



Government
Services

Emergency Relief Centre Guidelines

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Introduction

Background

The State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) specifies that councils have responsibility for the establishment of Emergency Relief Centres (ERC) to provide immediate and basic services to people affected by an emergency.

An ERC is not a refuge or recovery centre, it is a safe place coordinated by council, where people can go to:

- take shelter from the emergency
- access relief and other available information
- access relief support services to assist with their immediate needs
- reconnect with their community.

Municipal Emergency Management Plans (MEMP) and council ERC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) describe local ERC processes for each municipality. Locally focussed planning is crucial but there should be a baseline level of service provided at all ERCs across the state. This will allow community members to access a similar level of service at any ERC.

Previous large-scale emergencies have highlighted inconsistent practices across ERCs. Reviews under two inquiries recommended centralised guidance. These were:

The Inspector-General for Emergency Management (IGEM) Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season, Phase 2 – Recommendation 11:

The Victorian Government work with the Municipal Association of Victoria and councils to build contingencies into emergency relief centre planning to ensure places of shelter are inclusive, recognise diversity and are better placed to support all displaced people in circumstances of:

- *community isolation*
- *prolonged emergencies*
- *community-led activation of centres.*

The Victorian Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee 2022 flood event in Victoria Inquiry Final Report – Recommendation 58

That the Victorian Government, working with local councils, establish statewide operating guidelines for emergency relief centres. These guidelines should include protocols on rapid activation, streamlined communication and resource mobilisation. Local councils should remain empowered to tailor protocols to meet local needs.

Purpose

This document (the Guidelines) provides guidance for councils to plan for the operation of an ERC. It also considers alternatives to a traditional ERC to deliver relief services to isolated and at-risk communities.

The Guidelines have been developed for voluntary implementation by councils. They are intended to promote a better practice approach by prioritising consistency, continuous improvement, adaptability and collaboration. Councils and partner agencies can learn from experience and share insights to improve local processes, rather than rigidly applying prescriptive standards.

The Guidelines support and facilitate review and update to relief sections of MEMPs, relevant Sub-Plans, and local ERC plans and standard operating procedures.

The document acknowledges that it is not possible to meet every expectation of the community.

Scope

In scope

These Guidelines cover:

- Planning, governance and coordination including:
 - ERC site selection, staffing, security, welfare, cultural safety and accessibility.
 - Alternative ERC models such as community hubs, power and shower hubs, mobile relief delivery and coordinated relief outreach.
 - Planning with communities where an ERC is activated and managed by community in scenarios where they are isolated.
 - Roles and responsibilities of councils and partner agencies (as defined in the SEMP/policy/legislation), escalation pathways and inter council resource sharing.
- Operations of ERCs including:
 - Delivery of immediate relief services such as shelter, food, water, registration and personal support at ERCs.
 - Safety and inclusion including cultural safety, child safety, family violence considerations, LGBTQI+ inclusion and disability access.
- Alignment with council SOPs, MEMP, Regional Emergency Management Plan (REMP), SEMP, and other plans such as the Victorian Emergency Animal Welfare Plan.
- Advice on compliance with legislation such as the Gender Equality Act, Child Safe Standards, and building and accommodation standards.
- Continuous Improvement through better practice principles, audits, and after-action reviews.
- Reference to the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) to ensure proper expenditure processes are established and eligible expenditure incurred can be reimbursed back to council.

Out of scope

These Guidelines do not cover:

- Incident control procedures such as evacuation triggers and planning. For information on this please refer to the Victorian Evacuation Guidelines and relevant Joint Standard Operating Procedures (JSOP).
- Specific funding arrangements and cost recovery. Activation funding and DRFA processes are addressed separately (refer to the DRFA Guidelines and specific guidance issued by Emergency Management Victoria). Council staff need to familiarise themselves with DRFA processes and procedures.
- Recovery centre operations. The transition to recovery centres is noted but detailed guidance is outside of scope.

Principles

Emergency Management agencies with relief responsibilities must incorporate SEMP relief principles into their planning, decision-making and delivery of services. Building on these, the following principles will guide ERC planning and decision making. ERC operations should:

- Support the health, wellbeing and sustainability of council staff, relief agency staff and volunteers.
- Support the safety and security of all individuals and companion animals.
- Plan effectively and consider the financial implications.
- Use local knowledge, be flexible and scalable.
- Clearly define governance, leadership and coordination.
- Provide timely and equitable relief services.
- Consider accessibility, inclusion, and cultural safety for all members of the community.
- Adopt a trauma-informed approach.
- Commit to continuous improvement.

Audience

The audience for these Guidelines is councils and council staff. Victorian Government departments and agencies, non-government organisations, businesses and community groups with a significant role in supporting councils to provide relief during an emergency may also find them useful.

Authority and governance structures

Under the SEMP councils are responsible for establishing ERCs to provide immediate and basic services to people affected by an emergency. This guide supports councils to plan for that role.

The SEMP also designates relief responsibilities to numerous other agencies. Councils must plan for ERCs with these agencies through the Municipal and Regional Emergency Management Planning Committees (MEMPC and REMPC).

The Guidelines have been developed by Local Government Victoria (LGV) in consultation with councils and emergency partners. The SEMP provides authority for LGV (under the relevant government department) to provide advice as the Lead Response Support Agency for local government.

Maintaining the Guidelines

The Guidelines will be maintained by LGV on a three-year review cycle to ensure they remain current and effective. If a large-scale activation occurs and significant lessons are identified through after-action reviews or audits, the Guidelines will be updated earlier to incorporate those improvements. This approach ensures the document reflects better practice, adapts to emerging risks, and aligns with the Victorian Preparedness Framework and the SEMP.

Planning for relief

This section covers the planning stage. Planning for relief is crucial to support communities during an emergency. Councils need to have a clear understanding of their capability and capacity to open one or more ERCs or coordinate relief outreach services. Councils also need to work with partners and stakeholders in the planning stage to clarify each other's role.

Planning across council

Successful ERCs and relief coordination require the input and support of multiple teams across council. The following table lists some areas where councils can highlight the role of ERCs in internal policies and operational procedures. Please note, this is not exhaustive and illustrative only as councils have different structures and team names.

Table 1: Key council teams that should be involved in planning for and operating ERCs.

Activity	Council team	Role
Designation of a facility as an ERC	Facilities or community development team	Manage contracts and user agreement with third party users of community facilities to ensure they temporarily vacate/share the facility when an ERC is activated.
	Capital works or Infrastructure Project Teams	Consult the Emergency Management Team when designing or redeveloping community facilities to ensure the building can be used as an ERC.
	Maternal and Child Health, Environmental Health, Community Development, Animal Management and the Building Surveyor	Conduct suitability assessment and audits and the building.
	Risk and Safety team	Incorporate the facility into business continuity plans and facility evacuation plans.
	MEMPC Chair	Include ERCs in the MEMPC version of the MEMP (not the public version) or other relevant sub-plans.

Activity	Council team	Role
	Municipal Building Surveyor	Provide advice on temporary accommodation standards under s64(1) of the Building Act 1993.
Activation of the ERC	Facilities or Community development team	Notify users of the facility that bookings are cancelled or assist in moving bookings to other facilities. They also support with building access, functionality and maintenance issues.
	Finance team	Provide cost centres and support to track ERC expenditure to support DRFA claims.
	Communications team	Provide updates to all staff regarding the activation and use of the ERC.
	Executive team	Support and approval of budget to operate the facility as an ERC.
	People and Culture team	Support staffing of the ERC and backfilling of regular positions. Compliance with Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (Psychological Health) 2025.
Exercising an ERC	Executive	Support and budget to run a yearly ERC exercise to support capacity and capability.
	People and Culture	Policies that support staff to be involved in emergency management training and exercising. Compliance with Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (Psychological Health) 2025.

Case study: Integrating Emergency Relief Centres into community infrastructure
Alexandra Community Relief & Leisure Centre redevelopment

In February 2026, Murrindindi Shire Council endorsed the Alexandra Community Relief & Leisure Centre Redevelopment Plan. The project highlights the critical importance of embedding ERC capability into the planning and upgrade of community infrastructure, particularly in disaster prone regional areas.

The existing Alexandra Community Leisure Centre had served the community since 1978, functioning as both a recreation facility and a designated ERC. While the centre had long supported community health, sport and wellbeing, the ageing building no longer met contemporary standards for accessibility, safety, or emergency management. These limitations were brought into sharp focus following repeated emergencies in the shire, including major fires and floods and the January 2026 bushfires.

Recognising the growing need for resilient, multi-purpose infrastructure, council adopted a redevelopment approach that prioritised both everyday community use and emergency response. Planning was undertaken in partnership with Alexandra Secondary College, a key project partner and co-funder, ensuring strong alignment across education, health and community outcomes.

The proposed redevelopment included a full-sized indoor court for emergency shelter, flexible program rooms, commercial kitchen, accessible amenities, improved site access, and sustainable design features to enhance long-term resilience. This dual-purpose design enabled the facility to transition quickly and effectively during emergencies without compromising its day-to-day role.

The Alexandra redevelopment demonstrates best practice in future-focused infrastructure planning, reinforcing that ERC functionality should be a core consideration, not an afterthought, when upgrading community facilities.

Site selection

When selecting a site for an ERC, councils should prioritise accessibility, safety, and functionality. The location should be easy to reach by major roads, have adequate parking, and be close to affected communities.

Councils located near state borders, should ensure MEMPs consider the needs of communities that are likely to require access to an ERC across the border. MEMPCs should facilitate planning with interstate EM committees to ensure interoperability.

Plan for sufficient indoor space for registration, food and water distribution, sleeping (if required) and personal support areas, with flexibility to scale up if demand increases. Larger spaces can be partitioned into smaller rooms and smaller rooms combined to form larger spaces. Essential amenities such as toilets, heating/cooling, and reliable power and water connections are critical. Where not available, develop contingency plans to ensure health and safety can be maintained, for example, alternative cooling during a heatwave. Where possible, the site should also allow for privacy and cultural safety, including gender-neutral spaces and child-friendly areas.

Choose venues familiar to the community, such as sporting complexes or community centres, and ensure compliance with health, hygiene, and disability access standards. Planning should also consider security, traffic flow management

and areas for companion animals to be housed out of the weather. Ensure toilets/showers can be safely accessed when there is minimal staffing in the facility.

Scalability

ERCs should be designed to expand or contract quickly based on the number of people requiring assistance. This can be forecast using population thresholds, size of the emergency event or prolonged activation periods. Scalability planning can include:

- Flexible layouts that allow additional space for registration, food distribution, or sleeping areas.
- Modular infrastructure (e.g., portable showers, generators) that can be added as demand grows.
- Clear triggers for scaling up operations.

Capability and capacity

Emergencies vary in size, complexity, and duration. An ERC should have sufficient capacity to meet community needs under different scenarios. Planning for these scenarios ensures councils can respond effectively without overwhelming their resources or compromising staff or community safety. This should be embedded into the organisations business continuity planning.

Councils should understand, document and communicate their capacity to operate ERCs or relief alternatives. ERC and relief exercises provide an opportunity to test and review ERC processes. Testing can identify the time it takes to identify a resource need, activate a resource request, deploy, induct and roster a staff member from another region. Councils can make resource requests either through regional arrangements or the MAV [Inter-Council Emergency Management Resource Sharing Protocol](#).

To plan for staffing an ERC or other relief activation, councils should:

- Maintain enough trained staff familiar with ERC SOPs.
- Include a staffing matrix in ERC planning. This examines how many staff you have and how long you can run an ERC without external assistance (see section on rostering and staffing matrix).
- Document staffing limits.
- Participate in resource sharing protocols and agreements.
- Test capability and capacity through regular ERC exercises and incorporate lessons for continuous improvement. This provides staff with an opportunity to self-identify whether working in an ERC environment is right for them. Some staff may be better suited to non-public facing roles.

To plan for resourcing an ERC or other relief activation, councils should:

- Consider the use of technology for registration, communication, and resource tracking for efficiency. For example, self-registration via a QR code that captures basic information that can then be used to support relief planning.
- Document resource limits.

- Identify local sources to borrow, hire or purchase resources such as generators, porta-loos, temporary fencing, etc.
- Identify triggers for requesting surge support through regional or state processes.

This is also relevant for relief lead and support agencies and all local service organisations providing relief services. The MEMPC has a responsibility to understand and monitor capacity across the municipality. Reporting to MEMPC and REMPC prior to the high-risk weather season can be scheduled as part of normal readiness arrangements. The [Victorian Preparedness Framework](#) and the core capabilities provides a starting point to understand what to include in reporting.

Types of relief delivery

Relief service delivery will depend on the nature of the emergency, community needs and the capacity of relief providers. MEMPCs should plan for scenarios where communities may be isolated or where emergencies, such as a health emergency prevent face-to-face interactions. Whatever model is activated, communities must be able to understand how to access relief using VicEmergency.

Emergency Relief Centre

A traditional ERC is an existing facility established and coordinated by a council to provide immediate and basic relief services to people affected by an emergency. It is typically located in a community building, such as a neighbourhood centre or sporting complex, and staffed by council personnel and relief agencies. As defined in the SEMP, the centre offers essential services like shelter, food and water, non-food items (such as bedding and clothing), reconnecting friends and families, and health services including psychological first aid. It also provides a safe space for community members during the initial response phase of an emergency. It is best not to publicly advertise a list of designated ERCs. This prevents the public from assuming which ERC will be activated and attending the wrong facility.

A traditional ERC may be the best model when a physical facility is required. It can support large numbers of displaced people requiring multiple relief services in a single location.

Community hub or power/shower hub

A community hub or power and shower hub is an alternative model to the traditional ERC. Instead of providing a full suite of relief services, these hubs provide access to electricity for charging devices, hot showers, and basic amenities. Hubs are typically used when people still have access to their homes but are impacted by utility outages.

Hubs can operate from smaller venues with reliable water and power connections, minimal temporary infrastructure (e.g., portable shower units or generators), and simple traffic flow management. This streamlined approach allows councils to activate hubs quickly, position them closer to affected communities, and reduce operational complexity while still delivering critical relief services.

Place-based relief or outreach services

There may be times when a physical space is not practical or safe and council may decide to coordinate relief directly to affected communities through mobile teams or local service providers. This is ideal for isolated areas or for a health emergency that limits movement.

Local networks

Councils and MEMPC agencies are encouraged to partner with local networks to deliver relief to communities. These networks have existing community links and can significantly improve the speed and effectiveness relief delivery. They build on established relationships, reduce barriers for vulnerable groups, and support culturally safe and inclusive service delivery. Engaging these networks and partnerships early enables place-based relief delivery and eliminates the requirement for community to travel to a traditional ERC.

These networks often include local community service providers, volunteer groups, multicultural associations, First Nations organisations, and faith-based or community-led initiatives. Services can include direct delivery of food, water, hygiene supplies, and psychosocial support.

Councils should maintain pre-arranged agreements and contact lists within their plans and processes. MEMPs should outline these arrangements where they rely on or include organisations not mentioned in the SEMP. Community-led ERCs should be written into the local recovery plan. An objective of exercising an ERC could include testing these partnerships to ensure processes and expectations are clear.

Community led Emergency Relief Centre Case Study – East Gippsland

East Gippsland Shire Council stretches from west of Bairnsdale to the New South Wales border, covering 20,931 square kilometres and almost 10% of the state. Of the 50,000 residents, around 75% live in the regional centre of Bairnsdale and growth areas of Lakes Entrance and Paynesville, though many live in rural and remote communities that become isolated during fire, flood, and storm events.

During the Black Summer 2019/20 fires there were more than 7 ERCs opened across East Gippsland. Many major arterial roads, including the Great Alpine Road, Princes Highway and Monaro Highway were closed for extended periods with telecommunications, power and water also significantly impacted. Council endeavoured to facilitate and resource all ERCs, but found they were unable to get resources to some sites due to road closures and safety risks.

Following this event council recognised that in times of emergency, community leaders make an enormous contribution and know what their own community needs and resources are.

Recovery and resilience funding enabled council to develop a tailored community led ERC training and exercise program to empower community leaders and enhance their knowledge and skills to open and operate an ERC.

Expressions of interest were promoted across the East Gippsland communities and community networks to identify people who would like to be involved in a community led ERC. Interested people were encouraged to use the QR code to register their interest, the training and exercising was then delivered across 6 designated ERC locations in Mallacoota, Cann River, Orbost, Lakes Entrance, Buchan and Omeo.

Some of the training topics included:

- Victorian Emergency Management framework
- Council's role during an emergency
- Australian Red Cross and Register-Find-Reunite
- Relevant legislation
- Council support expectations

Council actively supports the community leaders coordinating community-led ERCs to develop their own procedures, including where to get the keys, who to contact and basics of an ERC operation.

Mallacoota, Omeo and Buchan are examples of where the core group of 3-4 people have developed their own procedural manuals. The core group have also completed National Police and Working with Children Checks and are onboarded as council volunteers. Spontaneous volunteers that attend ERCs to help during an event will be overseen and managed by the core group.

For more information, visit council's website at

<https://www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/community/emergency-management>

Companion animals

The welfare of domestic/companion animals can be a deciding factor in a person's decision to evacuate a property or attend an ERC. If animal access and welfare is incorporated as a key component of ERC planning, a person with a pet will be much more likely to use the ERC.

Planning support resources include the [Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience Planning for Animals Handbook](#) and the [Victorian Emergency Animal Welfare Plan](#). MEMPCs are encouraged to engage with stakeholders identified in the SEMP such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) when reviewing animal management plans.

For companion animal overflow or large animals, councils can consider planning for alternative sites to ERCs such as showgrounds, saleyards or pounds.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is helpful in planning with communities to achieve greater inclusion and equity. It refers to the ways in which different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. Aspects of a person's identify can include social characteristics such as aboriginality, gender,

sex, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, ability, age, mental health, socioeconomic status and many others. See <https://www.vic.gov.au/understanding-intersectionality>. When these aspects or characteristics combine, people find it harder to get the help they need due to systemic barriers, and they are at greater risk of the consequences of emergencies.

The table below provides a summary of the planning that could be undertaken and will be dependent on communities and their individual needs. Further information and links to resources are provided in Appendix One.

Table 2: Guide to planning for different communities.

Risk	Cohort	Mitigation
At increased risk of violence after emergencies.	Women	Train staff to respond to a disclosure. Include messaging about family violence in communications.
	Children	
	LGBTQI+	
	Older people	
Discrimination and racism.	First Peoples	Pre-plan with identified communities. Build relationships with community leaders. Create inclusive spaces. Train staff. Ensure privacy when registering people.
	Multicultural Communities	
	LGBTQI+	
Systemic challenges navigating relief services.	Multicultural communities	Pre-plan with identified communities. Planning is person-centred and strengths based. Accessible and safe spaces. Remove language barriers by engaging with community leaders and providing access to in-language services such as interpreters. ERC staff have posters that allow people to identify their first language.
	Older People	
	People experiencing housing instability and/or challenges with socioeconomic status.	
	People living with disability.	
	People with literacy, numeracy or IT access and use challenges.	

Case Study: A regional Gender Impact Assessment Framework for Emergency Relief Centres

The Grampians Region Relief and Recovery Committee (GRRRC) developed a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) process to guide the planning, operation and review of ERCs across the Grampians region. This regional approach ensures a consistent, gender aware and inclusive response to emergencies, while supporting councils to meet their obligations under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

The committee recognised that emergencies affect people differently depending on gender and other intersecting factors such as disability, age, cultural background, caring responsibilities, gender identity and experiences of family violence. While ERCs are critical for safety and immediate support, a one size fits all model risked overlooking these differences and creating unintended barriers to access.

Drawing on regional demographic data, after action reviews, community feedback and best practice research, including gender and disaster guidelines, the GRRRC designed a structured GIA process for all ERCs. The assessment framework requires councils to consider who is likely to use relief centres, how different groups may experience the service, and what barriers may prevent safe and dignified access.

As a result, the regional GIA framework embeds practical and scalable improvements, such as inclusive intake processes, private and confidential spaces, accessibility for people with disability, culturally safe environments, appropriate facilities for LGBTIQ+ community members, consideration of family violence risks, and planning for infants, pregnant people and older residents. It also emphasises staff training and clear referral pathways to specialist support services.

By leading the design of a regional Gender Impact Assessment process, the GRRRC has strengthened equity, safety and consistency across ERCs. The framework helps ensure relief services better meet diverse community needs, address gender inequality and promote gender equality during times of crisis.

ERC kits

Rapid and efficient activation of an ERC relies on having the right equipment and supplies ready to go. ERC kits provide council with a pre-packed, organised set of essential items that support safe, inclusive, and effective operations during the critical first hours of an emergency. Standardising kits can help maintain uniform practices across multiple ERCs and councils.

Reference ERC kits in the MEMP or internal council plans and integrated into ERC Standard Operating Procedures. Test and deploy ERC kits during regular exercises.

ERC kits should be tailored to local needs but can generally include:

- Standard Operating Procedures
- Registration materials:
 - Personal Information Forms (PIFs) if using.
 - Stationary (pens)
 - QR codes or tablets for electronic registration (e.g. Crisisworks).

- Privacy screens for confidential conversations.
- Signage and communication:
 - Directional signs for registration, child-friendly spaces, and amenities.
 - Multilingual information sheets.

Items within kits should be stored and organised for quick deployment. Consider using:

- Tubs or containers: Store items in clearly labelled, stackable tubs for easy transport and inventory checks.
- Dedicated ERC trailer: Larger councils may consider a purpose-built trailer stocked with ERC kits for rapid deployment.
- Inventory management: Maintain a checklist and conduct regular audits to ensure kits are complete and items are within expiry dates. At a minimum, conduct an audit before the higher risk weather season, and another at the end of the season.

Standard operating procedures

Every council should develop its own ERC SOPs tailored to local needs, capacity, and capability. While statewide guidelines provide a consistent framework, local SOPs ensure that operational decisions reflect the unique characteristics of each municipality. This includes geography, demographics, available facilities, and community vulnerabilities.

Benefits of creating localised SOPs include:

- Alignment with local capacity: Councils vary in staffing levels, volunteer networks, and access to resources. SOPs should define realistic processes that match local capability.
- Integration with the MEMP: SOPs must complement existing emergency arrangements, escalation pathways, and governance structures.
- Community-specific needs: Local SOPs allow councils to incorporate cultural safety considerations, disability access requirements, and other inclusion measures relevant to their communities.
- Operational clarity: SOPs provide staff and volunteers with clear instructions for activation, registration, service delivery, and deactivation, reducing confusion during high-pressure situations. Security protocols to ensure that security protocols are known and understood by all ERC staff.
- Role clarity: Role statements or role cards enable each area and each staff member to understand their role.
- Practical reminders: Checklists for common items such as ERC setup, pack up and management.
- Continuous improvement: Councils can embed lessons learned from exercises and real events into SOPs, ensuring they remain practical and effective over time.

Local SOPs should be reviewed regularly, tested through ERC exercises, and updated following after-action reviews to maintain alignment with better practice and evolving risks.

Linking into the emergency management framework

To effectively plan for an ERC, councils should ensure alignment with Victoria's emergency management framework. ERC operations do not exist in isolation, they form part of a broader, integrated system that spans municipal, regional, and state levels. Linking ERC planning to framework documents:

- Promotes consistency across all levels of emergency management, and across all councils
- Clarifies each agency's role
- Assists with legal and policy compliance
- Facilitates effective resource sharing and escalation
- Strengthens community confidence through coordinated planning.

Councils should embed these linkages in their ERC SOPs and review them regularly as part of emergency management exercises and continuous improvement processes.

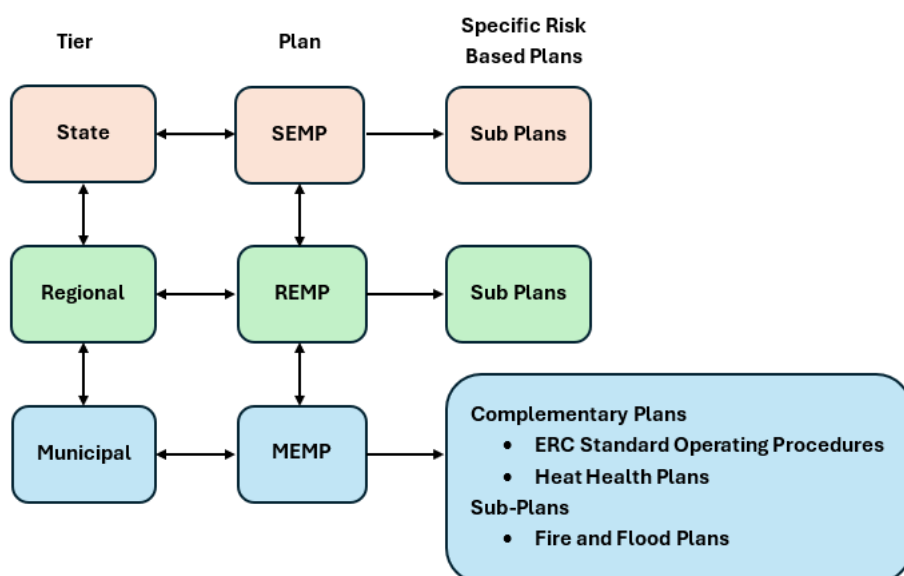
Key documents to reference:

- Internal procedures and plans, for example a Council Emergency Management Plan or Operations Plan that outlines command structures and finance protocols including linkages to a Council Emergency Operations Centre (CEOC).
- MEMP: for local arrangements, agency roles, and resource capabilities. ERC planning should reflect the MEMP's identified facilities and escalation pathways.
- REMP: for regional arrangements, escalation processes and regional surge and inter-council support.
- SEMP: for statewide relief principles, governance structures, and agency responsibilities for relief and recovery.
- Joint Operating Procedures
- EMV Guidance on preparing EM plans
- Victorian Emergency Operations Handbook
- Emergency Management Performance Standards
- Municipal Association of Victoria emergency guidance material
- Other relevant Frameworks and Standards:
 - Child Safe Standards for protecting children in ERCs.
 - Gender Equality Act 2020 requirements for Gender Impact Assessments.
 - Victorian Animal Welfare Plan for managing pets and support animals.
 - DRFA for financial eligibility and claims.
 - Victorian Preparedness Framework
 - Emergency Management Planning Framework
 - Community Resilience Framework
 - Recovery Governance Framework
 - Assurance Framework for Emergency Management
 - Sector Outcomes Framework
 - Lessons Management Framework

Key legislation:

- Emergency Management Act 2013

- Country Fire Authority Act 1958
- Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958
- Building Act 1993
- Building Code 2018 (part 11A emergency accommodation provision)
- Environment Protection Act 2017



Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements

The DRFA is the Australian Government’s cost-sharing arrangement for providing financial assistance to the states following a natural disaster or a terrorist attack.

When a disaster occurs that meets the DRFA criteria, councils can submit a claim to the Victorian Government for eligible expenditure incurred to deliver relief and recovery activities to communities. All claims assessed to meet eligibility criteria are reimbursed to councils.

The Victorian Government reimburses eligible claims under the DRFA as they are lodged and assessed. A disaster is eligible when:

- a coordinated multi-agency response was required; and
- State eligible expenditure exceeds or is expected to exceed the small disaster criteria of \$240,000.

Councils should familiarise themselves with the DRFA processes and evidence requirements for eligible expenditure prior to an emergency. It can be resource intensive and difficult to reconcile costs and evidence after the emergency. That’s why it’s important for the Municipal Emergency Management Officer (MEMO), Municipal Recovery Manager (MRM), ERC Manager and Finance team to have a written procedure to ensure claim compliance. Understanding and exercising the financial tracking processes will give council a higher chance of successful DRFA claims for eligible expenditure. The [DRFA toolbox](#) has helpful guidance and Tip Sheets to assist councils to comply with the conditions of the DRFA.

Planning for escalation

It is important council understands how and why to escalate relief prior to an emergency. Councils should discuss and plan for escalation through their MEMPC including the Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator (MERC) within Victoria Police. Escalation occurs as is described in the SEMP, but local escalation arrangements may differ. Escalation arrangements for ERCs should be described in MEMPs and local SOPs.

Operations

This section covers the activation and operations stage. Stepping through each component of activation and operations is crucial to ensure an ERC adequately supports communities during an emergency. Councils need to have a clear understanding of their capability and capacity to staff one or more ERCs or coordinate relief outreach services. Councils also need to work with partners and stakeholders to understand where to access supports.

Working with Incident Control

At the local level, relief activation rests with the Incident Controller in collaboration with the council as the municipal relief coordinator. This is described in the SEMP. The REMP should describe how the arrangements will be implemented at the regional level and how Emergency Management Victoria as the regional tier coordinator will engage with councils.

The SEMP states that relief operations are to be integrated into response and that relief outcomes are considered when making decisions. All decision makers need to keep the relief principles front of mind. This means that councils can consider the best means to deliver relief needs and provide advice to the Incident Controller to support the community. The SEMP does not limit relief to the opening of an ERC. The DRFA allows for the reimbursement of the establishment and operation of ERCs, outreach relief including basic food, medical supplies, and emergency clothing drops to isolated individuals.

When an emergency evacuation is required, the same level of coordination may not be possible, see JSOP 3.12 and the Evacuation Guidelines on EM-COP.

Rapid activation

Standard operating procedures can include a readiness matrix that identifies the required resources on higher risk days. Communicating with council executive, managers and trained staff on risk days prepares for quick deployment. If an ERC is required urgently, it is more likely needed as a safe place to shelter and provide information. Waiting to fill every role identified in the SOP shouldn't delay the opening an ERC. Prioritise sending critical staff to safely open and operate the ERC while other roles are enroute, this should be prioritised to support community safety.

Relief activation process

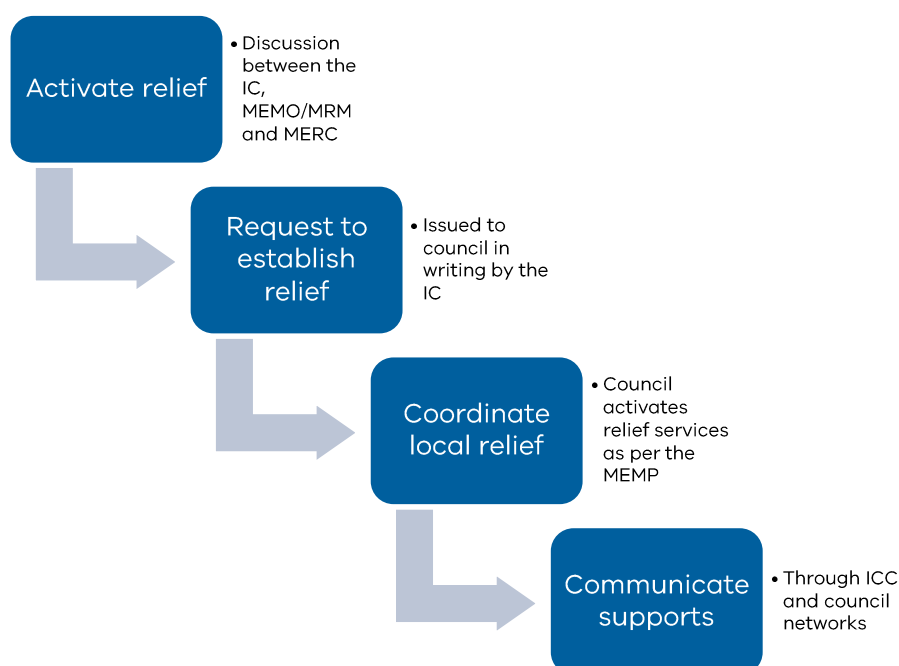


Figure 1: Relief activation process from Incident Control to council.

The method of relief delivery activated will be based on the consequences, scale of displacement, essential services required and any health or safety constraints. It is crucial that council is involved in activation discussions with the IC to provide local context. Council can provide advice on the best method to deliver relief, the location for an ERC or hub, likely community transit routes, indirect impacts to unaffected community, etc.

Supporting public communications

Public communications must be consistent across different mediums and can be delivered through VicEmergency and council networks. They should be targeted to known cohorts in the community and could cover information directed at:

- Tourists, travellers and holiday homeowners to leave or avoid the area to limit the number of people requiring support through an ERC.
- Displaced people to consider staying with friends and family, and remember to take medications, pet food and supplies and any other immediate need personal items with them.
- People attending the ERC to understand that ERCs can offer temporary shelter and remember to bring items necessary for their own health and wellbeing. The ERC may not cater to diverse needs such as wheelchair accessibility. The ERC may or may not have spaces for companion animals.
- People that speak a different language and require translations into languages spoken in the community.

ERC staffing

Councils must assign clear roles in an ERC to support the staff that will be working there. Each role has defined responsibilities that support governance, service delivery, and community and staff wellbeing.

The initial staffing of an ERC will be dependent on the size of the emergency (how many people are impacted), the size of the building and councils' capacity to divert staff from their usual roles. Scenario planning can help councils to determine how many staff are needed to fill critical roles and identify staffing shortfalls. It is usually the MEMO or MRM (with support from the EM team) that activate the required staff.

The following table outlines the core services that require staffing in a traditional ERC.

Table 3: Staffing roles in an ERC.

Role	Tools	Suggested staff matrix*
Opening the centre to provide shelter from the emergency		
May initially be undertaken by staff already present at a council operated facility if during normal business hours.	Standby roster for high-risk days.	Small event: 3 staff members fulfil all required roles.
Staff trained in opening a facility, registration and personal support.	Role cards or aide memoir for simple tasks. Written procedure on how to open a centre including turning off alarms and turning on power. ERC kits.	Medium sized event: ERC Manager, 5 personal support and registration staff, 1 animal management staff member, logistics support from the CEOC/MECC. Large event: ERC Manager and 2IC, 6-8 personal support and registration staff, traffic management/precinct support, on site logistics and information officer. Supporting event – 3-5 personal support and registration staff sent to support an ERC in a Victorian council or cross-border ERC equivalent (under a resource sharing agreement).
Information for community		
A role is identified to provide regular updated information on information boards, council	Pre-approved messaging to direct spontaneous volunteers and donations to the most appropriate pathway, i.e. GIVIT for donations.	Small event: 3 staff members fulfill all required roles. Medium sized event: dedicated communications officer embedded into Councils Emergency

Role	Tools	Suggested staff matrix*
website and social media.	Regular briefings with council and agency staff.	Operations Centre. Roles are identified in the ERC.
Communications Officer embedded into the Councils Emergency Operations Centre.	Control Agency is engaged to attend a community meeting. Council Facebook or YouTube Channel is set up to live stream community meetings. Staff have access to information boards or white boards that can be placed at the entry of the ERC. Staff are familiar with VicEmergency and local radio stations where community can stay connected to messaging. Customer Service Staff are briefed, have access to scripts and FAQs.	Large event: Internal and an External Communications Officer embedded into Councils Emergency Operations Centre. Dedicated staff in the ERC.

Register people

Identified ERC Staff.	Posters or postcards with QR code allowing people to register themselves. Laptops or tablets/iPads to access Crisisworks.	Small event: 3 staff members fulfill all required roles. Medium sized events: 5 personal support and registration staff. Large event: 6-8 personal support/registration staff.
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Animal management

Local laws/Animal Management Officers.	Messaging to advise people what to bring with them and what is available at the ERC.	Small event may not require activation of specialised support. Medium and Large events: think about how staff in other parts of the organisation can assist i.e. depot staff that may not be activated during the early stages of an emergency when roads are closed.
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Role	Tools	Suggested staff matrix*
Food and water		
Identified ERC Staff	Activate Salvation Army/local providers in your plan.	<p>Small event: 3 staff members fulfill all required roles.</p> <p>Medium sized event: ERC Manager (The MRM could also fulfil this role). MRM actively monitors situation.</p> <p>Large event: ERC Manager and 2IC work with logistics staff in Council Operations or on-site logistics staff and relief lead agencies.</p>
Material aid		
Standard Operating Procedure identifies the role responsible for contacting relief lead agencies.	<p>Messaging to advise people what to bring with them and what is available at the ERC.</p> <p>Activate Salvation Army.</p>	<p>Small event: may not be applicable.</p> <p>Medium event: ERC Manager (The MRM could also fulfil this role). MRM actively monitors situation.</p> <p>Large event: Registration staff escalate needs to ERC Manager. MRM coordinates relief needs and is supported by Council Emergency Operations Centre.</p>
Personal support/psychological first aid		
For council staff this will form one skill across multiple roles including registration, community support team and ERC Manager.	<p>Staff matrix identifying trained staff.</p> <p>Activate VCC Emergencies Ministry/Australian Red Cross.</p>	Council staff are supported by relief lead agencies who contribute to resource planning needs in the ERC.

*Each council can define what a small, medium or large size event means for their community. This is for illustrative purposes only.

Suggested governance structures

The internal council governance structure to manage decisions, information sharing and approvals from the ERC will be determined by the size and complexity of the emergency. The table below shows one possible structure, but this may vary between councils. Councils should consider which positions have financial delegation and be mindful that purchases for the ERC will likely require quick approvals. Note this core structure also links into the Incident Emergency Management Team (IEMT) through the ICC EMLO, and other areas of council through the MRM or MEMO. All structures should be clearly identified in internal operational plans.

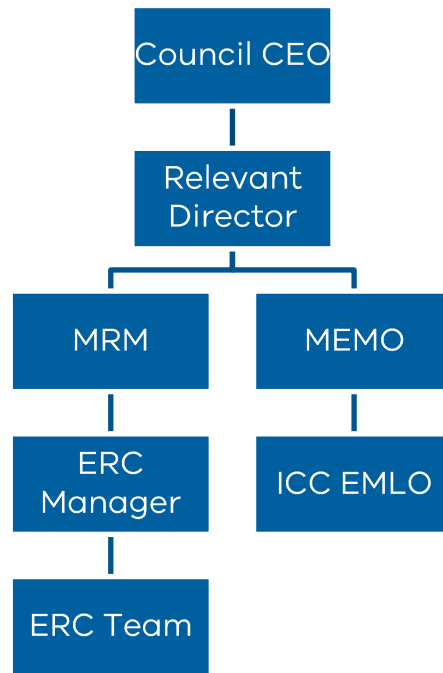


Figure 2: Example of a council emergency governance structure.

Rostering and staffing matrix

Rosters

A roster should be established for council staff working in an ERC, in accordance with the relevant council's Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA).

The type of rostering used should consider councils capability and capacity and ability to bring in external support. A roster period may cover extended days (up to 24 hours), have mandatory breaks between shifts or shift blocks, and minimise disruption to critical BAU services. Given the nature of emergencies, it is useful to roster in shorter blocks of around four days. This supports staff to work as a team and gives them a sufficient break between roster cycles. The type of roster used may change in response to staff feedback or reduced community need for an ERC.

Once the first roster cycle is in place, it is recommended that the following cycles are planned as early as possible. Allocate rostering to a role such as a logistics officer in the CEOC. Use templates such as roster contact forms and a rostering guide that clearly identifies the roles and shifts required. Crisisworks or other incident management software can assist in streamlining availability and rostering processes.

Table 4 provides an example of a four-day roster cycle with three 8.5-hour shifts per day. This roster requires large numbers of staff but enables those staff to work a standard shift length. It also enables a smaller team overnight. This cycle may be more difficult to staff where council has multiple ERCs open.

Table 4: Example roster one, three shifts per day.

Shift	Cycle 1				Cycle 2			
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
Day Shift 0700 to 1530	Team A	Team A	Team A	Team A	Team D	Team D	Team D	Team D
Afternoon Shift 1500 to 2330	Team B	Team B	Team B	Team B	Team E	Team E	Team E	Team E
Night Shift 2300 to 0730	Team C	Team C	Team C	Team C	Team F	Team F	Team F	Team F

Table 5 provides an example of a four-day roster cycle with two 12.5-hour shifts per day. This roster requires less staff overall but is more demanding on those staff.

Table 5: Example roster two, two shifts per day.

Shift	Cycle 1				Cycle 2			
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
Day Shift 0700 to 1930	Team A	Team A	Team A	Team A	Team C	Team C	Team C	Team C
Night Shift 1900 to 0730	Team B	Team B	Team B	Team B	Team D	Team D	Team D	Team D

Staff briefing

Preparing staff for their shift is an important first step in helping them feel supported. To give structure to a staff briefing, use the SMEACS format:

- What is happening (Situation)
- What needs to be achieved (Mission)
- What relief services are to be deployed (Execution)
- What key actions are required including rosters and logistics (Administration)
- Communications channels e.g. whether a supporting CEOC/MECC is activated. (Communications)
- Any safety considerations (Safety)

If an induction into the role is also required, the person should be allowed sufficient time before their shift to familiarise themselves with job cards or SOPs.

Staff handovers

Handovers are critical to support staff wellbeing and service continuity. Building a half hour overlap in shifts allows for handover and a short briefing or debriefing prior to leaving the ERC. The *Effective Handovers and Non-Technical Skills* online course is available on [EM Learning](#) to help staff understand how to handover.

Staffing matrix

A staffing matrix can be designed to establish the requirements for the ERC. A matrix can help to identify roles, responsibilities, and training (desired or completed) for each role. This will assist councils to identify critical roles, the personnel required to fill them and potential staffing gaps and trigger points for resource requests.

The matrix then identifies the training requirements and who can fulfil that role. If council does not have sufficient staff to fill each role, this document highlights the trigger for a resource request.

Table 6: Staff Matrix Example

Staff name	Role	Training completed	Availability
Staff name A	ERC Manager	ERC Exercise Psychosocial First Aid Handovers and Briefings	No planned leave for high-risk weather season
Staff name B	ERC Manager ICC EMLO	ERC Exercise EMLO Training Psychosocial First Aid	Away December
Staff name C	ERC Manager SIA Coordinator	Psychosocial First Aid Crisisworks Administrator Access	No planned leave for high-risk weather season

ERC security and staff wellbeing

Staff welfare

When councils establish and operate ERCs, it is essential to consider the wellbeing of staff. A focus on wellbeing helps maintain effective operations and protects those delivering the relief services.

Staff must be given opportunities for rest during and between shifts. This can be managed through considered rostering. Plan shifts to reduce fatigue and maintain continuity of service. Ensure staff have the time to eat a meal and are reminded of the importance of staying hydrated.

Staff need a clear understanding of their role responsibilities and reporting lines. Ensure they have the information they need before starting work in an ERC. This includes whether they will have access to meals and snacks or must bring their own.

Offer welfare support during and after shifts. This includes access to mental health resources, and informal or structured debriefing. Encourage cultural safety, diversity, and trauma-informed approaches in all interactions. Protect physical health when there is risk of infectious disease transmission through use of masks and/or registering people from their vehicle. Also ensure there are first-aid training staff present at the ERC.

Staff welfare considerations should be built into ERC planning and activation processes and adapted to local circumstances. Sharing experiences and better practice examples across councils can also help strengthen staff wellbeing approaches.

Staff and ERC security

Ensuring staff safety in an ERC and the surrounding area/precinct requires proactive planning and clear protocols. All staff should be briefed on emergency procedures, maintaining situational awareness, and escalation pathways before operations commence.

If there is a reasonable expectation of heightened tensions or disruptive behaviour, consider engaging licensed private security personnel to maintain a safe environment for staff and community. It is important not to rely on Victoria Police as a dedicated security presence, as their role is focused on law enforcement and emergency response rather than ongoing site security. Victoria Police may be able to provide a regular drop in or drive by to provide support where they have capacity or are being supported by police resources from other regions.

Regular risk assessments, clear communication channels, and visible security measures will help create a safe and controlled environment for everyone involved. Consider security monitoring such as registration of ERC occupants and CCTV and establish a “buddy” system to enable staff to monitor each other’s safety. Public access to areas where there are children present should be monitored to ensure child safety. Consider involving your council’s Risk and Safety team in audits and live checks on ERC facilities.

An essential element of ERC security is ensuring that the flow of people into an ERC is managed. Bottlenecks often occur when people are registering as they enter

ERCs. Consider the use of self-registration through Crisisworks (via printed and displayed QR codes) or another system that can speed up the process.

In animal management areas, implement bite prevention and animal-handling briefings; separate high-arousal animals; and flag restricted/dangerous dogs in accordance with the *Domestic Animals Act 1994* to inform handling and enclosure decisions.

Staff from other councils and agency staff

When hosting staff from other councils or agencies to assist in ERC operations, it is important to recognise that the duty of care extends to these staff as well. Hosted staff are often working in unfamiliar environments under stressful conditions, which can increase fatigue and psychosocial risks.

Provide clear induction on site layout, safety protocols, and local procedures to reduce uncertainty and improve confidence. Briefings should include local context including the consequences of the emergency on the local community. Consider pairing staff from outside the area with a local person.

Ensure staff deployed from other councils have the relevant delegations to fulfil specific roles. For example, an ERC Manager may need decision and financial delegation to effectively act in that role. Ensure delegation procedures are in place before activating staff from other councils.

Provide external staff with the same level of wellbeing supports. Ensure access to rest areas, hydration, mental health resources, and opportunities for debriefing during and after shifts. Apply fair rostering practices that account for travel time and fatigue and avoid placing visiting staff in high-risk roles without adequate support. Consider logistics for external staff including accommodation and transport.

Maintain contact after deployment to check on wellbeing and provide information about available support services. Councils have a responsibility to ensure that staff returning home are provided with access to mental health or welfare assistance.

Embedding these practices into ERC planning and activation processes helps support anyone working in the ERC.

Safety during a concurrent health emergency

Councils developed COVID Safe Plans during 2020. These are still relevant and can be incorporated into standard operating procedures. They are also applicable to other health emergencies. Councils should seek advice from the Department of Health representative on the MEMPC and councils Environmental Health Team for contemporary advice.

Dynamic risk assessment

ERCs inherently reflect our communities, and it is important to constantly evaluate the facility for negative behaviours. SOPs and training can help identify and mitigate known risks, such as individuals under apprehended violence orders or sex

offenders attending an ERC. JSOP 08.02 is written for control agencies but is a useful tool within the ERC environment.

Examples include scammers pretending to offer a service or providing a false identity to gain access to information and play on individuals heightened anxiety. Spontaneous volunteers with good intentions can inadvertently create potentially dangerous situations such as offering a place to stay in their own home or cleaning up inside homes.

Implementing the following can help mitigate risks:

- maintaining situational awareness of the ERC and its surroundings.
- registering community members on entry.
- reinforcing safety protocols during briefings and debriefings.
- considering the deployment of a dedicated safety officer.

Personal support

ERC staff and volunteers must adopt a trauma-informed approach. Encourage a focus on empathy, respect, and awareness of diverse needs, ensuring that interactions do not unintentionally cause harm. Providing quiet areas, pairing visiting staff with local personnel for cultural context, and documenting support provided to at-risk groups are practical steps that strengthen inclusion and accountability. These practices ensure that relief services uphold dignity, cultural safety, and equity for all community members.

Unaccompanied minors

If children arrive at an ERC without a guardian, parent, or adult supervision, it is critical that they be regarded as a priority. Staff must immediately follow child safeguarding principles. If an ERC has a Child Safe Officer or Team Leader, they must be notified immediately. Escalation is through ringing Triple Zero (000).

ERC equipment

Rapid and efficient activation of an ERC relies on having the right equipment and supplies ready to go. Deploy the ERC kit to ensure the ERC has directional signage, stationery and registration set up. Use checklists with the SOP to ensure all relevant equipment is set up and to identify anything missing. Work within the governance structure to organise and approve hire or purchase of additional equipment. It can be helpful to use existing contractors to streamline purchases.

Waste management

Proper waste management is critical to maintaining health, safety, and operational efficiency in an ERC. During emergencies, ERCs will experience high foot traffic, extended operating hours, and diverse service delivery, all of which generate significant volumes of waste including food scraps, packaging, hygiene products, animal waste and medical disposables. If waste is not managed effectively, it can

lead to hygiene risks, attract pests, create unpleasant conditions for staff and community, and compromise the overall safety of the facility.

Why waste management matters

- Health and hygiene: Accumulated waste can spread bacteria and viruses, attract pests and increase the risk of illness among vulnerable populations.
- Safety: Overflowing bins or misplaced waste can create trip hazards and obstruct emergency exits.
- Community confidence: A clean and orderly ERC reassures evacuees that their wellbeing is a priority.
- Environmental responsibility: Proper disposal and recycling reduce environmental impact and align with council sustainability commitments.

Key principles for waste management

- Plan ahead: Include waste management in ERC Standard Operating Procedures and site audits. Identify waste collection points and disposal methods before activation.
- Segregate waste: Provide clearly marked bins for general waste, recyclables, and hazardous materials (e.g. medical waste, PPE).
- Maintain regular collection: Schedule frequent waste removal to prevent overflow, especially during peak occupancy.
- Ensure compliance: Follow council regulations and environmental health standards for waste handling and disposal.
- Staff training: Brief staff and volunteers on waste protocols, including safe handling of sharps or contaminated materials.
- Partner with contractors: Engage waste management providers early in activation to ensure timely collection and disposal.

Practical tips

- Position bins in high-use areas such as food service zones, registration desks, and hygiene facilities.
- Use foot-pedal bins to reduce contact and improve hygiene.
- Keep cleaning supplies and PPE (gloves, masks) available for staff handling waste.
- Document waste management activities in ERC logs for accountability and continuous improvement.

Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements

When an eligible event is declared, specific DRFA assistance measures are activated within affected local government areas. Councils should refer to the [Victorian Government guidance](#), including the four steps when making a claim for reimbursement under the DRFA. The [DRFA toolbox](#) has helpful guidance and Tip Sheets to assist councils to comply with the conditions of the DRFA.

The MEMO is responsible to ensure that there are procedures and systems to monitor and recover council's emergency expenditure. However, it is recommended that finance teams and the MRM and ERC Manager understand how the DRFA works to ensure ERC expenditure is recorded and tracked.

Escalation and triggers for surge resource request

MAV – Protocol for Inter-Council Resource Sharing

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) Emergency Management Inter-Council Resource Sharing Protocol provides a formal mechanism for councils to request or share personnel, equipment, and expertise when local capacity is exceeded during and after emergencies. It is consistent with the concepts and policy guidelines within the *Emergency Management Act 2013* and the SEMP. The protocol is not intended to inhibit or diminish the effectiveness of any existing inter-council resource sharing arrangement. It promotes collaboration and resilience across Victorian councils and reduces operational risk by providing surge capacity.

Process:

1. Request: The impacted council escalates through their Authorised Officer (usually MEMO or MRM) to make a request through the MAV protocol. All arrangements must comply with the SEMP and MEMP.
2. Coordination: The impacted council reviews which staff are available and capable to fill roles and makes a request to the relevant councils. Impacted councils can find it helpful to appoint a dedicated person to undertake this coordination role.
3. Deployment: the sharing council deploys their staff to work for the impacted council for a defined period, ensuring they have the information needed to start the role.
4. Induction & welfare: Visiting staff must receive orientation, safety briefings, and welfare support to ensure effective integration.
5. Delegations: Staff deployed under the protocol retain their delegated authority if properly documented by the impacted host council.
6. Cost recovery: Councils should document resource sharing for potential reimbursement under DRFA. Unless agreed otherwise, the impacted council is responsible for the reimbursement, or payment, of all expenses incurred by the assisting council.

Regional agreements

Regional agreements enable neighbouring councils to enter a formal memorandum of understanding (or similar) to share resources. These are beneficial for small to medium events but may not offer as much capacity when larger emergencies affect multiple councils signed to the agreement.

Escalation to the region

Escalation ensures councils can access additional resources and support when the scale or complexity of an emergency exceeds local capacity. Timely escalation reduces the risk to staff, volunteers, and community and helps maintain continuity of relief services.

When a council is responding to an emergency, it is critical to know when and how to escalate for additional resources for an ERC. Once council has exhausted municipal resources through any existing MOU or local plan, escalation occurs as is described in the SEMP.

Council (usually through the MEMO or MRM) escalate through Victoria Police, the Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator (MERC), when additional resources are required in an emergency. Local escalation arrangements may differ particularly between metropolitan and rural/regional areas. Escalation arrangements for ERCs should be described in MEMPs and local SOPs.

Councils should escalate when:

- Staffing capacity is predicted to be exceeded (e.g. fatigue, insufficient trained personnel).
- Essential supplies or services are running low (food, water, bedding, hygiene items).
- Specialist support is required (e.g. cultural safety advisors, family violence specialists, first aid and mental health professionals).
- Security or safety risks increase beyond what local arrangements can manage.
- Concurrent emergencies or prolonged operations exceed local capacity to manage.

How to escalate

- Identify the need early:
 - Monitor triggers such as staffing shortages, resource depletion, or increased community demand
 - Use ERC checklists and capacity matrices to determine thresholds for escalation
 - Be proactive and request assistance before critical thresholds are reached.
- Follow the Chain of Command:
 - Escalate through the MEMO or MRM
 - The MEMO/MRM will liaise with the MERC for formal resource requests
 - See the SEMP/REMP for further information on escalation.
- If local options are exhausted activate Regional and State Protocols:
 - Regional emergency management arrangements
 - MAV Inter-Council Resource Sharing Protocol for staff and equipment
 - Relevant state agencies for specialist services (e.g. DFFH for accommodation, Salvation Army for material goods) as per the SEMP.
- Document and communicate:
 - Record all escalation requests in ERC logs and systems
 - Clearly brief incoming staff and agencies on roles, responsibilities, and the local context
 - Ensure induction processes are completed for external personnel.

Deactivation

The decision to close an ERC, hub or other method of relief delivery, is the decision of the MRM, MEMO and MERC in conjunction with the Incident Controller.

Triggers for deactivation:

- Emergency threat has reduced/changed.

- Community needs have shifted from immediate relief to recovery.
- ERC occupancy has reduced to a level where ongoing operation is no longer needed.
- Alternative service models (e.g. outreach or recovery hubs) are in place where required.

Key steps in deactivation:

1. Assess community needs: Confirm that displaced individuals have access to recovery services or alternative accommodation as required.
2. Plan transition: transition operations to business-as-usual community development services or activate recovery services. A Recovery Centre or other recovery service should be activated where there is an identified need for continued community support and service delivery.
3. Communicate closure: Provide clear, timely communication to the community, Incident Controller and partner agencies about closure timelines and available recovery services, with as much advance notice as possible.
4. Manage site and resources:
 - a) Deregister individuals and ensure privacy compliance.
 - b) Collect and secure all documentation, including logs and escalation records.
 - c) Arrange cleaning, waste disposal, and return of equipment.
 - d) Audit and repack/restock ERC kits as required.
5. Staff and volunteer debrief: Conduct wellbeing checks and provide opportunities for structured or informal debriefing. Ensure organisational wellbeing supports are communicated to staff returning to their normal team.
6. After Action Review: Capture lessons learned and feed into continuous improvement process.
7. Audit and reporting: Complete ERC audit requirements and collate evidence for DRFA cost recovery.

Review and continuous improvement

Debriefing is expected after an event, and it is recommended that councils facilitate this opportunity with all staff that were activated to a position in support of an ERC. Debriefing is different to a 'hot debrief' that should occur after each day/shift.

It is also good practice that where there is an observation that interacts with another agency or relates to emergency management doctrine, observations are entered into [EM Share](#). Observations can be shared anonymously if council staff feel more comfortable however, if you submit your observations while being logged in you can track how your observations are being used to inform continuous improvement.

Having a culture of debriefing or after-action reviews and capturing experiences, what worked well and what could be improved will allow councils to track continuous improvement over time, share better practices with other councils and provide evidence of lessons learnt.

Appendix One

Key terms

For the purposes of this document the following key terms used in the Guidelines are defined as follows:

CEOC/MEOC: Different councils call their operations centres different terms with some using Council Emergency Operations Centre and others Municipal Emergency Operations Centre. It is where council establishes their internal command structure to respond to the needs of the community, coordinate relief and manage the impacts to council infrastructure.

Emergency shelter: Group shelter provided for affected persons in a community hall or similar. It is part of emergency relief and is different from temporary accommodation (source: [AIDR](#)).

Registration: undertaken by council to know who is seeking relief and/or using an ERC for emergency shelter.

Trauma informed: everyone's response to traumatic incidents such as a disaster is unique and influenced by their personal history, their context and the protective factors in their life. Training in personal support/psychological first aid will help to alleviate the anxiety and stress during and immediately after an emergency.

Further information and resources

Animal management

The management of animal welfare at an ERC is a core component of the delivery of relief. Within the SEMP, councils are the lead agency for the management of companion animals in emergencies and for the housing of displaced and lost/stray companion animals. Councils are not responsible for native animals and stock.

Processes for the management of animals that may present to ERCs should be contained within ERC SOP and referenced in the local Emergency Animal Welfare Plan. It is essential that these plans align with the local MEMP and the Victorian Animal Welfare Plan.

Planning should focus on practical measures that maintain animal safety and owner access. While codes of practice and standards apply across Victoria, achieving full compliance during an active emergency may not always be possible.

Key considerations include:

- Check-in and identification: Set up a secure animal intake area separate from the general ERC intake. Establish clear procedures for record keeping including microchip scanning, registering animals and linking them to their owners in the ERC or elsewhere.
- Housing and care: Determine whether animals will remain with owners or be housed separately and ensure appropriate facilities at the ERC or overflow

- location (e.g. cages, crates, bedding, water, ventilation, noise mitigation, weather protection, litter, toilet space, exercise area, species separation).
- Access arrangements: Plan for owner access, can 24-hour access be provided, or will scheduled visits be required?
- Health and safety: Include provisions for veterinary care, hygiene, waste management and isolation of sick or unvaccinated animals.
- Staffing and training: Ensure staff understand animal handling protocols and have access to PPE and cleaning supplies.

Embedding animal welfare into ERC planning promotes community confidence, supports safe evacuation, and aligns with Victoria's emergency management principles.

For planning support, the RSPCA has resources on keeping your pets safe in emergencies. Visit: <https://rspcavic.org/emergencyplanning/>.

Child safety

Children are among the most at risk cohorts in an ERC. It is essential that their needs, especially when unaccompanied in an ERC, are planned for effectively. It is critical that you plan out escalation pathways for issues like child safety and unaccompanied minors and that these are in alignment with escalation in the SEMP.

While all people can be affected by an emergency, children are uniquely vulnerable and require specific and targeted interventions to ensure their needs and safety are considered a priority.

Councils in Victoria are required to comply with the Child Safe Standards, which were established to protect children and young people from harm and abuse. These standards include a range of measures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, such as:

- Child safety knowledge, skills and awareness: Staff must receive training to understand and apply child safety principles.
- Suitable staff and volunteers: Organisations must ensure that staff and volunteers are suitable for their roles in child-related work. It is council's responsibility to ensure staff and volunteers work safely with children. This may include minimum safety checks like a Working with Children Check.
- Cultural safety: organisations must support the cultural rights of children and young people, including Aboriginal children and young people.
- Governance and systems: Organisations must have systems and processes in place to manage the risk of child abuse.
- Compliance with standards: All relevant entities must comply with the Child Safe Standards, which include a range of new standards and updated information sharing powers to respond to risks of child abuse and breaches of the Standards.

Councils are encouraged to access resources and information to help implement these standards effectively. The Commission for Children and Young People provide a range of resources and guidance to assist organisations in understanding and complying with the Child Safe Standards.

Many councils have developed planning around establishing 'Child Friendly Spaces' within an ERC. Save the Children have developed a toolkit about creating child

friendly spaces in humanitarian settings ([The Toolkit for Child Friendly Spaces in Humanitarian Settings - Save the Children's Resource Centre](#)). Many of the concepts it discusses are applicable in an ERC.

Creating child-friendly spaces in ERC involves several key principles and practices:

- Identification of vulnerable children: Recognizing the unique needs of children in emergencies is crucial. These spaces should be specifically designed to protect children from physical harm and psychosocial distress while allowing them to participate in organized and supervised activities ([knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-jan-2014-child-friendly-spaces-protecting-and-supporting-children-in-emergency-response-and-recovery/](#)).
- Psychosocial support: Incorporating psychosocial support into the spaces is vital for strengthening resilience and wellbeing for children, young people, and families. This support should be integrated into the activities and activities should be structured to promote learning and development (Ibid).
- Child-centred activities: Activities in these spaces should be child-centred, allowing children to express themselves, build confidence, and interact with peers. They should also provide opportunities for fun and play, which are essential for recovery and healing ([Guidelines for Child Friendly Spaces in Emergencies - Save the Children's Resource Centre](#)).
- Monitoring and evaluation: Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the spaces are necessary to ensure they meet the needs of children and are effective in providing the support they require (Ibid).
- Training and support: Staff involved in setting up and running these spaces should receive ongoing training and support to ensure they are equipped to provide the best care and services to children ([Child Friendly Space in Emergencies](#)).

Creating child-friendly spaces is a critical component of emergency relief efforts, providing a vital link to support services and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children during and after emergencies ([knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-jan-2014-child-friendly-spaces-protecting-and-supporting-children-in-emergency-response-and-recovery/](#))

For further information about complying with Child Safety Regulations at ERCs, you should talk to your nominated Child Safety Officer, review council's Child Safe Policy, and have an understanding of the Child Safe Standards issued under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*.

Cultural safety - First Peoples

Cultural safety in ERCs is about creating an environment where First People (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People) feel safe. It is an inclusive term and for it to apply at an ERC it means that there is no assault, challenge or denial of First People identity and experience from attending a facility or receiving relief services.

Cultural safety is a pre-condition for First People to access or be involved in services. Cultural safety is an experience that First People have and whether it exists in an ERC is to be determined by them.

Ensuring the cultural safety of First People's is a critical part of effective ERC planning.

Key elements of ensuring ERCs are culturally safe include (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety):

- Cultural safety is everyone's business: to ensure that someone's safety, identity, and needs can be respected, understood and supported
- Having knowledge and respect for yourself: be aware of how your own cultural values, knowledge, skills and attitudes are formed and affect others, including responsibility to address your unconscious bias, racism and discrimination
- Knowledge and respect for First People: understand the diversity amongst First People, communities and cultures and attitudes to working in partnership together
- Commit to redesign ERCs to reduce racism and discrimination: Remove barriers to attendance by First People, for example ensure police presence is kept to a minimum and don't get police to stand at the front of an ERC as a security force.
- Cultural safety is an ongoing journey of learning: embedding a framework that focuses on the need to unlearn unconscious bias and racism and relearn Aboriginal Cultural Values.

Having relationships with local First Peoples service providers (i.e. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations / Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations / Aboriginal Social Enterprises), organisations and individuals in your council area is critical to delivering culturally safe ERCs. Don't wait until there is an emergency to reach out and make connections with First Peoples. Consider undertaking some cultural awareness training that involves walking on country to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage from Traditional Owners in your area. It's important to take the time to learn about walking respectfully on and taking care for country.

Consider embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework in your emergency plans and processes, especially regarding ERCs. The framework provides a continuous quality improvement model to strengthen the cultural safety of individuals and organisations.

Cultural safety – multicultural community

Multicultural communities are disproportionately affected by emergencies and disasters. Establishing relationships based on cooperation and trust with communities including the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) or multicultural communities is an essential part of emergency preparation. It can be very difficult to establish that trust during an active emergency. This is evident in communities that have had negative experience of authority, including people who have experienced this in their countries of origin or those that do not speak English fluently. Strengthening relationships between multicultural communities, emergency agencies, and council is an important and ongoing process

Like all communities, multicultural groups possess a wide range of skills and strengths that can be leveraged to manage stress and respond effectively during emergencies. Many of these capabilities stem from pre-arrival experiences of adversity, such as conflict or displacement, and include resilience under pressure, adaptability, strong leadership, and well-established community networks. These

communities often demonstrate an ability to mobilize quickly, uphold collective responsibility, and navigate cross-cultural environments.

Challenges such as limited awareness of local risks, socio-economic disadvantage, language barriers, inadequate housing, and cultural differences can increase vulnerability. These risks are often more pronounced for individuals who arrived as refugees, hold temporary visas, lack documentation, or have settled in Australia within the past decade.

Community leaders and connectors frequently play a critical role in preparedness, response, and recovery efforts within migrant and refugee communities. Research by Wallace, Farmer, and McCosker (2019)¹ highlights that these connectors facilitate the exchange of information, resources, and relationships across cultural and organisational boundaries, a role that proved essential during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Safety of the LGBTQI+ community

Emergencies can amplify vulnerabilities for LGBTQI+ individuals, including risks of discrimination, exclusion, or lack of access to appropriate services. Councils have a responsibility to ensure ERCs are safe, inclusive, and respectful environments for all community members.

Key planning considerations

1. Inclusive policies and language
 - Ensure ERC policies explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression.
 - Use inclusive language in signage, forms, and communications.
2. Privacy and confidentiality
 - Protect personal information during registration and service delivery.
 - Avoid unnecessary disclosure of gender identity or sexual orientation.
3. Safe spaces
 - Provide smaller quiet areas for individuals who may feel unsafe in shared spaces.
 - Consider gender-neutral facilities (e.g. toilets, showers) where possible.
4. Staff training
 - Train ERC staff and volunteers in LGBTQI+ awareness and cultural safety.
 - Include guidance on respectful interactions and responding to discrimination.
5. Access to specialist support
 - Maintain contact lists for LGBTQI+ support services and referral pathways.
 - Ensure psychosocial support providers are trained in LGBTQI+ issues.
6. Visibility and communication

¹Wallace C, Farmer J and McCusker A (2019) 'Boundary spanning practices of community connectors for engaging 'hardly reached' people in health services', *Social Science & Medicine*, 232, July 2019:366–373.

- Display clear messages that ERCs are inclusive and safe for LGBTQI+ individuals.
- Use multiple channels to communicate this commitment to the community.

Why this approach strengthens ERC operations:

- Promotes equity and inclusion.
- Reduces risk of harm and discrimination.
- Builds trust and confidence in emergency management services.

For planning support visit: [Gender, toilets and evacuation centres | AJEM News & views](#)

Gender Impact Assessment

Under s 9(1) of the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, councils must conduct a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) when developing or reviewing any policy, program, or service that has a "direct and significant impact on the public".

GIAs evaluate potential differential impacts based on gender and other intersecting identities (such as Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion and sexual orientation) and describe how the service will be designed to address gender inequality. Councils must promote gender equality, take proportionate action, and report progress on GIAs every two years.

For guides on how to undertake a GIA visit:

<https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/gender-impact-assessment-guide-templates-and-data-sources>