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| Emergency Management for High-Rise Public Housing Buildings |
| October 2024 |
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| **Emergency Management for High-Rise Public Housing Buildings**  October 2024 |
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# Definitions

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| **Term** | **Definition** |
| Emergency | An emergency is considered something that effects an individual or a group that may include fire, storm, flood. Which may involve government agencies, emergency services and stakeholders. |
| Emergency management | The coordinated efforts and processes involved in preparing for, responding to, recovering from, and mitigating the impacts of emergencies and disasters. |
| Emergency response | The immediate actions taken to address an emergency situation, including evacuation, rescue operations, and the provision of medical assistance. |
| Evacuation plan | A detailed strategy outlining the procedures for safely evacuating occupants from a building during an emergency. |
| Risk assessment | The process of identifying and evaluating potential hazards that could affect the safety and security of high-rise buildings and their occupants. |
| Crisis communication | The dissemination of information to stakeholders, including residents and emergency services, during an emergency to ensure clear and effective communication. |
| Preparedness | The state of having plans, procedures, and resources in place to effectively respond to potential emergencies or disasters. |
| Mitigation | Efforts taken to reduce the impact or likelihood of emergencies occurring, including building design, safety measures, and community education. |
| Shelter-in-place | A strategy where occupants are advised to remain indoors and seek safety within the building during certain types of emergencies, such as hazardous material spills or severe weather events. |
| Business continuity | The processes and plans implemented by an organisation to ensure that critical business functions can continue during and after a significant disruption. |
| Service agreement | A service agreement is a legal contract between a government department and a funded organisation for delivery of services in the community on behalf of the department. |

# Purpose

This document consolidates and provides references to resources available for emergency management in public housing high-rise buildings. These resources apply to properties owned or leased by Homes Victoria and outline roles and responsibilities in managing high-rise buildings in emergencies.

# Frameworks

This section covers legislative and policy frameworks which support emergency preparedness and response in Victoria.

## Legislative

The Victorian Government’s State emergency management arrangements are outlined in the**:**

* [Emergency Management Act (1986)](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/emergency-management-act-1986/051) <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/emergency-management-act-1986/051>; The purpose of this Act is to provide for the organisation of emergency management in Victoria.
* [Emergency Management Act (2013 update)](https://dhhsvicgovau-my.sharepoint.com/personal/sofia_messina_homes_vic_gov_au/Documents/Emergency%20Management%20Act%20(2013%20update)) <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/emergency-management-act-2013/020> The purpose of this Act is to— (a) establish new governance arrangements for emergency management in Victoria; and (b) repeal the Fire Services Commissioner Act 2010; and (c) consequentially amend emergency management legislation and certain other Acts.
* [State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP)](https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp) <https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp>. Contains provisions providing for the mitigation of, response to and recovery from emergencies, and specifies the roles and responsibilities of agencies in relation to emergency management (EM).

## Policy and guidelines

The Victorian Government’s State emergency management arrangements are outlined in**:**

* [Social services sector emergency management policy (Word)](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-09/Social%20services%20sector%20emergency%20management%20policy.docx). This policy assists the department and service providers to prepare for and respond to emergencies.
* [Emergency Management Housing O](https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management-housing)perational Guidelines (Victorian Housing Register). The guidelines provide guidance when individuals and households need urgent accommodation due to an emergency.
* [DFFH-Afterhours-Maintenance-Guidelines-2023.docx (sharepoint.com)](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/Publichousingresources/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7BB885912B-7065-41A7-BA62-45E4E61A08A9%7D&file=DFFH-Afterhours-Maintenance-Guidelines-2023.docx&action=default&mobileredirect=true&DefaultItemOpen=1%3Fweb%3D1&xsdata=%3D&sdata=N2tVWG9HU3huZUJQTVUwcFUwZHFwa1BrNWkyVE53ZnZHVnhvTXRDemtTRT0%3D&ovuser=c0e0601f-0fac-449c-9c88-a104c4eb9f28%2Csofia.messina%40homes.vic.gov.au).The guideline provides information to support afterhours maintenance responses including advice in emergencies.
* [Capital Development Guidelines (series 7)](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/capital-development-guidelines-series-7) [https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/capital-development-guidelines-series-7#](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/capital-development-guidelines-series-7) . The guidelines outline the department's policy, procedures and processes to manage risk to life due to fire in buildings or facilities that are owned, managed or funded by the department.
* [First 5 minutes - Emergency Management Manual](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/sites/dffh/Groups%20Forms%20and%20other/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2Fdffh%2FGroups%20Forms%20and%20other%2FCentral%2DPrecinct%2DEmergency%2DManagement%2FFirst%205%20Minutes%20%2D%20Emergency%20Management%20Manual%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2Fdffh%2FGroups%20Forms%20and%20other%2FCentral%2DPrecinct%2DEmergency%2DManagement&isSPOFile=1) . Applicable for the management of emergencies where an operational office is located at the base of the high-rise building.

# Roles and responsibilities

Under the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP), [State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP).pdf (emv.vic.gov.au)](https://files.emv.vic.gov.au/2023-12/State%20Emergency%20Management%20Plan%20(SEMP).pdf), the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) plays a lead role in emergency management planning, preparedness, policy and guidance to the social services sector. This includes services delivered, funded, or regulated by the department.

The department works closely with both non-government organisations and government agencies to prepare, plan and deliver relief activities, with a focus on supporting vulnerable families and individuals during emergencies.

## Emergency Services

The Department of Justice and Community Safety supports the portfolios of Police and Emergency Services and has a range of responsibilities relating to the planning, management and delivery of Victoria's emergency services. The following emergency service agencies provide and lead on-the-ground emergency response services to the Victorian community. These include:

* Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV)
* Country Fire Authority (CFA)
* Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES)
* Triple Zero Victoria
* Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV).

## Disability, Fairness & Emergency Management Division

The Disability, Fairness & Emergency Management Division’s emergency relief role under the SEMP includes management of Victoria’s emergency relief payments under the:

* Personal Hardship Assistance Program
* Coordination of temporary emergency shelter and accommodation (when needs are escalated from local councils)
* Delivery of psychosocial support services, in partnership with the Australian Red Cross and
* Victorian Council of Churches-Emergency Ministries.

At the regional and local levels, this Division participates in:

* Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees (MEMPC) and Regional Emergency Management Planning Committees (REMPC), alongside key agencies such as:
  + Country Fire Authority (CFA)
  + Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV)
  + SES (State Emergency Services), and others.

The department also participates in sub-groups that emerge from MEMPC meetings, including risk assessment groups and other key initiatives.

## Homes Victoria

Homes Victoria (Asset Management Branch) has responsibilities to complete any site and building maintenance works identified through reports or site inspections and undertake a fire preparedness inspection for any newly acquired or identified properties. The responsibilities are applicable to properties owned or leased by Homes Victoria, including public and community housing.

The Asset Management Branch also oversee the end-to-end process of significant property related works resulting from an emergency which may include fire rectification and sprinkler system installation. The Asset Management Branch review fire safety policy for high-rise buildings regularly ensuring the policy meets the relevant requirements of the Building Code of Australia and has been approved by Fire Rescue Victoria. High-rise building evacuation plans are stored in the department’s Fire Risk Management System (FRMS).

## Community Operations Practice Leadership Division

Whilst emergency services lead and coordinate the emergency response, local housing staff play an important support role during an emergency event. Housing operational teams have site specific knowledge and experience supporting the delivery of client-centred services to individuals and families who reside in public housing and have relationships with on-site support agencies and community groups.

Some of the duties required include but are not limited to are:

* arranging make safe repairs and urgent / responsive maintenance once the site has been formally handed over from emergency services
* identifying known high-risk renters/ households that may need extra support during the emergency, based on available information
* assisting with establishment of any command post (i.e. opening a community facility for use as a control or meeting room)
* preparing coordinated briefings to senior leaders within the department, including identifying key risks, actions and resourcing requirements from other areas
* participating on incident management and recovery meetings and providing advice and respond to Emergency Services requests for information
* working with key support agencies
* appropriately trained staff may contribute to the processing of any financial hardship payments as directed by Area Executive Directors.
* working with local government emergency recovery teams and emergency management division to support affected renters/ households in locating alternative accommodation if deemed required as set out in the [Emergency Management Housing Operational Guidelines](https://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/emergency-management-housing)
* liaising with onsite contractors and Homes Victoria in relation to security and cleaning requirements

# **Appendix 1 – Additional Information**

To assist renters facing an emergency, housing staff can access the information below.

## Emergency relief handbook

People who have been impacted by emergency events may experience a mix of physical, mental and emotional reactions. The [Emergency relief handbook (PDF, 197.66 KB)](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/202410/Emergency%20Relief%20Handbook.pdf) and [Emergency relief handbook - accessible (Word, 78.56 KB)](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/202410/Emergency%20Relief%20Handbook%20-%20accessible.docx) are available to people who have been affected by an emergency.

People can be advised use the handbook if they have been directly impacted by an emergency, or supporting others affected by an emergency.  The Emergency Relief Handbook can be used straight after an emergency and into the early recovery stage. It applies to all types of major emergencies.

## Personal Hardship and Assistance Program

The [Personal Hardship Assistance Program](https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/personal-hardship-assistance-program) helps people experiencing financial hardship in emergencies. The program includes Emergency Relief Payments and Re-establishment Assistance

People can access support if experiencing trauma, damage or loss due to disasters and emergencies. People may be eligible for an emergency payment if affected by a house fire or a natural disaster.

## Emergency Relief Payments

A one-off payment is provided to help meet immediate needs, including emergency food, shelter, clothing, medication and accommodation. People who have been impacted by an emergency or natural disaster and have urgent relief needs, can:

* call VicEmergency on 1800 226 226
* visit [VicEmergency Relief webpage](https://emergency.vic.gov.au/relief)
* contact their local council.

This information can be found at <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management>. This information can be found at <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management>.