



WOLLONGONG CITY STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

STRATEGIC PLAN 2007-2010

*The worst in nature
the best in us*

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1. Introduction

Introduction

This, our second strategic plan, aims to guide the development and direction that the Wollongong City SES Unit plans to take over the next four years. The State Emergency Service, as an organization, has undergone a number of significant changes recently, and our Unit too has grown in terms of size, experience and capability.

With that in mind, we feel that it is important that strategic planning guide our future development. This will enable us to realise our maximum potential to be of benefit to both the community and our members. The rest of this section includes a context for the plan.

The SES organisation

The State Emergency Service is an emergency and rescue service dedicated to assisting the community. It is made up almost entirely of volunteers, with more than 232 Units comprising about 10,000 volunteers located throughout New South Wales.

While our major responsibilities are for flood and storm operations, the SES also provides the majority of general rescue effort in the rural parts of the state. This includes road accident rescue, vertical rescue, bush search and rescue and other forms of specialist rescue that may be required due to local threats. The Service's trained rescuers also support the full-time emergency services during major disasters.

Our Unit

The Wollongong City Unit comprises around 90 members (as at June 2006) who provide immediate assistance to the City of Wollongong, which extends from Waterfall in the north to Yallah in the south and is home to around 190,000 people. Our volunteers are available to respond 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Unit is well respected for its participation, performance and achievement in various activities and competitions.

Our Unit is one of the largest Units in the State, and also one of busiest, based on the volume and variety of work we perform. This diversity is due to the unique geography of our area and the good working relationships we have with the other local emergency services, who call on us to support them in many different situations.

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1. Introduction, Continued

Community Hazards

The City of Wollongong is subject to a number of natural hazards that are directly relevant to our legislated core role.

1. In the past the Illawarra has experienced a number of significant rainfall events. This, together with the runoff from our steep escarpment, can cause flash flooding and result in significant damage to property and threat to life. A good example of this type of event was the August 1998 severe storm.
2. Prolonged heavy rain can also cause generalized flooding, particularly in the low-lying areas to the south around Dapto and the surrounds of Lake Illawarra.
3. Given the high density of trees in the Illawarra, we are affected by the strong, gale-force winds that typically occur in late winter/early spring and those associated with "southerly busters" that can occur at any time of the year.
4. Heavy bushland along the escarpment, particularly in the north of the City poses a significant bushfire risk.
5. The increase in public recreation in the bushlands of our escarpment has seen an increase in the number of accidents and incidents of people becoming lost.

While our organisation is structured to provide assistance from out-of-area SES Units, our unique geography means that we can be isolated from outside assistance during severe events. This means that where possible, we need to be self-sufficient in terms of equipment and resources to perform our role.

Our Role

Our prime role under the State Emergency Service Act (1989) is to act as the combat agency for flood, storm and tempest events within the City of Wollongong. The Unit also has a secondary role, to provide assistance to other emergency service organisations at their request.

Examples of this assistance includes:

1. Assisting the Police Service in the search and rescue of missing persons, or in the search for evidence at a crime scene.
 2. Assisting the Rural Fire Service with evacuations, transport and welfare during bushfire operations.
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1. Introduction, Continued

Plan Approach The approach we've taken in putting this plan together was to conduct a *SWOT analysis* to examine our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. From this we can do three things:

1. Determine key areas to focus on over the course of the plan
2. Establish goals pertaining to these areas
3. Put in place strategies to achieve these goals

2. SWOT Analysis

Introduction The Unit conducted a SWOT analysis in 2006. Separate analysis activities were conducted by each of the Unit's teams. These were then collated.

Results Here are the results from our SWOT analysis. Numbers in brackets after an item indicate the number of times that item was listed in the individual analyses.

Strengths

- Quality and variety of skills we possess (2)
- Good resources (2)
- Quality, nationally recognized training
- Good working relationship with other emergency service organizations (2)
- Level of professionalism
- Good leadership (2)
- Experience of our members
- Quality of the work we do
- Commitment of members
- Our members come from a wide demographic background
- Internal communication

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2. SWOT Analysis, Continued

Weaknesses

- Our HQ is too small and has access problems during flooding
- Poor level of commitment to fundraising / community-outreach duties
- Members expected to volunteer a lot of time
- Families
- Not enough family involvement
- Public awareness of the SES and its role
- Training groups are sometimes large and progress can be slow
- We need more trainers
- Availability of members for day-shift callouts
- Maintenance and care of equipment
- Retention rate of new members

Opportunities

- More scenario-based training
- Improve our public education
- Expand our headquarters
- Increasing public/media awareness
- Training/working with other agencies (2)
- Improved use of technology
- Use/recognition of our training by employers
- Improve social/family activities

Threats

- Unusually light operational workload in recent years, leading to low morale and members leaving (2)
- Teams becoming “bottom heavy” in terms of less-skilled members
- Space limitations with our current headquarters
- Unit is getting quite large and this places a significant load on the few members responsible for its running and management
- The need to continually raise funds

Comment

The SWOT analysis process has provided some interesting results, and it was useful to conduct it in small groups and collate the results rather than attempt to do it on a whole-Unit basis. There are a number of common issues, which indicate the importance members place on these items.

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2. SWOT Analysis, Continued

Analysis Summary

Based on the findings of the collated analysis, we have identified a few items in each area to use as the focus for this strategic plan.

Strengths

- The quality and variety of skills we possess.
- The resources we have at our disposal.
- The good working relationship we have with other services.
- A strong leadership team.

Weaknesses

- We have become too big for our headquarters.
- There is a relatively poor level of commitment to community and fundraising activities.

Opportunities

- Take advantage of our good working relationship with other services to work and train with them more.
- Improve social and family activities.

Threats

- A relatively light workload in terms of our core roles is affecting morale.
- The size of the Unit is placing a significant load on a core group of members and senior officers.

3. Plan Objectives

Introduction Before looking to the focus areas for this plan it is useful to remind ourselves of our organisation's vision and mission so that we can ensure that our development efforts are aligned to them.

Vision Statement The organisation wide vision statement is *Flood-safe and storm-safe communities protected by motivated, well-trained and properly equipped volunteer units.*

Mission Statement The organisation wide mission statement is *to provide immediate assistance to the community in times of natural or man-made incidents or emergencies.*

Objectives Based on our SWOT analysis, and guided by our vision and mission statements, our major objectives in this plan are:

1. To continue improvements to our current headquarters and our use of its space whilst working towards getting an expansion or replacement headquarters in the longer term.
2. To address the workload imbalance for non-operational activities.
3. To expand and improve training and social activities that involve other services and family members.

4. Strategies

Introduction This section looks at the strategies we will employ to achieve our objectives.

Headquarters Improvement

Objective

To continue improvements to our current headquarters and our use of its space whilst working towards getting an expansion or replacement headquarters in the longer term.

Background

Over the past couple of years we have outgrown our current headquarters in Montague street. This is causing us a number of problems:

1. Training on a Monday evening is being limited by amount of space available to run training courses due to the number of members we have.
2. We do not have sufficient shed space to house all our vehicles meaning that most of our vehicles are parked outside. We have already had some of our vehicles broken into as a result of this.
3. We have had to source shipping containers and demountable buildings to hold some of our equipment.

Localized flooding of Montague street has also been a problem in the past for us but we have been assured that recent mitigation work has addressed this. That being the case, our preferred option is to expand our current headquarters rather than relocate, as Montague street is a convenient central location and expanding our existing headquarters should be significantly cheaper than building a new headquarters.

Strategy

With the support of our Region and State headquarters, we will continue to work with Council to get an expanded or replacement headquarters. Until this is realized we will continue to identify cost-effective opportunities to make better use of our existing facilities.

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4. Strategies, Continued

Workload Imbalance

Objective

To address the workload imbalance for non-operational activities.

Background

Our members contribute their time to the Unit in four main areas:

1. Operations: responding to requests for help from the community
2. Receiving training
3. Participating in community education, PR and Fundraising Activities
4. Administration: Preparing and delivering training and the day-to-day running and management of the Unit

Whilst nearly all our members equally participate in the first two of these areas, the last two tend to be performed by a core group of members.

The last two are generally perceived as not as interesting as participating in operations and training, yet without them, we would not be able to perform operations effectively or deliver training. As the Unit has grown in recent years, the administration workload has also increased, but this work is being performed by the same number of members who did it a few years ago when the Unit was half its current size.

Being an SES member is not just about having fun and learning new skills, and we need to ensure that all our members understand this and are willing to share the workload in all areas.

An additional problem is that the majority of our trainers also hold senior positions within the Unit. This is somewhat a downside of their experience as it means that they have both an administration/management burden on their time as well as demands to prepare and deliver training.

Strategy

We have defined what we expect of members in terms of their “minimum commitment” to the Unit, and this is explained to prospective members when they join. Over the course of this plan we will monitor the commitment of all members in the Unit to ensure that the workload is distributed more evenly and follow up with those who fail to meet our expectations.

We need to be more proactive in identifying and encouraging potential trainers. Ideally these should be members who do not hold senior positions, so that we can reduce the training workload on those who do.

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4. Strategies, Continued

Activities

Objective

To expand and improve training and social activities that involve other services and family members.

Background

Being a large semi-metropolitan Unit with a good relationship with other emergency services, we have a quite a high support workload compared to other SES Units. We therefore need to ensure that we maintain the skills and inter-service relationships to ensure that we can provide the level of support that other services have come to rely on.

We rely on our volunteers giving up their time for SES activities and this can take them away from others, in particular, their family members. If we can provide activities that involve family members, it not only helps them understand the importance of what we do but also enables members to meet their SES commitments with less detrimental impact on their family lives.

Strategy

We will be proactive in organising activities and exercises that involve other services. This will have a twofold benefit: it will raise the awareness of our capabilities as well as provide an opportunity for our members to work alongside and learn from other emergency service personnel.

We will ensure that we run at least one social activity a month, and where possible allow family members to join in. Ideally these activities should provide the opportunity to learn or develop skills that will benefit our members in the various roles they may be called on to perform. This way they not only gain valuable skills and experience but also their family members gain a greater understanding of some of the things SES volunteers do (and may motivate family members to become volunteers themselves).

5. Goals

Introduction This section will list the goals we plan to achieve during the period of this plan.

Headquarters and Vehicle Infrastructure

Objective:

To continue improvements to our current headquarters and our use of its space whilst working towards getting an expansion or replacement headquarters in the longer term.

Goals:

- Relocate Store number 1 to a demountable building.
 - Continue to work with Council to either agree upon an acceptable upgrade to our current headquarters or identify a new site and headquarters building.
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Workload Imbalance

Objective:

To address the workload imbalance for non-operational activities.

Goals:

1. Community, PR and fundraising activities
 - Fully implement our SOP on minimum member commitment.
 - Implement restrictions on specialist training courses and social activities to those members meeting their commitment to the Unit.
 2. Trainer Development
 - Conduct a Trainer Needs Analysis to identify the number of trainers the Unit needs in order to be self-sufficient in delivering training to our members.
 - Identify and encourage members to fill the gaps identified in the above analysis, particularly those members who do not hold senior positions within the Unit.
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5. Goals, Continued

Activities

Objective:

To expand and improve training and social activities that involve other services and family members.

Goals:

- Aim to run at least one social activity per month.
- Ensure that we run a variety of activities to cater for the varying interests of our members, although the majority of these activities should provide an opportunity to learn or develop skills that will benefit our members in their SES work.
- Aim to run at least one activity or exercise with each of the three agencies – Police, Ambulance and NSW Fire Brigades – each year.
- Explore opportunities to train or exercise with other organizations – e.g. CHC Rescue Helicopter Service.

6. Training

Introduction This section looks at our training priorities over the next three years.

Management ***Introduction:***

A Unit of our size requires an effective management team to ensure that we are trained, equipped and prepared to respond to the needs of the community, and that when we do respond we do so in an effective and professional manner.

Objective:

Provide our senior officers with the necessary training and development to enable them to perform their role to the best of their ability and to be proactive in identifying and developing members who show potential for future leadership positions.

Goals:

- Ensure key senior members involved in the administration of the Unit complete the new *Unit Administration Course* in 2007.
- Actively embrace to the move to AIIMS in 2007.
- Ensure all members in leadership positions attend the *SES Team Leader* course.
- Ensure regular meetings of the team leaders, management team, training team and senior officers.

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6. Training, Continued

Operations

Introduction:

An effective Operations team is critical to provide an effective response to the community, particular as an event grows and other SES Units and agencies need to be coordinated.

Objective:

Continue to expand our Operations team and develop their skills so that they can effectively manage large-scale operations.

Goals:

- Actively promote the importance of Operations during recruitment and orientation days.
- Work towards our Operations team becoming a separate team in its own right with a Team Leader and Deputies.
- Develop the skills and experience of Operations members through emergency-management training.

Field Teams

Introduction:

Our field members make up the bulk of the Unit's members and belong to one of three teams. Each team is designed to be self-sufficient in response to any request for assistance that the Unit receives when that team is rostered on call.

The table below represents a training-gap analysis conducted at the end of 2006 for the core training courses that provide our members the skills they need for safe and effective response.

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6. Training, Continued

Skill	Target %	Bravo (19)		Echo (15)		Zulu (16)	
		Number	Number needed	Number	Number needed	Number	Number needed
Induction	75	16	-2	13	-2	11	1
Operate Comms Equipment	50	14	-5	14	-7	11	-3
General rescue	50	11	-2	9	-2	10	-2
Storm and Water Damage	50	11	-2	9	-2	10	-2
Work in an ops centre	25	6	-1	1	3	5	-1
Chainsaw -- crosscut	25	7	-2	2	2	3	1
Chainsaw -- felling	10	0	2	0	2	0	2
Map reading	50	7	3	11	-4	6	2
Land search	50	12	-3	11	-4	4	4
Flood boat	20	3	1	2	1	3	0
Vertical rescue	20	3	1	3	0	3	0
First aid	100	17	2	13	2	13	3

Objective:

To ensure that we meet or exceed the target percentages for trained members within each team. Improve the ongoing training for advanced or specialist skills.

Goals:

- Ensure that positions are allocated to courses based on the needs identified above.
- Implement a regular skills-maintenance day that rotates through the various specialist skills (floodboat, chainsaw and vertical rescue).
- Expand our training-gap analysis to include and set baseline targets for courses offered by other agencies that provide important skills to enable us to provide effective support to these agencies; for example, Bush Fire Awareness (RFS), USAR Cat 1 (NSWFB).