

Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS)

and its use in Queensland

Disaster Management Act 2003



**Standard Emergency
Warning Signal**

stop & listen





Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) and its use in Queensland

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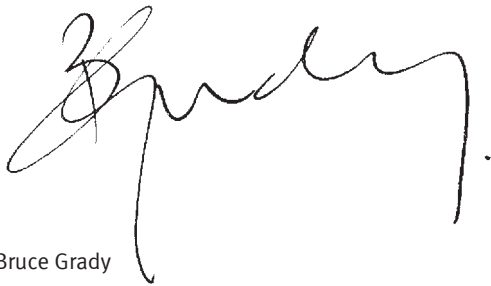
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Authorisation

The Guidelines for the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) and its use in Queensland have been developed by Emergency Management Queensland, Department of Community Safety, in accordance with the *Disaster Management Act 2003*.

The Guidelines are hereby authorised by the Assistant Director General, Emergency Management Queensland.



Bruce Grady
Assistant Director-General
Emergency Management Queensland

Date:

Endorsement

Queensland is vulnerable to natural disasters, particularly for cyclone, thunderstorm, earthquake, severe weather events and for bushfire. Effective community warning systems are a key component in managing emergencies and can assist in preventing the loss of life.

The Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) is a critical tool in response to flood and other major emergency situations. SEWS has been used to warn or inform relevant communities of an impending emergency.

These Guidelines govern the use of SEWS in Queensland. The Guidelines have been reviewed in 2012 by Emergency Management Queensland in collaboration with the Bureau of Meteorology, members of the State Disaster Coordination Group and local government representatives.

The Guidelines are hereby endorsed by the State Disaster Management Group.



Chair
State Disaster Management Group

Date:



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Aim

The aim of the Guidelines for the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) is to establish how Queensland will manage and operate SEWS to assist in the delivery of public warnings and messages for major emergency events. This guideline should be used in conjunction with individual agency's standard operating procedures or standing orders.

Acknowledgements

The assistance and cooperation of officers of Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ), Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS), State Disaster Coordination Group (SDCG) member agencies, Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) members across the State, and representatives from ABC Local Radio and Commercial Radio Australia, who contributed to the development of these guidelines is appreciated.

Amendments

Proposals for amendment or addition to the contents of these Guidelines are to be forwarded to:

Assistant Director-General
Emergency Management Queensland
Department of Community Safety
Attn: Disaster Management Standards Branch

Postal Address:	GPO Box 1425 BRISBANE QLD 4001
Physical Address:	Emergency Services Complex 125 Kedron Park Rd KEDRON QLD 4031

Version control of these Guidelines is managed by the EMQ Disaster Management Standards Branch. Reissue of these Guidelines following amendment or review will be recorded in the table below and advice of reissue will be distributed throughout the disaster management network. Recipients should take all appropriate action to ensure they are in possession of the most recent version, and that previous versions in both hard copy and electronic forms are archived accordingly. Further information can be requested by contacting the EMQ Disaster Management Standards Branch.

Version	Amendment	SDMG Endorsement Date

Review Date

The Assistant Director-General, EMQ, Department of Community (DCS) is to ensure that this guideline and its associated procedures are reviewed at a minimum every three years or as required.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In 1999, all States and Territories reached an agreement on the need for a Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) to be used in assisting the delivery of public warnings and messages for major emergency events.

It was agreed that the signal for SEWS be the existing Bureau of Meteorology tropical cyclone warning signal.

The States and Territories further agreed to accept responsibility for the preparation and implementation of procedures related to the use of SEWS in each jurisdiction and to develop and conduct appropriate public awareness programmes.

Queensland endorsed this approach.

1.2 Function of SEWS

SEWS is intended for use as an alert signal to be played on public media to draw listeners' attention in potentially affected areas to a following emergency warning. It is meant to attract these listeners' attention to the fact that they should take notice of the emergency message.

1.3 Management of SEWS

Responsibility for the management of SEWS in Queensland rests with the Assistant Director-General of Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ) in coordination with the Queensland Regional Director of the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) for meteorological purposes.

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2 Operational Procedures

As part of a coordinated national emergency plan, a distinctive audio signal has been adopted to alert the community to the broadcast of an urgent safety message relating to a major emergency/disaster. The SEWS is a wailing siren sound which has been previously used in Queensland to attract attention to cyclone warnings where a destructive impact was expected

2.1 Use of the SEWS

It is vital that the impact of the warning signal be preserved by ensuring that it is used for serious impacts only.

The audio signal will only be used:

- To alert listeners/viewers of radio/television, or where appropriate by other means, that an official announcement is about to be made concerning an actual or potential major emergency/disaster likely to affect them; and
- When the public needs to be informed to take, or be prepared to take, specific action in order to protect life, property or the environment.

As a general rule, the following four factors should be present:

1. Potential for loss of life and/or a major threat to a significant number of properties or the environment. Usually the threat/impact would be the lead item in local news bulletins;
2. A significant number of people need to be warned;
3. Significant impact is expected or is occurring at the time; and
4. One or more phenomena are classified as “destructive”.

The Queensland Emergency Alert Guidelines aims to establish how Queensland will manage and operate Emergency Alert (EA). EA is an emergency warning system providing the capability to send warning messages to fixed line telephones based on their physical location and to mobile telephones based on their billing addresses within a particular area.

2.2 Eligible events

It is vital that the status and effectiveness of the SEWS is maintained by limiting its use to significant events only. Such events will be restricted to:

- Wind Gusts >125 km/h (for example tropical cyclones of category 2 and above or their wintertime equivalents);
- Storm Tide > 0.5 m above Highest Astronomical Tide (HAT) (note that the Guidelines allow to Initiating Authorities to exercise a degree of flexibility and discretion if there is a significant threat to areas below 0.5m above HAT);
- Large Hail > 4cm in diameter (corresponding to > golf ball size);
- Tornado(es);
- Major Flood, Flash Flood and/or Dam Break;
- Intense Rainfall leading to Flash Floods and/or Landslides (1-6 hour rainfall total > 50 year Average Recurrence interval);
- Geo Hazards including effects of Earthquakes and/or Tsunami Waves > 1m (tide dependent);
- Major Urban and Rural Fires;
- Major Pollution, Hazardous Material or Bio-Hazard Emergency;



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- Civil Defence Emergency (as defined in Article 61 of Protocol 1 of the 1977 Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 – Immediate Effect – Armed Conflict Break Out); and
- Other major Emergency situations.

2.3 Initiating authorities

In Queensland, the authority to initiate SEWS warnings will be restricted to:

- The Regional Director, BoM (or nominated delegate) for weather and flood related events only;
- The Assistant Director-General of EMQ (or nominated delegate) for disaster events and civil defence emergencies;
- The Commissioner of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) (or Chief Superintendent or Regional Manager Rural Operations as delegate) for fire and HAZMAT related events only; and
- The Commissioner of Queensland Police Service (QPS) (or Senior Officer of a rank no lower than Assistant Commissioner as delegate), for events not covered by the authorities listed above.

The Assistant Director-General of EMQ (or nominated delegate) is to be formally advised when and every occasion that SEWS is initiated.

2.4 Notifying Local Government

When a SEWS warning is issued, the Local Disaster Coordinator (LDC) (or nominated delegate) of each local government affected by the warning is to be notified by the Initiating Authority at the earliest opportunity. All Initiating Authorities should notify the EMQ State Duty Supervisor or State Duty Officer at the SDCC Watch Desk who will then contact the relevant local governments.

2.5 Bureau of Meteorology SEWS broadcasts

To alert the media that the use of the SEWS has been authorised, the following text will be included at the head of the warning:

Transmitters serving the area <list> ARE REQUESTED TO USE THE STANDARD EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNAL BEFORE BROADCASTING THIS MESSAGE.

Warnings are allocated a broadcast priority:

- Top priority: For immediate broadcast.
- Priority: For broadcast within the hour.
- Warnings with no priority are not labelled.

Note that all warnings authorising the use of the SEWS are top priority. However not all top priority warnings warrant the use of the SEWS.

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2.6 SEWS broadcasts other than weather or flood related

The officer initiating the SEWS will ensure that the relevant media outlets are contacted by whatever means are deemed appropriate and will immediately confirm all details in writing by fax and email.

The request for broadcast of an emergency announcement using SEWS will contain details of the text of the message, information as to when broadcasts are to commence and how frequently they should be repeated as well as the localities in which they should be broadcast.

Requests for a SEWS broadcast will contain the name and appointment of the appropriate Initiating Authority and will also contain relevant telephone contact numbers so that confirmation of information can be undertaken by the broadcaster.





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Abbreviations

BOM	Bureau of Meteorology
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EMQ	Emergency Management Queensland
HAT	Highest astronomical tide
LDC	Local Disaster Coordinator
LDMG	Local Disaster Management Group
QFRS	Queensland Fire and Rescue Service
QPS	Queensland Police Service
SDCC	State Disaster Coordination Centre
SDCG	State Disaster Coordination Group
SEWS	Standard Emergency Warning Signal

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Appendix 1: Message Format

Transmitters are requested to use the standard emergency warning signal before broadcasting the message, which should be read verbatim. Messages should open with the following statement:

EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENT

This is an official emergency announcement for... (insert appropriate area)... issued by... (insert appropriate authority)... concerning ... (insert type of emergency).....

SEWS messages should contain the following details.

- Indicate that they should be read verbatim
- What has happened
- What has been done to date
- Where it happened
- What is proposed to be done
- When it happened
- Any public safety instructions/messages/directions
- Who authorised the message.

Messages should close with the following statement:

This emergency announcement was issued by... (insert appropriate authority)... Stay tuned to this station for further information.

A suggested format for conveying SEWS information to broadcast outlets will be made available to initiating authorities through Emergency Management Queensland, Department of Community Safety. Electronic copies of these guidelines and the SEWS signal are able to be downloaded at http://www.disaster.qld.gov.au/Warnings_and_Alerts/About_SEWS.html



Appendix 2: Example Message To Broadcast Outlets

(EXAMPLE ONLY)

Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology Queensland

Transmitters serving the area Maryborough and Gympie are REQUESTED TO USE THE STANDARD EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNAL BEFORE BROADCASTING THIS MESSAGE.

TOP PRIORITY FOR IMMEDIATE BROADCAST

SEVERE WEATHER WARNING

for Heavy Rain

For people in the Southeast Coast district and parts of the Wide Bay and Burnett district.

Issued at 6:35 am on Monday 5 March 2012

Synoptic Situation: At 6:00 am AEST, a low pressure system was located near Maryborough and moving slowly in a southerly direction. The low is expected to continue moving slowly in a southerly direction today before possibly moving in a northerly direction during Tuesday.

Heavy rain which may lead to flash flooding is expected about the Southeast Coast and south eastern parts of the Wide Bay and Burnett districts today, particularly about the Fraser and Sunshine Coasts and adjacent inland areas.

Localised 24 hour rainfall totals in excess of 150mm are likely, especially about the Fraser and Sunshine Coasts and adjacent inland areas. Locations which may be affected include Fraser Island, Gympie, the Sunshine Coast, Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Ipswich.

At 6:20am AEST, the heaviest rain was located on radar near Tiaro, Glenwood, Gympie and Goomboorian. In the 2 hours to 6:20am AEST, 124mm of rainfall has been recorded at Mount Wolvi [east of Gympie].

Flood Warnings are current for various rivers and streams in these districts; refer to <http://www.bom.gov.au/qld/warnings/>

Emergency Management Queensland advises that people should:

- Avoid driving, walking or riding through flood waters.
- Keep clear of creeks and storm drains.
- For emergency assistance contact the SES on 132 500.

The next warning is due to be issued by 8:00 am AEST Monday.

Warnings are also available through TV and Radio broadcasts, the Bureau's website at www.bom.gov.au or call 1300 659 219. The Bureau and Emergency Management Queensland would appreciate warnings being broadcast regularly.

This message was authorised by...