Local Government becoming AWARE!

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper will outline a program called AWARE (All West Australians Reducing Emergencies), which increases the capacity of Local Governments to support community action through community engagement. The AWARE Program follows a community engagement model to assist Local Government in identifying, assessing and evaluating emergency risks to help mitigate against the effects of emergencies. The program reflects a new approach to dealing with emergencies, which can be applied by other agencies and community-based organisations across a range of services.

The program has involved comprehensive consultation and collaboration with key stakeholders through a process of a review of past experiences and practices throughout Australia; it became evident that the provision of the current training and development initiatives to encourage Local Government to undertake emergency risk management was not sufficient to stimulate action.

In the development of the AWARE Program FESA was conscious that the program was working through all three sectors of government. The provision of funding at the Federal level through EMA was passed on to the State government to develop and administer a program specifically to meet Local Governments' needs. The AWARE Program is based on a partnership undertaken between Local Government and their communities to reduce risks and make their communities safer in which to live.

2. SUMMARY

The AWARE program aims to enhance emergency risk management within Western Australia through local government. The objectives of the AWARE program are to:

➢ Identify and develop current and future emergency risk management (ERM) leaders in the community.
➢ Enhance the ERM skills and understanding of local communities.
➢ Identify opportunities and fund ERM strategies, to improve ERM in the community.
➢ Increase the involvement of emergency management practitioners and local communities in focused ERM programs.
➢ Increase community awareness of the value of effective ERM.
➢ Improve ERM support systems for local communities.
➢ Encourage the integration of ERM as part of organisational culture in local government.

Local Governments may care for a number of communities within their jurisdiction and are the first level of support available during emergencies. Research has shown that Local Governments have an important role in emergency management because emergencies inevitably impact directly or indirectly on communities. How well a community handles emergencies can be strongly influenced by the Local Governments attitude, preparedness and involvement in community centred emergency management.

The AWARE Program emphasises community participation and ownership of issues. This approach is strong process-orientated, focusing on consensus, cooperation and building community capacity to define and solve community issues. The program assists Local Government to facilitate and engage their community in the process of community development. This ensures that the community comes together to take action and generate solutions to make their community safer through the tool of emergency risk management.

2.1 Strategies

The range of options developed through the AWARE Program to assist local government with the implementation of emergency risk management strategies, includes a scholarship program, a grant scheme and customised training.

2.1.1 Scholarship

The scholarship strategy centres on local government staff who are focused on implementing emergency risk management strategies within their local community. The scholarship provides a funding limit to assist with things such as travel, accommodation and course fees for approved training and development opportunities that assists towards reducing the risk in the community.

The scholarship provides local government with an opportunity to develop the emergency management knowledge and skills of selected staff members. The scholarship funding enhances the participants' emergency risk management skills and assists them to facilitate risk identification and analysis within their local community.

2.1.2 Training

The training component of the AWARE Program has resulted in the development of a customised two-day emergency risk management project workshop and one-day introduction to recovery management for local government. Local Emergency Management Committee members, local government staff and other community members are encouraged to attend either of these workshops or the one-day introduction to emergency risk management workshop.

FESA Emergency Management Services coordinates and delivers the local customised training according to the training needs of the local government. The AWARE funding covers all costs associated with the delivery of training including any travel and accommodation costs.

2.1.3 Grant scheme

The grant scheme provides each local government with access to funding for components of ERM projects to facilitate them through the ERM process. The funding enables the local government to undertake ERM within their community. If a Local Government has undertaken the ERM process in their community the grant scheme can be accessed to determine and manage the implementation of treatment strategies identified by the ERM process. Grant scheme applications may include:
➢ Salary subsidies;
➢ Mitigation strategies;
➢ Treatment options;
➢ Research studies.

2.2   2002/03 applications

Applications for the AWARE Program were first called for in the 2002/03 financial year. 22 applications received from 29 Local Governments with a number of joint applications. The types of applications are varied, with many Local Governments applying for 2 or 3 of the AWARE strategies in one application. Local Government received the AWARE Program enthusiastically with some outstanding original applications. These particular Local Governments have addressed ERM across the three strategies with a nomination for the scholarship, developing a training plan within the council and accessing the grants scheme to part-fund a position to work on the ERM project.

Eleven projects have been undertaken through the grant scheme, seven scholarships were awarded and three training activities as part of the AWARE Program were completed in the 2002/03 financial year involving 15 Local Governments in both the metropolitan and country areas.

2.3   2003/04 applications

Applications for the second round of funding in the 2003/04 financial year were received with 16 applications lodged from 24 Local Governments including three joint applications. Seven projects were undertaken through the grant scheme, 16 training workshops were delivered predominantly within regional Western Australia and four scholarships were awarded.

2.4   2004/05 applications

Applications for the 2004/05 financial year were called and closed, with 16 applications being received from 15 local governments. Five projects from the grant scheme are likely to proceed, with 11 training activities scheduled and three scholarships awarded.

3.   CONCLUSION

Some outstanding results are being realised with more than one quarter of Local Governments involved in the AWARE Program. The results are receiving media interest and include increased community participation and awareness, the development of local emergency management initiatives and an increase in understanding of local risks for Local Government and their communities.
In the past, communities have been vulnerable to the effects of emergencies. Under the AWARE program communities are now more aware and better prepared as they understand what risks affect their community. The AWARE Program is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioural changes through community engagement that will improve the safety of the community.

The AWARE Program is constantly being reviewed and measured against its objectives. With exciting results being seen from AWARE projects in Local Government, FESA has committed to funding the program annually after the initial injection of Commonwealth funding.