

CHECKLISTS TO KEEP WOMEN AND CHILDREN SAFE AFTER NATURAL DISASTERS

Women's experiences during the Victorian Black Saturday bushfires were researched by Women's Health Goulburn North East (late 2009 to 2011).¹ This research provided new insights about how to keep women and children safer during disasters.

CHECKLIST FOR ...

DISASTER PREVENTION AGENCIES RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ELIMINATION OR REDUCTION OF THE INCIDENCE OR SEVERITY OF EMERGENCIES AND THE MITIGATION OF THEIR EFFECTS

(Ambulance Victoria, Aust. Attorney General's Dept., Red Cross – RediPlan, Building Commission, BOM, CMA, Coroners Court, CFA, DEECD, DH, DHS, DPI, DSE, DOT, Emergency Broadcasters, EnergySafe, EPA, Life Saving Victoria, MFB, Municipal Councils, OESC, OFSC, Parks Vic, St John's, Vic Roads, VicPol, SES, WorkSafe)²

¹ See full report, 'The Way He Tells It' at www.wheatlh.com.au/environmentaljustice

² From Emergency Management Manual Victoria: Part 7 (2010)

<http://www.oesc.vic.gov.au/emergencymanual>



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- Educate disaster-prone communities about the probable health effects of disaster before a disaster occurs. Include the possible exacerbation of previous traumas
- Tailor Mental Health First-Aid courses to include disaster trauma and the probability of increased family violence, and provide them annually to communities in disaster-prone areas
- Develop strategies to prevent and respond to family violence in your community after a disaster
- Establish methods for compiling accurate statistics on family violence, e.g.
 - Prioritise the inclusion of a 'family violence' tick-box in data collection forms so it is not hidden beneath other presenting issues
 - Review Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence to ensure accurate recording of family violence after disasters
- In policies and in response measures such as case management, include women and children as 'vulnerable' groups
- Establish a National Preferred Provider Register to list disaster trauma practitioners who have a sound understanding of family violence
- Increase long-term funding for family violence services in communities affected by disaster
- Police to establish a new position of Disaster Liaison Officer with expertise in the dynamics of disaster and family violence and with a designated role in disaster recovery meetings
- Police to investigate ways to ensure the safety of women, children and communities, whilst being aware of the pressures on disaster survivors
- Establish National Disaster Guidelines that:
 - ensure accurate family violence statistics are recorded by all personnel responding to disaster e.g. health & community services and police
 - state the need for relationship and family counselling in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and on a long-term ongoing basis
- Recognise that the way men and women act is often the result of social conditioning and these gendered roles can leave women at a disadvantage both during and after disasters
- Before, during and after disasters, challenge expectations that men will behave in a defined 'masculine' way – encourage expression of emotion

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CHECKLIST FOR ...

DISASTER RESPONSE SERVICES RESPONSIBLE FOR COMBATING OF EMERGENCIES AND THE PROVISION OF RESCUE AND IMMEDIATE RELIEF SERVICES

(Response Coordination Agency: VicPol, DH, CFA/MFB, Defence Forces, DPI, DSE, EPA, Water Authorities, DOT, VicRoads, Red Cross, Ambulance Vic, Municipal Councils, VicRelief Foodbank, Salvation Army, BOM, WorkSafe, DPC)

¹ See full report, 'The Way He Tells It' at www.whealth.com.au/environmentaljustice

Contact Women's Health Goulburn North East for more information: www.whealth.com.au/environmentaljustice



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Be alert to the increase of family violence after disasters

Ensure those working in human services post-disasters have undertaken Common Risk Assessment Framework (or similar) training to identify and respond effectively to family violence

Include specialist FV services in disaster response and recovery planning bodies

Include women at all levels in disaster response and recovery planning bodies

Name it: Say the word 'violent' – not 'stressed' and 'angry'

Seek out specialist family violence services for advice and refer people to them

Explore ways for emergency services workers – especially police and fire-fighters – to return to families immediately after the initial trauma of the disaster and where possible, backfill with personnel from other regions

Investigate mandatory counselling for emergency services workers in the immediate postdisaster period – particularly in male-dominated organisations

Prioritise the needs of all sole adults escaping disasters with small children

Recognise that the way men and women act is often the result of social conditioning and these gendered roles can leave women at a disadvantage both during and after disasters

Before, during and after disasters, challenge expectations that men will behave in a defined 'masculine' way – encourage expression of emotion

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DISASTER RECOVERY SERVICES RESPONSIBLE FOR ASSISTING PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES AFFECTED BY EMERGENCIES

(Recovery Coordination Agency: DHS, Municipal Councils, DPI, Parks Vic, Centrelink, DIIRD, Rural Finance Corporation, Rural Financial Counselling, hospitals, Community Health, Mental Health, Victorian Council of Churches, Red Cross, Salvation Army, DEECD, DPC)

¹ See full report, 'The Way He Tells It' at www.whealth.com.au/environmentaljustice

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Check the DISASTER RESPONSE SERVICES list, as well as ...

- Include an agenda item on family violence in regular meetings of organisations and community recovery committees
- Monitor accurate recording of family violence after disasters by police and other responsible recovery bodies such as a case management or other system
- Investigate ways of supporting men in the aftermath of a disaster, in the knowledge that they are often reluctant to seek formal counselling
- Offer financial and systemic support for women's groups post-disaster
- Post-disaster, include responsible drinking advertising in community spaces and hold some community alcohol-free events
- Provide ongoing counselling for families of emergency services workers
- Employ local men and women in paid reconstruction efforts, and offer a gradual and supported re-entry to the workforce

IN CONCLUSION, WE SUPPORT RECOMMENDATION 65 FROM THE FINAL REPORT OF THE 2009 VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES ROYAL COMMISSION:

THE COMMONWEALTH ESTABLISH A NATIONAL CENTRE FOR BUSHFIRE RESEARCH IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER AUSTRALIAN JURISDICTIONS TO SUPPORT PURE, APPLIED AND LONG-TERM RESEARCH IN THE PHYSICAL, BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RELEVANT TO BUSHFIRES AND TO PROMOTE CONTINUING RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP IN RELATED DISCIPLINES.

(TEAGUE, MCLEOD, & PASCOE, 2010)



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