

Case Study - Exercise Heatwave 25

Exercise need

On 3 March 2025, the Northwest Metropolitan Regional Emergency Management Committee undertook Exercise Heatwave Emergency 25, a discussion exercise to test regional arrangements for responding to a heatwave.

The exercise was held at the Fire and Rescue NSW Emergency Services Academy and involved representatives from the REMC as well as Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMC) in the area.



This was the first time that an exercise of this nature had been conducted within the region. The exercise provided an opportunity for participants to discuss and workshop their anticipated responses to a heatwave across their Local Government Areas (LGAs).

Exercise aim

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

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



Exercise objectives

- **Ensure** that LEMC/REMC 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 LEMC/REMC for heatwave response readiness
- **Verify** their alignment with the updated NSW state heatwave sub plan

Exercise outcomes

The exercise identified a deficit in heatwave-specific planning, triggers and responses within the Northwest Metropolitan Region.

The exercise highlighted a need for Local Emergency Operations Centres (LEOCs) to coordinate their responses, noting the widespread nature of heatwaves, which would result in the role of the Regional Emergency Operations Controller becoming more pronounced.

Most participants agreed that the exercise increased their knowledge and understanding of heatwave emergencies and was a relevant and good use of their time.

The insights and recommendations derived from this workshop highlight that the aims of evaluation and assessment of heatwave response were met.



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
The complexity of animal welfare concerns is not well understood and needs improved communication and response action planning.	Improve
Facilities, resources, and methods for effective communication vary in each LGA and planning must be contextualised to the local community when responding to heatwaves.	Improve
Resource limitations in some functional areas hinder their ability to provide Liaison Officers in each LEOC, representation at the Regional.	Improve

Observations/Insights	Sustain/Improve
Emergency Operations Centre (REOC) may need to be prioritised.	
Regular and extensive information sharing between the LEOC and REOC is crucial, establishment of a Common Operating Picture is necessary.	Improve
EOC activation triggers need to be reviewed and considered in the context of heatwaves that may be separate or in conjunction with other hazards.	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:

1. LEOC and REOC EOC activation triggers and protocols should be enhanced to cater for heatwaves

2. 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
3. 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/REMC/EOCs would be beneficial.