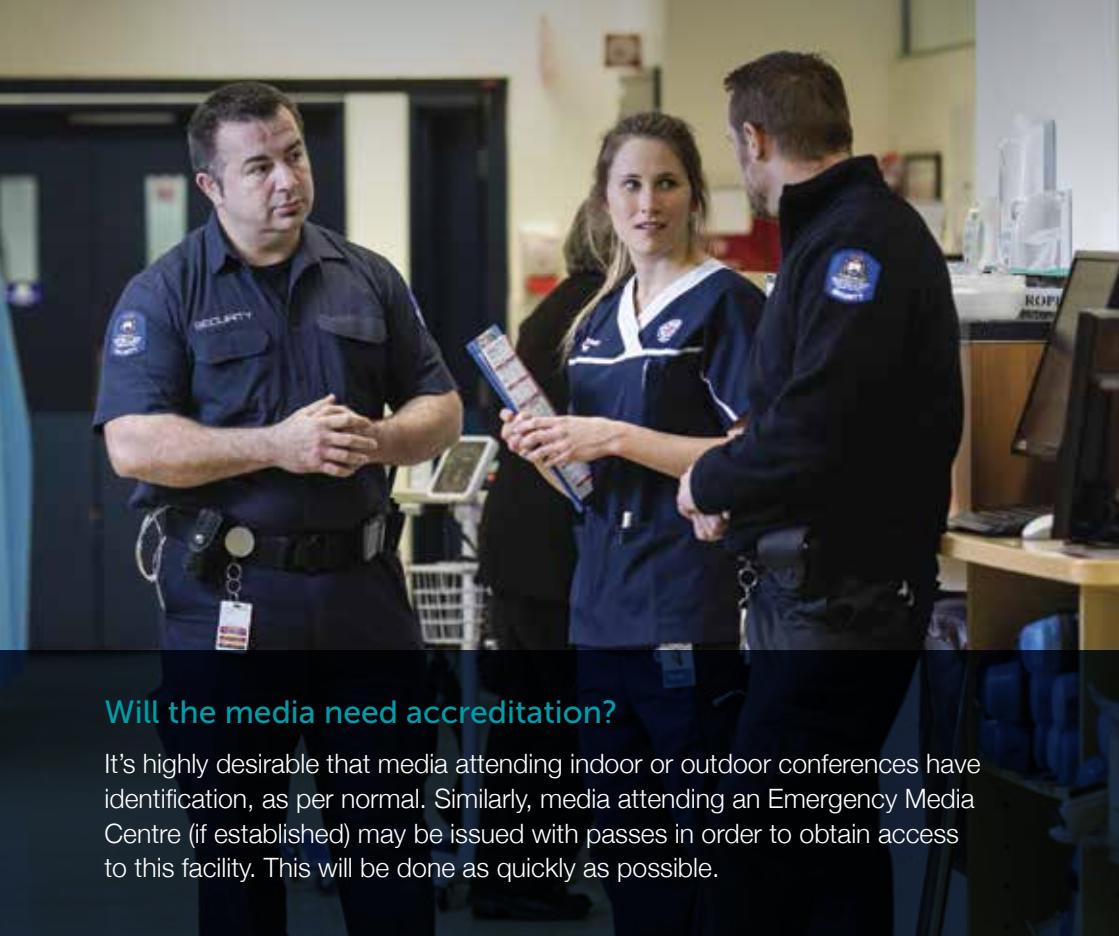
Will the media need accreditation?

It's highly desirable that media attending indoor or outdoor conferences have identification, as per normal. Similarly, media attending an Emergency Media Centre (if established) may be issued with passes in order to obtain access to this facility. This will be done as quickly as possible.

What is the commitment to newsrooms?

The media can expect:

– Regular and timely release of information, including access to spokespeople where possible.

– **Authorities to ask newsrooms to play a cooperative role in assisting authorities relay up-to-date information to the public via the mass media.**

– Authorities to work cooperatively with the media in pursuit of effective emergency containment.

– **The media's right to cover the story to be acknowledged and supported, as long as media activities don't interfere with the operational response.**

– Regular information updates, but with the likelihood that information in the early stages of an emergency will be limited and/or unconfirmed.

– **Support and combat agencies to speak/provide information on their specific involvement in the emergency, once it is appropriate to do so.**

– Media access to the general locality of emergencies, where this will not impact unreasonably on public or media safety, emergency operations or criminal investigations.

– **Social media to be heavily utilised by emergency agencies.**

– Emergency web pages and the State Public Information Line to be activated if required, in which case the media will be notified and asked to promote these sources of public information.

– **Media requests for access to command and coordination facilities to generally be declined, although media briefings may be held in the vicinity of, or adjacent to, these facilities. File vision of these facilities in use has been made available previously and might again be offered.**

– The possible establishment of an emergency media centre to provide a central place for information dissemination. Technical capability for live coverage from this centre will ultimately remain the media's responsibility.

What might newsrooms put in an emergency kit?

☐ Bottled water	☐ Radio
☐ Sturdy gloves	☐ Spare batteries
☐ Fire blanket	☐ High-visibility vest
☐ First aid kit	☐ Steel-capped boots
☐ Torch	☐ Emergency contact numbers

It is recommended that Chiefs of Staff and other media managers arrange for the right equipment to be available to all staff being deployed.

What agencies expect from the media

We understand the media play a critical role in communicating to the public during emergency situations. It is important that information shared by media outlets is obtained appropriately and ethically.

The media are requested to:

– Follow the instructions of emergency services personnel

– Obey road blocks and exclusion zones

– Not put themselves or others unnecessarily at risk

– Respect the rights of victims of emergencies to be treated with dignity and have their privacy respected

– Not broadcast unconfirmed information or hearsay – this includes on social media

– Take into account requests not to publish or broadcast certain information

– Inform authorities if they identify 'new' hazards while reporting (eg: a bridge collapsing).

Media are expected to behave in accordance with the MEAA Code of Ethics by reporting honestly, fairly, independently and with respect for the rights of others.

During an emergency, people affected by the emergency may be in a heightened state of alert or emotionally distressed. Media outlets can help communicate to the community by ensuring their stories explain clearly and simply which areas are affected and what people in those areas should do.

Be aware that people may be relying on your information. Keep your stories up to date and refer back to the emergency services' websites so people can get current information.

Media outlets can help to reach a wider section of the community by:

– Sharing authorities' social media posts

– Considering using closed captions and TV crawlers

– Ensuring their stories and broadcasts are as accessible to people with disabilities as possible.

How can the media stay safe in an emergency?

Safety of the public is the highest priority for, and responsibility of, emergency responders. This of course includes members of the media.

For this reason, the news media should follow all directions of the HMA/Controlling Agency and heed the advice of emergency personnel. No story is worth injury or death.

The earliest phase of an emergency is when media are at greatest risk. This is when emergency responders may still be assessing the dangers, so a high degree of caution is urged. The full extent or type of the hazard may not yet be clear.

Circumstances in which safety is a major concern include, but are not limited to:

– Reporting outside in high winds during cyclones (risk of being struck by debris)

– Entering bushfire or flood-affected areas (getting trapped by a fire front or struck by falling tree branches)

– Approaching the vicinity of chemical spills or fires (toxic inhalation)

– Entering a vicinity where armed offenders remain (gunfire risk)

– Covering land searches in remote locations (exposure or getting lost)

– Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other emergency equipment such as adequate communications, suitable clothing, water, etc, should be made available by the employer and used in the right circumstances. HMAs/ Controlling Agencies may specify the level of protection that is required. For those working alone, the occupational safety and health legislation requires the employer to establish a procedure for the employee to make regular contact with the office

– DFES provides training for journalists and media representatives likely to attend a fire ground or other natural hazard scene. To register for this course, please contact DFES Media via media@dfes.wa.gov.au.

Editors and Chiefs of Staff

Newsroom Editors and Chiefs-of-Staff should give safety of newsroom personnel the highest consideration. It should not be assumed reporters, camera operators and photographers on the ground will have full information about the emergency or be experienced enough to make sound safety decisions. Safety information received by newsrooms should be immediately relayed to employees in the field.

Terrorist Acts and Public Information

Terrorism can present special public information challenges. It is important for news media organisations to have a clear understanding of public information priorities.

Don't jump to the conclusion that an incident is terrorist-related simply because of how it appears. For example, an explosion could simply be the result of a gas-leak, not a bomb. If a situation is determined to be a terrorist act, the agreed protocol is that the Commissioner of Police will determine this and the public will be informed.

In the first stages of a terrorist incident there will be an urgent rush for media organisations to capture vision and images of the incident and/or the associated emergency response. This is understood by law enforcement authorities, however safety must be a guiding factor in decision making. Be aware that in previous real situations, live coverage has been monitored by the offenders and put lives of the public and first-responders at risk, so take advice from police where this is given.

Key Media Considerations

Consider the safety of your news teams. The police want them to cover the story, but do so safely. Follow Police's advice and instructions.

Avoid drawing conclusions that an event is terrorism. It may not be.

Live coverage can risk the safety of members of the public and first responders. Take the advice of police seriously.

Terrorism can generate extreme community tensions and the media's manner of reporting events and choice of language and terminology can negatively or positively influence that.
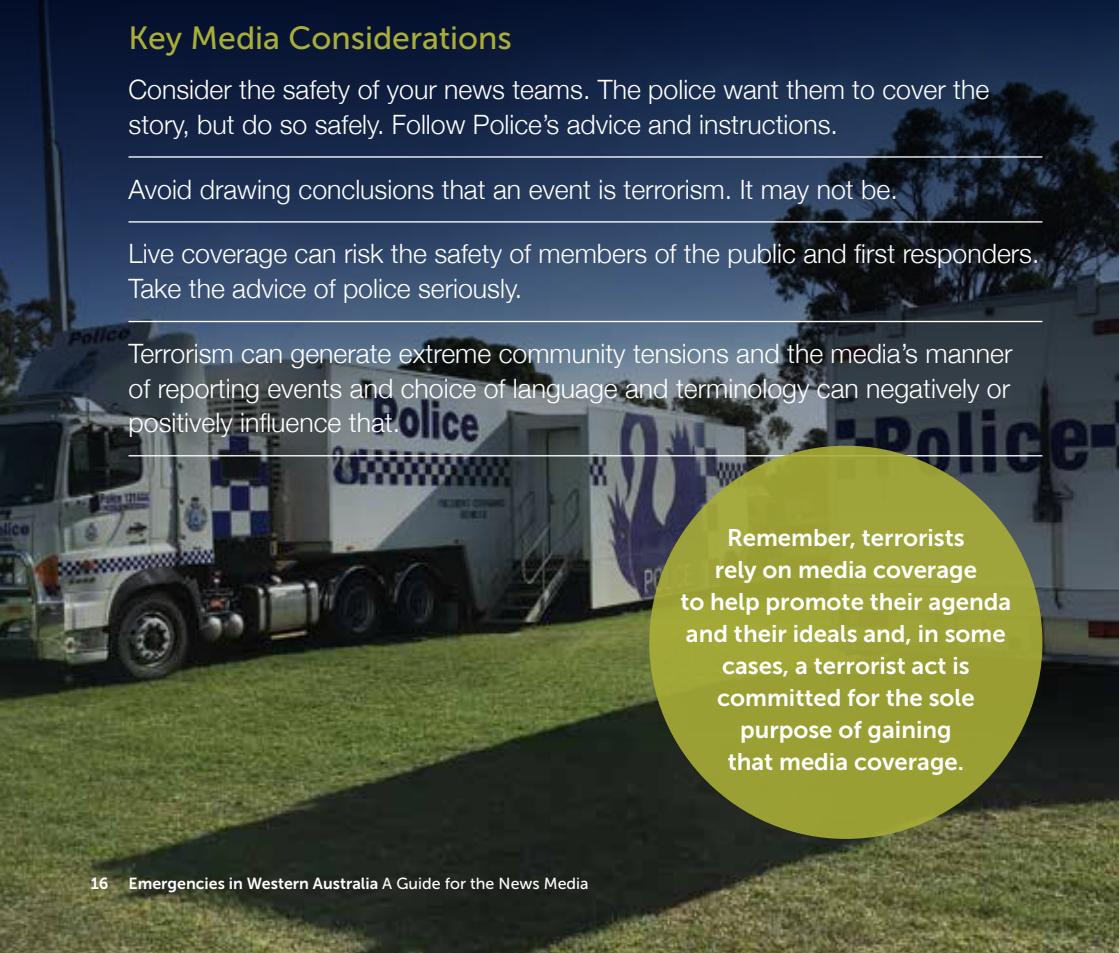
Remember, terrorists rely on media coverage to help promote their agenda and their ideals and, in some cases, a terrorist act is committed for the sole purpose of gaining that media coverage.

News Coverage Risks / Responsible Reporting

Risk to Public – your news coverage may help inform terrorists where survivors or other potential victims are. This was the case in the Mumbai attacks where the terrorists used live news coverage to identify targets.

Risk to Law Enforcement Officers – Maintaining a live broadcast of a siege or hostage situation may provide the terrorists with information on police positions and tactics. This risks lives.

Methodology – Interviewing academics or retired law enforcement professionals is common during or after critical incidents. Remember that while those people may be able to talk about how law enforcement agencies are likely to respond to an incident, they are not privy to the details of this incident and such information may directly assist terrorists if they are monitoring media channels.

Notify the police immediately if an alleged offender contacts your media outlet wanting to go on-air or seek publication of threats, demands or other material.

HMA Priorities

Public Safety	this will focus on delivering emergency messages to those directly impacted.
Public Awareness	informing the rest of the community about what is happening.
Investigations	seeking information from the community regarding the incident and those involved.

Spokespersons

In the event an incident is determined to be a terrorist act, there are national guidelines that nominate specific spokespersons. Remember, WA Police is the HMA for a terrorist act in Western Australia and as such will take the lead on media and public information matters.

State Spokespersons:
Premiers or their designated spokespeople will perform this role for State and Territory Governments.

National Spokespersons:
The Prime Minister, the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Counter-Terrorism and the Attorney-General are the primary spokespeople for the Commonwealth Government in a national security incident.

Other Spokespersons:
If required, other spokespersons may be nominated if they have specific knowledge or expertise relating to an incident.

Frequently-Asked Questions

What about websites and social media?

Websites and social media channels are just two of a suite of communication channels a HMA/Controlling Agency may use during an emergency. Media are encouraged to share this content.

Emergency WA is a centralised website to be used by some HMAs/Controlling Agencies during emergencies during emergencies in WA, in addition to agencies' own websites. It is available at www.emergency.wa.gov.au .

Will TV and radio stations be asked to broadcast emergency messages?

Possibly. This could be at very short notice, so the support of media organisations is appreciated.

It is important newsrooms distinguish between 'news content' and 'emergency broadcast' content. If requested to do the latter by an HMA/Controlling Agency, news organisations are asked to broadcast or publish the material in its entirety, rather than editing or editorialising the content. This is important for public safety. TV stations may be asked to run crawlers during regular programming.

The ABC and 6PR are WA's 'emergency broadcasters'. Both organisations sought this status, which was offered to all media outlets that could meet certain criteria and wished to do so. The obligation on these organisations is to cut into regular programming as required by emergency authorities and broadcast information in its entirety.

This arrangement will NOT result in preferential news treatment.

How will the public be warned in a life-threatening emergency?

The public should not wait for a text message from authorities before leaving.

There may not be time to issue a warning. For example, bushfires can start close to homes and cause damage within minutes, an earthquake or tornado can occur without any warning at all, or an armed gunman could start threatening lives suddenly. Before a warning can be issued, the emergency services must be notified, they must assess the incident and then take steps to issue the alert.

Social media, radio, websites and television will be a priority means of doing this, but other mechanisms include the Emergency Alert (text and telephone message) system. This system is only used where there is a known, assessed and imminent threat to human life. Emergency Alert sends voice messages to landlines and text messages to mobile phones within a defined physical area. More information can be found at www.emergencyalert.gov.au

Another way emergency authorities can draw public attention to an urgent emergency is to request radio and television stations to precede emergency messages on radio with the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) audio signal – typically used mostly in association with cyclone warnings in the north of WA. Authorities will only ask for the SEWS signal to be used when it is considered urgent to warn the public of imminent danger. Each request for use must be accompanied by a fax or email, and will be included at the top of emergency alerts issued by HMAs/Controlling Agencies.

The SEWS audio file is available from Police Media Unit on police.media@police.wa.gov.au or (08) 9222 1011.

Why are road blocks necessary – even post-incident?

During an emergency, it may not be safe for the community to be allowed into the area, so road blocks will be put in place. These road blocks also enable emergency services to have the space to do what they need to, to protect life and property in the area.

The HMA/Controlling Agency may make arrangements for the media to pass through these roadblocks, however, this may not be possible in all circumstances.

The priority for emergency agencies is to protect the lives and property of people affected by the emergency and help to keep you, the media, safe.

Even after the immediate danger has passed, there will be other hazards such as burnt or fallen trees, loose debris and damage to roads and infrastructure, often along hundreds of kilometres of roads. Emergency agencies will be working hard to remove these hazards so that you, and the residents in the area, can enter.

If you wish to enter a restricted area, please be patient, stay in touch with the HMA/Controlling Agency and take up the media opportunities arranged for you.

Please be aware in particular that broadcasting images of properties destroyed, prior to residents being allowed to return, may cause distress to evacuated residents who were not aware that their property had been affected.

Is there an evacuation plan for the Perth CBD?

Yes there is. The plan has been developed in close consultation with the City of Perth, WA Police and other authorities. The public and media would be advised of the plan's details when an emergency occurred requiring evacuation. The plan outlines how people in the CBD will be notified and how people will be directed to move, or shelter-in-place. Social media, radio and television are important means of communicating with the public, in conjunction with Emergency Alert and on-ground police presence.

Are media blackouts likely to be sought?

Media blackouts may be sought in extreme situations, for defined periods, and on specific and agreed matters. Generally these matters are police-related. A successful blackout would require cooperation by all involved media outlets.

The only justification for a media blackout would be to preserve life, ensure the safety of officers and protect the integrity of a criminal investigation or protect vital evidence. Media blackouts would be collectively sought, via discussions between News Directors/Editors and the Police Media Unit. It is important to note that a media blackout won't necessarily prevent you from obtaining vision/images relating to the incident; it is more about delaying the broadcast/publication of material that could impact upon the operation.

Contact Information

For more information about State public information arrangements during emergencies, contact the Director Media and Corporate Communications, WA Police on 08 9222 1404 or police.media@police.wa.gov.au

To access WA's emergency plans (i.e. the State Emergency Management Plan and State Emergency Plans for specific hazards), go to www.oem.wa.gov.au