

Auckland Rain Emergency - January 2023

Generated by convective activity associated with an Atmospheric River, heavy rainfall occurred in Auckland on 27th January 2023. Event totals of over 250mm were widespread, with over 40mm in 15 minutes at the peak of the event. Four fatalities occurred.

Over 350 homes had severe damage, and another 1000 had partial damage. Infrastructure impacts included the closure of, and flooding inside Auckland Airport terminal.

There was limited public information throughout the event which led to significant criticism. The declaration of a state of emergency had never been tested and was held up for review by the communications team. The Mayor was new to the role, and the timing of the event on a Friday evening was material to the response. Many of the issues had been identified in a 2016 report, much of which was never acted on.

The case-study provides learnings for planning, leadership, technology, and stakeholder expectations, around unusual, but credible natural hazard incidents.

There are over 30 learnings identified by Climate Resilience associated with this event, some of which are documented in the learnings checklist, below.

Resources available

- Rainfall data – unofficial
- Media coverage
- Two official reviews

Useful to

- Government
- Dam owners
- Critical infrastructure
- Disaster managers
- Boards

What are relevant training and onboarding arrangements for incident leadership roles?

Is environmental monitoring output understood, and integrated to decision making?

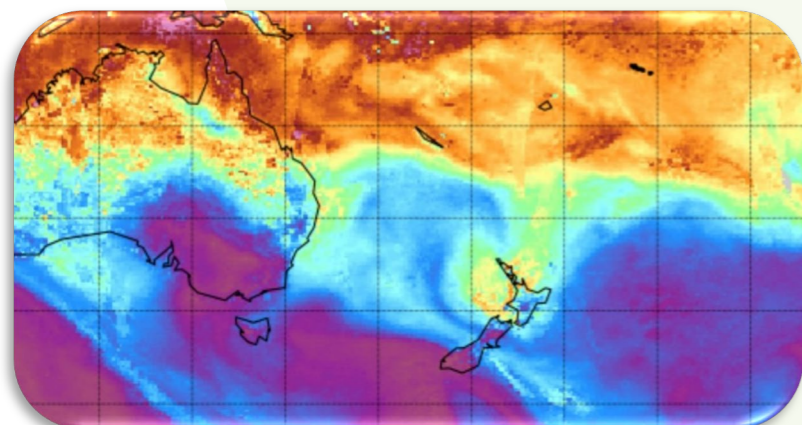
Governance Questions

Are incident and emergency plans tested regularly?

Does a change in technology use present a change in risk that requires a response?

Do stakeholder communication methods align with stakeholder expectation?

Learnings Checklist



Category	Event	Learning/prevention activity	Question?
Strategic risk	The declaration of a state of emergency was delayed for the BAU communication approval. Its role in unlocking resources was not understood and the communication approval process did not move away from 9-5 business as usual. (NZ Herald)	Processes and systems should be tested and should generally not reflect those used during business and usual.	Are systems designed to foster good outcomes with maximum appropriate delegation provided as an enabler? Is the process tested and are all those involved in the process trained?
Strategic risk	NZ Transport social media staff. The regular shift finished at 8pm and the worker went home with no additional rostering. (Review) The impact of this social media role in a civic emergency wasn't understood.	Evolving technology and associated expectations should be understood by those in incident response.	Have stakeholder expectations changed with technology use? Have system and process been updated?
Operational risk	No SMS alerts were sent to Auckland residents in the emergency.	SMS warning is expected by the community.	Are SMS alerts pre-populated and the system of dissemination known, practiced, and tested?
System and process	Communication sent to a person with the same name as the Mayor (NZ Herald). Severity of the situation was not understood by those in authority	Basic details can become a strategic risk	Can incident response systems function independently of individual email and 'phone information?
Strategic risk	2016 report for Auckland Emergency Management identified many of the communication problems (Review)	Learnings and recommendations need to be implemented, or documentation kept if not implemented.	Have outstanding learnings and recommendations been implemented?
Leadership	The Deputy Mayor understood Mayor had arrived to deal with the situation. In fact, he had arrived to show his son his new office. The Deputy Mayor happened to call just at that moment. (Review)	Clarity on roles and responsibilities, and communicating them, is imperative. Assuming is problematic. Confirmation of arrangements and when they change. via email is best practice in maturity assessments.	Is the incident hierarchy clear before, and during events?