



Shape Your Future Victoria

Emergency Management

More information on Emergency Management in Victoria is available at: www.PrepareVictoria.ca.

For research on other topics related to the *Official Community Plan* update, please visit: www.ShapeYourFutureVictoria.ca

Definition and Description

Emergency management seeks to save lives, preserve the environment and protect property and the economy. The protection of life is of paramount importance. Management of emergencies involves four interdependent areas of activity:

Prevention and Mitigation: Elimination or reduction of the risk and impacts of hazards.

Preparedness: Readiness for response to a disaster and to manage its impacts through emergency response plans.

Response: Actions during or immediately after a disaster to minimize suffering and losses through emergency communication, medical assistance, evacuation and search and rescue.

Recovery: Reinstatement of a community to an acceptable level through post-disaster actions, such as return of evacuees and reconstruction.

SOURCE: PUBLIC SAFETY CANADA

Why Is This Topic Important?

Emergency management helps to sustain safe, prosperous and resilient communities. Each municipality in BC is required to develop an emergency plan that assesses and ranks the risk of natural and human-made hazards as well as the impact of emergencies and disasters. The inclusion of mitigation actions in emergency plans can prevent disasters or greatly reduce the social, economic and environmental impacts in a community during events and afterwards.

Did You Know?

Sustainable communities reduce the risk of emergencies and disasters and have the adaptive capacity to cope with impacts if events occur. An **emergency** is a small-scale event that can be handled with community resources. A **disaster** is more extensive, overwhelming local capacities.

Hazards are threats to a community that can cause emergencies or disasters. There are natural hazards (e.g. heat waves or snowstorms) and human hazards (e.g. marine accidents or dam failure).

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The **Victoria Emergency Management Agency** (VEMA) is responsible for the City's emergency planning and coordinates its efforts with the Public Works Department and first response organizations including the Victoria Fire Department, the Victoria Police Department and the BC Ambulance Service.

A report called a *Hazard, Risk and Vulnerability Assessment* (HRVA) determines local hazards and the risk that each hazard poses to a community as a whole and to vulnerable segments of the population.

VEMA's HRVA report for Victoria identifies five **high-risk hazards**: earthquakes, motor vehicle accidents, plant disease and pest infestation, structure fires and wind storms.

Under the *BC Emergency Program Act*, the City of Victoria is legally required to develop an **emergency plan** that identifies local hazards and strategies for preparedness, response and recovery.

Issues and Trends

Hazards in Victoria

- Natural hazards can be atmospheric (e.g. heat waves), geological (e.g. landslides), hydrological (e.g. heavy rainfall), seismic (e.g. earthquakes and tsunamis) or lightning induced fires. The top two natural hazards in Victoria are earthquakes and wind storms.
- Human beings are also the source of hazards. One example is incidents of fires that damage buildings and other structures that occur in Victoria.
- According to the National Building Code of Canada, the City of Victoria is located within Seismic Zone 5 of 6 possible zones (with Zone 6 as the greatest risk of seismic activity). The Pacific Geo-science Centre indicates there is a 30 per cent likelihood of a damaging earthquake event in the city before 2054.

Vulnerable people and systems

- The ability to cope with an emergency or disaster is more difficult for elderly and very young people, as well as those who are low-income, homeless or do not speak English, such as visitors to Victoria.
- Economic and food systems are also highly vulnerable. A major disaster will affect all sectors of Victoria's economy. There is an estimated three-day food supply¹ on Vancouver Island. Lack of easy access to and from the Island will be a major concern in a disaster.
- Disasters may also damage critical facilities and infrastructure or render them inaccessible. Essential functions are located at City Hall, VEMA's Emergency Operations Centre within the Victoria Police Headquarters, fire halls, the harbour, hospitals and the Provincial Legislature. Critical infrastructure includes bridges, water mains and gas pipelines.

Emergency planning and strategies

- The City of Victoria completed the Victoria Emergency Management Agency Strategic Plan in 2007. This roadmap prioritizes the integration of preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation with all City departments and activities, where relevant. A key component is the work of over 100 active volunteers. Each participates in regular training, exercises and meetings; they are also ambassadors in the community.
- One key aspect of the Strategic Plan is to increase awareness and readiness across the community. VEMA partners with interested groups and provides easy-to-use publications, such as its two Recipes for Disaster, household and small business checklists for survival in an emergency or disaster.

The City in Action: What We Do Now

The *Victoria Emergency Management Agency Strategic Plan (2007)* is the City's roadmap for the implementation of city-wide strategies in prevention and mitigation, preparedness, recovery and response. VEMA responsibilities include its Emergency Operation Centre which is staffed and always ready to respond to events. To fulfill the legal requirements of an emergency plan, VEMA also commissioned an HRVA in 2006 that is a detailed analysis of Victoria's first responders, and capacity to address emergencies and disasters.

Share your thoughts and ideas:

Emergency Management is a priority for the City of Victoria but there could be more policies in the OCP that address prevention and mitigation, response and recovery.

- What steps have you and your household taken to prepare for an emergency or disaster?
- Are emergencies an important issue for neighbourhood planning? Why or why not?
- How could emergency management be addressed across the city? In what policies?

1. Please see the OCP Topic Sheet on Food Security.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

- Additional topic sheets are available online at www.shapeyourfuturevictoria.ca/research-facts