

## Case Study – Exercise Heatwave Emergency 25

### Exercise need

On 13 March 2025 the Blacktown Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) undertook Exercise Heatwave Emergency 25 at the Blacktown City Council Administration Centre. It was a discussion exercise to test local arrangements for responding to a heatwave.

This was the first time that an exercise of this theme had ever been conducted by the LEMC.



The exercise provided an opportunity for participants to discuss and workshop their anticipated responses to a heatwave across the Blacktown Local Government Area (LGA).

### Exercise aim

The exercise aimed to strengthen community safety, preparedness, response and recovery efforts by:

- **Evaluating local arrangements and adequacy of resourcing** for responding to a heatwave within the LGA
- **Assessing the coordination, effectiveness, readiness, and suitability** of the LEMC response and early recovery plans
- **Identifying gaps in knowledge, awareness and skills** amongst LEMC and Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) members

### Exercise objectives



- **Ensure** that LEMC and EOC procedures are established for effective heatwave response and assess their scope and effectiveness

- **Confirm** that all relevant stakeholders are familiar with heatwave response procedures
- **Identify** training, skills, capability, resource or logistical gaps within the LEMC for heatwave response readiness
- **Verify** the alignment of LEMC and EOC procedures with the updated NSW State Heatwave Sub Plan.

### Exercise outcomes

The exercise identified a deficit in heatwave-specific planning, triggers and responses within the Blacktown LEMC and LEOC.

The exercise highlighted the importance of early preplanning once the heatwave warning is issued by the Bureau of Meteorology, using the short lead time to implement risk mitigation strategies and guide the community through the event.

The exercise also highlighted the importance of contextualising communications to each LGA by sharing information with the REOC and coordinating between adjoining LGAs.

A significant gap in planning and response in animal welfare-related issues was identified, including the provisioning of messaging, considerations for designated Cool Areas, and meeting the needs of domestic animals, livestock and wild animals.

The exercise also highlighted several local scenario considerations unique to Blacktown, such as the challenges posed by a large music festival scheduled during the heatwave period, which required careful planning for crowd safety, water logistics, and ambulance liaison

support. Additional issues included a disability group home outage that underscored the need for rapid cooling solutions and energy restoration for vulnerable residents, transport disruptions on the T1 Western Line and Sydney Metro that demanded targeted commuter messaging, and energy system stress with potential AEMO-advised rolling blackouts, reinforcing the need for backup power and cooling sites.

### Exercise evaluation

Several observations/insights were made throughout the duration of the exercise; these have been categorised into the following insights:

Observations/Insights	Sustain/ Improve
Hold virtual meetings in the LEMC to share information and initiate planning	Improve
The complexity of animal welfare concerns is not well understood and needs improved communication and response action planning.	Improve
Heatwave communications need to be contextualised to local communities and aligned with the Ambulance Service’s key messages.	Improve

Observations/Insights	Sustain/ Improve
Resource limitations in some functional areas hinder their ability to provide Liaison Officers in each LEOC. Representation at the Regional Emergency Operations Centre (REOC) will need digital connectivity to LEOC’s.	Improve
Gaps in Department of Education heatwave cancellation policy in heat waves when compared to policy for bushfire-related closures.	Improve
Regular and extensive information sharing between the LEOC and REOC is crucial, establishment of a Common Operating Picture is necessary.	Improve
There is a need for greater understanding amongst agencies of Command and Control for heatwave emergencies, with clearer arrangements for cost recovery.	Improve
Robust record-keeping within the LEOC and REOC is essential for accountability, learning, and continuous improvement in emergency management.	Sustain

### Recommendations

The following recommendations arose from this exercise:

- LEOC and REOC EOC activation triggers and protocols should be enhanced to cater for heatwaves
- LEMCs should undertake improved planning to better cater for heatwaves in their areas. The planning should address:
  - Risks and vulnerabilities within LGAs arising from heatwaves
  - Critical facilities
  - Solutions for places of refuge during heatwaves
  - Animal welfare needs
  - Critical facilities
  - Targeted contextually relevant communications
- LEMCs need to proactively use the time between the initial advice from the Bureau of Meteorology and the onset of the heatwave to undertake contextual risk and vulnerability assessments, confirm resource availability, develop targeted communications and identify specific response activities. A pre-event checklist or guide for the LEMC would be beneficial.