



Evidence and
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Summit 2023
9-11 October

Melbourne, Australia & Online



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Science Interventions
Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine



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#49 - How to effectively learn from the past. Victoria's emergency management approach to learning lessons.

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Objectives/aims

The Victorian emergency management sector supports a culture of continuous improvement by:

- Encouraging the sector to share lessons, both positive actions to sustain and areas for improvement
- Encouraging learning from both assurance activities and contemporary good practice
- Focusing on systems of work, rather than the performance of individuals
- Recognising that identifying and implementing sustainable solutions takes time, resources and opportunity

In November 2015, Victoria's first sector-wide lessons management framework, EM-LEARN, was approved. This framework further supports the development of a culture of continuous improvement and outlines a model for lessons management and how it will be implemented into the sector. Lessons management involves the identification and learning of lessons captured through lessons and evaluation activities (including debriefing, monitoring and reviews) occurring before, during and after emergencies. This process of moving from identifying lessons to learning lessons is guided by the lessons management life cycle within the EM-LEARN Framework, which aims to provide a shared understanding of what lessons management means for the Victorian Emergency Management sector.

The process of implementing a lessons management approach over the past eight



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years has been tested by a number of major emergencies (COVID-19, Black Summer Fires, 2022 Victorian Flooding Event), this presentation will provide an overview of how the emergency management sector identifies lessons, implements change and learns lessons to ensure continuous improvement.

Methods

In 2014, the Victorian emergency management sector commenced an exploration of lessons management approaches. Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) conducted an environmental scan of local, national and international lessons management good practice. In addition, research was conducted through Charles Sturt University on what successful lessons management looks like in emergency management.

The environmental scan and research found:

- a strong culture of identifying themes, trends and lessons but not much success at ensuring lessons were learnt by creating lasting behaviour change
- no consistent model for capturing, analysing, sharing and implementing lessons leading to poorly defined roles, responsibilities and expectations
- that blame and shame, although diminished, was still prevalent in some parts of the sector
- a lack of visibility in the process of developing lessons, leading to a perception that personal observations and contributions were not influencing change
- there were many champions of learning practice in the field but there was a risk of losing momentum because of the perceived information 'black holes'
- emergency management agencies (e.g. responder agencies, government departments and non- government partners) were working separately on lessons management, creating silos of knowledge and disconnected learning opportunities
- there was a limited understanding of principles and benefits of lessons

The EM-LEARN Framework was released as 'approved for discussion' to allow the communication and exploration of the lessons management concepts and lessons management model across the sector. The framework outlined five key project areas to support implementation: governance, communication, process, training and technology.

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Real Time Monitoring and Evaluation (RTM&E) is a state level, multi-agency program. Unlike with traditional evaluations, often conducted post events, we conduct RTM&E during the readiness, response, relief and early recovery phases of an emergency. Observing meetings, debriefing personnel and reviewing documentation in action captures details that could be missed if an evaluation is done after the event. The approach promotes a no-blame, just and fair culture, consistent with the lessons management lifecycle in the EM-LEARN framework. The RTM&E program is used by the Victorian emergency management sector to monitor change and improvement in real time to ensure lessons are being captured, implementation and learned.

Main findings

The Victorian emergency management sector now has a well developed learning culture. It has moved away from recommendations and towards lessons; away from reports and towards case studies and away from action tracking and towards monitoring improvement. Over the past eight years this approach has been utilised to identify and learn lessons from many major emergencies and real time monitoring and evaluation (RTM&E) teams have been deployed to monitor change and improvement.