

# MULTI-AGENCY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION ABOVE THE INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM

Dr Christine Owen,<sup>1</sup> Dr Ben Brooks,<sup>2</sup> Professor Douglas Paton,<sup>3</sup> Dr Roshan Bhandari,<sup>1</sup> Steve Curnin<sup>1</sup> and Dr Chris Bearman<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania <sup>2</sup> National Centre for Ports and Shipping, University of Tasmania

<sup>3</sup> School of Psychology, University of Tasmania <sup>4</sup> Appleton Institute, Central Queensland University

## Research Problem

Failure in emergency incident management coordination in major events has long been recognised as a significant problem in reviews conducted following both national and international emergency events.



## The research has examined:

- existing practices and challenges facing those involved in managing emergency events at regional/state/national levels;
- key factors involved in breakdowns in coordination;
- education and training strategies to use to enhance capability; and
- changes that might be needed to support effective emergency management at regional/state and national levels.



## Data collection and analysis

- interviews with key personnel who work at a strategic level of emergency management (n=34)
- two organisational surveys (n=206; n=103) of personnel working in regional and state/national levels of emergency management
- observations of team decision-making in both simulation and state-level emergency operations centres (Tas, Vic, NSW, ACT, Qld, NZ)
- secondary sources classification and analysis of human factors issues identified in major inquiries
- review and analysis of training exercises and training strategies for capability development
- problem-based learning consultation with key stakeholders in the industry to develop discussion paper and to identify strategies for the future.

## Findings

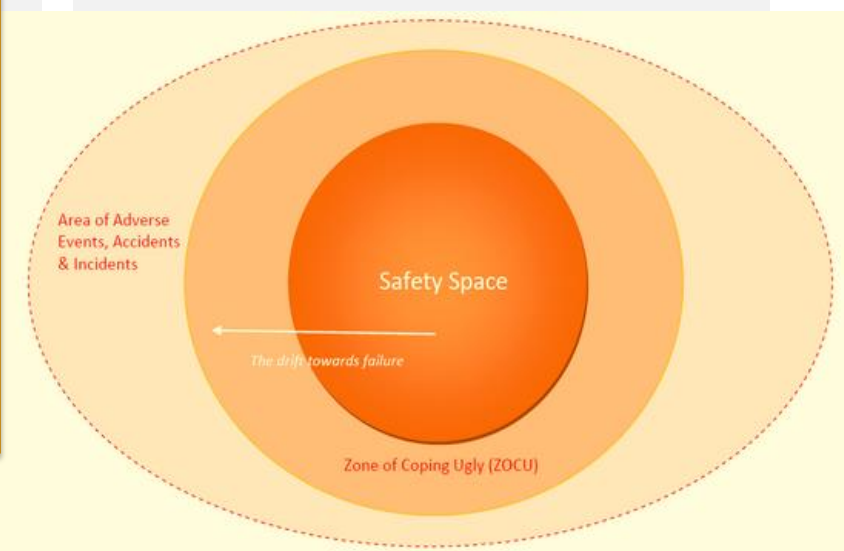
- There are different governance processes within the IMT and related arrangements in place which can lead to challenges with resource sharing.
- There are two main reasons that breakdowns and disconnects in the functioning within and between regional and state/national level teams occur:
  - a lack of shared understanding of the situation; and
  - inconsistent plans or differences in opinion about how to execute that plan exist.
- There is a need to develop leadership and capability to include new tools for practice (such as 'coping ugly').
- Training for above the IMT is limited.

## 'Coping Ugly'

Secondary sources analysis (Brooks, 2011) indicated that incident management systems are often reduced in capacity during emergency events. Under less than ideal conditions, how then might IMTs:

- recognise that the situation they are in is degrading.
- develop strategies to assist people to manage under those degraded conditions (in other words, to 'cope ugly') to get the job done.

In Figure 1, the white arrow shows the drift from safe to less than safe performance, to situations that may included accidents and incidents.



## The Challenges

Seven challenges have been identified and their implications have been written into a discussion paper, currently circulating, to priorities strategies for the future. The challenges are:

- Increased uncertainty, complexity and convergence
- Disaster Risk Reduction and policy disconnects
- Community expectations and resilience
- Social media, networking, and emergence
- The political-operational nexus
- Measuring emergency management effectiveness
- Development and Capability

Contact: Christine Owen  
[Christine.Owen@utas.edu.au](mailto:Christine.Owen@utas.edu.au)