

Emergency Reporting on Radio and Social Media

Community broadcasters can play a vital role in communications during emergencies, by providing their communities with up-to-date information that is hyperlocal and responsive. It is vital that they are appropriately resourced and given the tools they need to report on emergencies accurately and responsibly. The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) has worked with the ABC Emergency Team to create this set of resources to support CBAA members when Emergency Broadcasting (EB) may be required.

This includes:

- 1: When to begin emergency broadcasting
- 2: Emergency broadcasting stings
- 3: What to do on radio & social media
- 3: Broadcasting warnings on radio
- 4: Posting warnings on social media
- 5: Retransmission licensing

For more information, please contact CBAA’s Membership Engagement Team Leader at [support@cbaa.org.au](mailto:support@cbaa.org.au). These resources have been created as part of the strategic partnership between CBAA and ABC News. How to use these resources This guidance note and the associated EB Alert stings have been prepared for CBAA member organisations to support their emergency broadcasting activities. They may not be appropriate for other users, or for use in other locations. This guidance note contains general information only and may not be accurate, complete or current. It is not professional advice. Your organisation uses the information in this guidance note and the EB Alert Stings at its own discretion and risk. Unless the law provides otherwise, CBAA and ABC together and individually do not have any liability to any person arising from your organisation’s use of or reliance upon this guidance note or the EB Alert stings. CBAA and / or ABC own or have permission to use all intellectual property rights in this guidance note and the EB Alert Stings and reserve all such rights. Your organisation may use this guidance note and the EB Alert Stings solely for internal, non-commercial purposes to support emergency broadcasting activities, provided that:

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1: When to begin emergency broadcasting

*Emergency broadcasting should be triggered by an **official warning**, when lives and properties are threatened. Fire warnings are issued by state and territory fire agencies, weather related warnings are issued by State Emergency Services and the Bureau of Meteorology. To receive official warnings via email you need to sign up directly with the relevant agencies. Best to do this via their various media contacts, although some agencies do have subscription links on their websites. (Information correct 28 July 2024)*

	Agency & warnings link	Media contact
WA	Emergency WA DFES – Dept of Fire and Emergency Services	<a href="mailto:media@dfes.wa.gov.au">media@dfes.wa.gov.au</a> 08 9395 9543
NT	Bushfires NT & NTPFES – Police Fire and Emergency Services + Secure NT collates all warnings	<a href="mailto:pfes.media@pfes.nt.gov.au">pfes.media@pfes.nt.gov.au</a> 08 8985 8837

SA	CFS – <i>Country Fire Service</i> + SA SES	cfs.communications@eso.sa.gov.au 08 8115 3531 ses.media@eso.sa.gov.au
VIC	VicEmergency <i>EMV – Emergency Management Victoria</i>	media@emv.vic.gov.au 1300 287 289
TAS	Tas Alert <i>TFS – Tasmania Fire Service</i> + <i>SES Tasmania</i>	media@dpfem.tas.gov.au <i>TFS Media 03 6169 4340</i>  <i>SES media 03 6173 2424</i>
NSW	RFS – <i>Rural Fire Service</i> + NSW SES	media@rfs.nsw.gov.au <i>RFS (02) 9898 1855</i> media@ses.nsw.gov.au <i>1800 067 234</i>
ACT	ESA – <i>Emergency Services Agency</i>	esamedia@act.gov.au 02 6207 8564
QLD	QFD – <i>Qld Fire Dept (metro) &amp;</i> <i>QPS – Qld Police Service on behalf of</i> <i>Rural Fire Service &amp; SES</i> + Qld Disaster Management	media@qfes.qld.gov.au policemedia@police.qld.gov.au
National	BOM – <i>Bureau of Meteorology</i>	media@bom.gov.au

## 2: Emergency broadcasting stings

CBAAs have produced a set of four EB **Alert Stings** which *should be played before giving warning information on radio, to ensure the information **stands out** and gains the attention of the audience:*

- Emergency Information
- Emergency Information + SEWS
- Severe Weather Information
- Fire Ban Information

*Use the SEWS (Standard Emergency Warning Signal) only when requested in writing, i.e. in an official warning. The signal, which is a piercing siren sound, should be used sparingly as audience feedback is that listeners can switch off when it is overused (3 to 5 seconds and fade down is usually enough).*

*The **What to do** information below is based on the Australian Warning System (AWS) alert levels. The AWS uses a nationally consistent set of warning levels, colours, icons and calls to action for fires, flooding, storms and cyclone and other disaster events.*

## 3: What to do on radio & social media

AWS alert	What's happening	What to do on Radio	What to do on social media
Advice	No threat to lives or property.  Issued as a “heads up” that danger may increase.	No need to broadcast, unless of community interest (e.g. smoke across major road).  Do <b>NOT</b> play an alert sting.	Post on merit based on community interest or impact.

<p><b>Watch &amp; Act</b></p> <p>+ call to action</p> <p>e.g. 'prepare to leave'</p>	<p>Conditions changing.</p> <p>An event has the potential to threaten lives and property.</p>	<p>Use <b>EMERGENCY INFORMATION</b> sting and broadcast immediately.</p> <p>Or <b>SEVERE WEATHER INFORMATION</b> sting for storms/flash flooding and lower level cyclones.</p> <p>Repeat every 30 mins until audience is well informed, but not over news bulletins.</p> <p>Highlight warning level and call to action.</p>	<p>Publish on Facebook using text template and relevant photograph if available.</p> <p>Update when warning changes.</p>
<p><b>Emergency Warning</b></p> <p>+ call to action</p> <p>e.g. 'leave immediately'</p>	<p>Danger is immediate.</p> <p>Imminent threat to lives and property.</p>	<p>As above + use <b>EMERGENCY INFORMATION</b> sting and REPEAT warning at least 3 times per hour (about every 15 minutes).</p> <p>Inform and consult your manager.</p>	<p>As above + if already published at the lower level, update information.</p>
<p><b>Emergency Warning with SEWS request</b></p> <p>+ call to action</p> <p>e.g. 'seek shelter immediately'</p>	<p>Danger is imminent and communities may not be aware.</p> <p>Issued with a request to play the SEWS (Standard Emergency Warning Signal).</p>	<p>As above and SEWS request must be in writing i.e. on a warning or agency alert.</p> <p>Use <b>EMERGENCY INFORMATION + SEWS</b> sting and broadcast immediately, but not over news bulletins.</p> <p>Statewide and network programs should not play SEWS, use <b>EMERGENCY INFO: ALERT</b> instead.</p> <p>Consult with managers and agency to drop SEWS and revise coverage. Use SEWS again if threat escalates, or new areas are threatened.</p>	<p>As above.</p>

<b>Fire Ban or Total Fire Ban</b>	Issued ahead of extreme risk fire day, usually the afternoon before the ban takes affect.	Use <b>FIRE BAN INFORMATION</b> sting and details of ban from the fire agency.  Should be broadcast regularly on the day before the ban and the morning of the ban.	Publish simple FB post or share agency posts with details of ban timing and what is banned.
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3: Broadcasting warnings on radio

This outline demonstrates how you can turn an official emergency warning into a presenter script. As the threat level increases, the detail in your radio updates should also increase.

Warnings issued by various agencies including Bureau of Meteorology and state fire and emergency services (see list above), are usually written into pre-prepared templates and can be long and not written for the spoken word.

Example Watch & Act fire

This fictious bush fire warning example has key sections highlighted in yellow by the presenter/ producer for sections that are relevant for the on-air update.

Watch and Act Bushfire Warning –  
issued by a State Bushfire Agency  
*(Example only)*

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Date: 16 / 07 / 2024

BUSHFIRES MESSAGE: WATCH and ACT

**LOCATION:** Burnside Road, ARMADALE

**ALERT LEVEL:** Watch and Act – Leave now if you are not prepared. Conditions are changing. Start taking action now to protect your family and your property.

**FIRE TYPE:** Bushfire. **INFORMATION CURRENT AS AT:** 16/07/2024 14:20 hours.

**STATUS: GOING** - A fire which is spreading on one or more fronts. Effective containment strategies are not in place for the entire perimeter.

**RISKS FACED BY PEOPLE IN THE AREA:** Smoke from this fire may affect visibility. Active fire may occur close to the roadside. Firefighting crews may be working on property protection.

**WHAT TO DO:** Enact your bushfire survival plan. Leave immediately if your property is not safe and it is safe to do so.

**ADVICE TO THE PUBLIC:** Firefighting crews and aircraft are responding to a fire at Burnside Road south of ARMADALE near the intersection of The Busy Highway and Burnside Road. Volunteer Bushfire crews are responding and may be involved in property protection. Enact your bushfire survival plan and adhere to advice of fire crews.

For the safety of firefighting crews and other vehicles, drivers in the area are urged to slow down, turn on headlights and drive safely for the conditions. For further information and a map regarding this bushfires, go the State Agency website <https://stateagencybushfires/incidentmap>.

INFORMATION AUTHORISED BY: Incident Controller

Here is the script the presenter/ producer created, based on this example.

Introduce yourself and describe the location

Introduce yourself and describe the location

[Play the appropriate alert sting – refer to EB Alerts & Sting guide above]

Who issued the warning, the warning level and call to action

Who issued the warning, the warning level and call to action

Specific information about this event, check pronunciations

Specific information about this event, check pronunciations

The State Bushfire agency says if you have a bushfire survival plan, follow it now or leave immediately, if your property is not safe and it is safe to evacuate

The State Bushfire agency says if you have a bushfire survival plan, follow it now or leave immediately, if your property is not safe and it is safe to evacuate

Use editorial judgement to select generic advice and add website info.

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Brief recap & when the next update will be broadcast

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I'll bring you another update on this Watch & Act fire at Armadale, south of Darwin at 3:30pm, or sooner if the information changes, keep listening here on *[station name]*.

#### 4: Posting warnings on social media

It is recommended that official warning information is also posted on social media. With X (formerly known as Twitter) it's best to simply share the agency posts. For Facebook, best practice is the 'curate warning' information for clarity and for consistency use a template (see below). Be aware that warnings published to Tiktok and Instagram may not appear immediately due to their algorithms.

Sample social media template

Emergency Alert: Warning level – Incident type [WARNING LEVEL and CALL TO ACTION (eg Watch & Act - Prepare to Leave) ]



Time/date



Headline: a one-line summary

◦ Short dot points if required, try to limit to no more than three.



Detailed Location information

Listen to [ Local Radio Station name]



More Information

Relevant agency: [agency website]

How to use this template

- Follow 'What to do on radio and social' posting guidelines above.
- Copy and paste the template into your social media post and fill in the specific warning details.
- It's important to break up wordy warnings information, similar to a radio read.
- Use Emojis but not too many as this can reduce accessibility.
- Update the post when the warning changes and **CLOSE OFF YOUR POST** when the warning has eased to advice level.

Example social post

Emergency Alert: WATCH and ACT, Leave if not safe bushfire at Burnside Rd, Armadale.



2:20pm 16 July



Firefighting crews and aircraft are responding to a fire

◦ Enact your bushfire survival plan.

◦ Leave immediately if your property is not safe and it is safe to evacuate.



Burnside Road and The Busy Highway, ARMADALE

Listen to your LOCAL ABC Radio (example) <https://ab.co/Darwin>



More Information

ABC Emergency: [ab.co/emergency](http://ab.co/emergency) and State Bushfire agency (provide a link)

#### 5: Retransmission of ABC's local radio emergency feed

Sometimes during an emergency, it can be challenging to stay on air.

As part of your preparation for the emergency season, you can enter into a retransmission agreement with ABC. This agreement will allow you to retransmit your local ABC radio emergency feed during any period when there is a significant emergency or public safety is at risk in your local community.

To set up a retransmission agreement:

- Download the template agreement
- Fill in the information in yellow
- Email draft document to [dg-eblead@abc.net.au](mailto:dg-eblead@abc.net.au) with any questions you have
- An ABC representative will be in contact to finalise the agreement