

AELG/ 2: Lifelines Co-ordination (Response)

Project Report

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Executive Summary

The project to investigate the possible establishment of a Lifelines Co-ordination System for the initial phase of a regional scale emergency affecting the Auckland region was proposed by AELG and supported by the Auckland CDEM Group CEG. The project objectives were:

Design and recommend a means of effective and efficient lifelines co-ordination in the event of an emergency so as to:

- *enable prompt identification of priorities for service reinstatement*
- *provide a single point of reference for matters relating to lifelines*
- *enable effective inter-agency co-ordination of resources*
- *streamline the flow of information*
- *assist civil defence and emergency services response efforts*

The establishment of the CDEM Group for Auckland provides a timely opportunity for a fresh approach to establishing appropriate utility response mechanisms. This is particularly the case given the current major CDEM Group project to standardise EOC specifications and operations as much as possible across the region.

The project process involved the engagement of a consultant to undertake research and prepare reports, and the holding of a workshop on 4 April 2002 involving representatives from AELG and CEG.

Emergency communications systems for utilities in regional scale emergencies are to be addressed under a separate AELG project.

Current Lifeline Utility Arrangements in an Emergency

Current Civil Defence arrangements are based upon the requirement for liaison officers from each utility attending local and regional Civil Defence Headquarters, depending on the scale and nature of the incident.

These arrangements developed at a time when there were fewer and larger utility organisations with a more appropriate resource base. One of the key current shortcomings is the scarcity of senior utility representatives with appropriate authority, which casts doubt on the likelihood of utility representation in a large-scale emergency. Mechanisms for communicating with Lifeline utilities in a major emergency therefore need to be revalidated in order to ensure the functionality of the CDEM Group EOC(s).

Concept of a Specialist Lifelines Co-ordination System

The concept of a specialist Lifelines Co-ordination function or process emerged from the New Zealand Lifelines Study Tour to Los Angeles following the 1994 Northridge Earthquake. The observations of Wellington and Christchurch representatives during that visit were that the Californian co-ordination arrangements worked very effectively, and assisted the transition from the response phase to the recovery phase for the affected utilities.

Outcomes of Project Workshop

There was a unanimous view that the current arrangements are *passive* in nature (reactive and largely untested), and that there is an urgent need to take a more *active* approach to co-ordinating lifelines response.

The strong view to emerge from the workshop was that planning should not focus just on major regional scale events such as volcanic eruption or earthquake. It was felt that the immediate need is to improve arrangements to deal with smaller scale incidents that could be anticipated to occur more frequently (eg. in a 5 to 10 year or more return period context - 'extended Business As Usual').

The objective of a Lifelines Co-ordination System for regional scale emergencies is for all parties to have a clear understanding as to the communications and co-ordination arrangements that will apply. For smaller scale incidents, the base requirement is to have direct communications between lead Incident Control agencies and utility organisations, and with each other.

It is considered that neither the higher-level objective nor the base requirement can be met at present, given recent significant changes in both the utility and CDEM sectors. However a number of the elements are already in place, and it is considered that existing arrangements can be built upon in conjunction with current CDEM Group project initiatives.

Lifeline Utility Responsibilities and Benefits

Individual utilities have a responsibility to set up and maintain dependable arrangements that enable linkages between their organisation and the CDEM Group, and with other utilities. While this responsibility exists under the current Civil Defence Act, the new CDEM Bill provides greater focus on this. In particular, it emphasises the need for utilities to develop continuity plans that are integrated across utility and CDEM organisations, rather than prepared in isolation.

Utilities also have a responsibility to inform and involve their contractors appropriately. These responsibilities extend to regular testing and exercising the agreed arrangements.

Individual utilities benefit from a more systematic approach by rapidly receiving processed information on the status of other utilities. As an example of this, information on available access routes around the region is of vital importance to each utility as they undertake their own impact assessments and plan immediate repairs.

Project Recommendations

While it is important to move towards the establishment of a Lifelines Co-ordination System for extreme emergency events, the short-term need is to significantly improve the ability of utilities to communicate with each other and with CDEM agencies in a range of more foreseeable ‘extended Business As Usual’ incidents.

The focus should be on ***achieving dependable communications with individual utilities for transmitting system status messages in the immediate response phase*** (ie. initial hours).

Greater engagement between all of the parties involved in the utility emergency response process is clearly required.

The recommended short and medium-term steps are as follows:

1. AELG member utilities should review their existing Liaison Officer designations (where appropriate), and upgrade their contact list information to provide at least two points of contact (*before the end of the current financial year*).
2. AELG is to discuss options for co-ordinating this process on a sustainable basis with the Auckland Utility Operators’ Group (AUOG), TLA and Emergency Services representatives (*before AELG AGM in August or September*)
3. Organise with the CDEM Group a tabletop exercise focusing on a non-declared emergency incident to assist all parties to validate current arrangements, and to convey to some agencies the need to put in more effort in this area (*Project AELG/ 10 Exercises to Test Plans*).
4. Develop a priority approach to communication and liaison arrangements in an emergency which considers the aspects of both *physical reporting* and *remote (utility EOC-based) communication*. (*to be incorporated into the brief for project AELG/ 1 Communications Systems*)