Our district has experienced numerous emergency events over past years. Evidence from previous emergencies has shown that communities that plan and manage their own needs before, during and after an emergency recover more quickly and suffer less long term affects.
Content

Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 4
   The purpose of this guide
   How to use this guide
   Acknowledgments

Emergency Planning – State, Municipal, Local .......................................................... 5-7
   What are emergencies?
   Emergency management in Victoria
   Emergency management planning in the Wellington Shire Council
   Community emergency planning
   The benefits of planning for emergencies at a community level
   Do we need a community emergency plan?

Developing a Community Emergency Plan ................................................................. 8-9
   Step 1. Establishing an Emergency Planning Group ..................................................... 9
      Developing a Terms of Reference
      Engaging community members, agencies, and organisations
   Step 2. Define and Describe Your Local Community ................................................... 10-11
      Area Description
      Built Environment
      Social Environment
      Economic Environment
      Natural Environment
   Step 3. Identifying, Prioritising and Describing Community Emergencies ..................... 12-13
      Identifying significant community emergencies
      Understanding consequences and identifying actions
   Step 4. Developing Community Emergency Plans ....................................................... 14
      Identify actions that are common to all emergencies.
      Discuss common actions and group them into themes.
      Discuss the themes and specific actions and decide which actions are
      most relevant and important.
      For all of the actions identified:
      • Decide who will be responsible for actions
      • Decide when each action needs to be completed
      • Decide if resources are required.

Turning the Plan into action ........................................................................................... 16
   Promote and discuss the Community Emergency Plan.
   Provide an appropriate version to households.
   Authorise and support people or groups to undertake actions.
   Practice activities as appropriate.

Sustaining the Community Emergency Plan .................................................................. 17
   Establish a permanent and sustainable Community Emergency Group.
   Establish a schedule for reviewing the Plan annually.
   Establish a procedure for conducting a major review every 3 years.

Appendix – Community Emergency Planning Workbook ............................................
Introduction

Across Victoria, there is growing recognition of the importance of planning for emergencies at a local community level.

While significant emergency events will always involve government and non-government agencies, the active participation of local communities before, during and after such events will ensure the best outcomes for individuals, households and the community as a whole.

The purpose of this Guide

Wellington Shire Council has developed the Community Emergency Planning Guide (the Guide) to support local communities that want to take an active role in planning for, responding to and recovering from significant emergencies which have the potential to impact on their community. The Guide provides information to support the development of a Community Emergency Management Plan and it is intended that these locally produced plans will complement Municipal Emergency Management Planning and other emergency and community plans.

How to use this Guide

This Guide is intended for local communities who identify that they are at risk from emergencies. It is provided to assist them to plan and prepare for their own safety and wellbeing.

In general the Guide is aimed at townships and smaller communities, although it will also be useful in planning for emergencies in larger communities.

This document is developed with the intent that interested local people, in partnership with Wellington Shire Council, emergency services and other community groups, can develop a risk based, coordinated and effective local emergency plan for their own community.

Building relationships through the process of planning will be as important as the actual final product. The written plan will provide an ongoing resource as well as provide the basis for reviewing emergency planning and preparedness.

This Guide provides background and context to support and enable local community emergency planning. It also provides a structured process to work through in conjunction with a workbook to record information, decisions and actions.

By the end of the planning process it is intended that the community undertaking this work will have a set of emergency and risk based plans to assist with significant and likely emergencies.

Feedback and comments on this document and the process will always be appreciated. Feedback can be addressed to the Emergency Management Team at the Wellington Shire Council, PO Box 506, Sale, Victoria 3850.

Acknowledgments

This Guide is based on a pilot project led by the Loch Sport/Golden Beach/Paradise Beach communities and local agencies. Their participation and guidance is greatly appreciated.

This project was funded by a Natural Disaster Resilience Grant administered through the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner. The project was undertaken by Wellington Shire Council and Steve Pascoe and Associates, emergency management consultants.
Emergency planning – State, Municipal and Local

What are emergencies?
An emergency is any event which threatens or impacts the safety or health of people, and/or destroys or damages property or the natural environment.

Emergencies are characterised by some or all of the following:

- They are disruptive to individuals and communities;
- They are not part of day-to-day experience and are outside normal life expectations;
- They are unpredictable in occurrence and effects;
- They can be of sudden or slow onset;
- They require a response for which normal local resources may be inadequate;
- They have a wide range of effects and impacts on the human, built and natural environments; and
- There are complex needs in dealing with the impact.

Many emergencies are obvious, such as bushfires, floods and storms, while others such as disease outbreaks, agricultural or industrial disasters, loss of essential services, drought, heatwaves, etc. are less obvious.

In a local community context, an emergency might be defined as any event which has the potential to:

- Disrupt the community for some time;
- Threaten the sustainability or viability of the community; and/or
- Require external support to manage or recover from.

This context does not include events which impact only single individuals or households, however many communities do respond to these within their normal, day-to-day community support networks.

Emergency Management in Victoria

Emergency Management Act
www.oesc.vic.gov.au

The EMMV describes emergency planning, prevention, response and recovery activities and allocates roles and responsibilities to government and non-government agencies and organisations. Part 7 of the EMMV provides lists of emergencies anticipated in Victoria and identifies the control agency responsible for managing each emergency as well as key support agencies.

Emergency Management Manual Victoria
www.oesc.vic.gov.au

Under these arrangements, formal planning for emergency management occurs at state, regional and municipal levels. Municipal emergency management planning includes the identification of hazards and risks and documentation of the multi-agency arrangements for the prevention of, response to, and recovery from, emergencies that have the potential to affect the municipal district.

The municipal emergency planning process provides the forum for emergency agencies and organisations to discuss and better understand their roles, responsibilities, resources and capabilities.

Municipal councils are responsible for establishing a Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC), made up of representatives from council, emergency services, government and non-government agencies and community. The MEMPC is responsible for planning for emergencies which affect the broader municipal community. These arrangements are contained in Municipal Emergency Management Plans, which are held and maintained by councils and are available to community members.
Emergency management planning in Wellington Shire

The Wellington Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMPlan) provides information to emergency services, other organisations and the community within Wellington Shire, on how emergency risks will be managed.

The Wellington MEMPlan:
- Provides risk specific response and recovery plans for the municipality;
- Identifies emergencies that have the potential to impact communities within the Wellington Shire;
- Identifies the steps to be taken to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergency events;
- Defines the roles of organisations in relation to emergencies;
- Records the commitment of all participating agencies and groups in the process; and
- Contains all legislatively required information such as municipal resources and Neighbourhood Safer Places – Places of Last Resort.

Community emergency planning.

Evidence from previous emergencies has shown that communities that plan and manage their own needs before, during and after an emergency recover more quickly and suffer less long term affects. This is because the process develops community resilience by strengthening the ability of the community to establish collaborative relationships between individuals and groups to achieve common objectives.

Local communities are well placed to contribute to the management of emergencies which impact their area:
- They have historical knowledge of emergencies in their area;
- They have excellent local knowledge of geography, infrastructure and economy;
- They have excellent understanding of the local natural environment, historic and cultural values;
- They are able to identify, link with and support vulnerable community members;
- They have access to community resources;
- They have established communications networks and systems;
- They can identify local skills and limitations;
- They can be proactive in emergency prevention and preparedness;
- They are able to develop and manage local triggers for action; and
- They will be the ‘first responders’ following any emergency.

The benefits of planning for emergencies at a community level

Planning for emergencies at the local community level can have many benefits including:
- Effective identification and understanding of local hazards and risks;
- Development of local arrangements before an emergency occurs;
- Reduction in the impacts of emergencies;
- Strengthening local organisations and people;
- Utilising local knowledge, networks and resources;
- Enabling communication with, and support from external agencies;
- Developing support arrangements for vulnerable community members;
- Identification and strengthening of local resources, skills, talents, and leadership;
- Building community resilience to a range of adverse events;
- Ability to access expertise and attract support and resources; and
- Ability to provide valuable local information to municipal emergency planners.
Do we need a Community Emergency Plan?

Before undertaking the development of a local emergency management plan it is worthwhile asking:

“Are emergencies a problem for our local community?”

If community members do not see emergencies as a real threat, it will be difficult to enlist the necessary enthusiasm and support for the development of a Community Emergency Plan.

**Activity:**

Take a look at the characteristics of emergencies on Page 5. What local emergency events might fit these definitions?

**Consider:**

- Is there a history of emergencies in this area?
- Are there new or emerging threats/hazards?
- What events are likely to require the intervention and support from external agencies?
- What events might have a long term impact on our community?

If you have identified one or a number of potential emergency threats, then it is likely that your community would benefit from the development of a Community Emergency Management Plan.

If you want to proceed make contact with Wellington Shire Council’s Emergency Management Team to discuss options and opportunities.

It is important that the emergency planning process involves the broader community and has an appropriate level of credibility and recognition.

It is strongly recommended that local emergency management planning be undertaken by a sub-committee auspiced by an incorporated community group such as a Community Representative Group, Progress or Ratepayers Association.

Planning within a properly auspiced subcommittee will provide participants with appropriate help, support and protection, as well as ensuring effective maintenance and sustainability of plans.

A disaster resilient community is one where... people work together with local leaders using their knowledge and resources to prepare for and deal with disasters. They use personal and community strengths, and existing community networks and structures; a resilient community is enabled by strong social networks that offer support to individuals and families in a time of crisis.  
*National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, Page 5.*

**Wellington Shire Council website**

Developing a Community Emergency Action Plan

Community Emergency Action Plan Flow Chart

**Step 1.** Establish Emergency Planning Group
- Terms of Reference
- Engaging community members, agencies, and organisations

**Step 2.** Define and Describe Your Local Community
Area Description, Built Environment, Social Environment, Economic Environment, Natural Environment

**Step 3.** Identify, Prioritise and Describe Community Emergencies
Identify significant community emergencies
Understanding consequences and identifying actions

- **Emergency 1**
  - Engage with relevant agencies to learn more about this emergency
  - Describe this potential emergency
  - Understand the impact of the emergency and consequences for the community.
  - Identify actions to manage the emergency

- **Emergency 2**
  - Engage with relevant agencies to learn more about this emergency
  - Describe this potential emergency
  - Understand the impact of the emergency and consequences for the community.
  - Identify actions to manage the emergency

- **Emergency 3**
  - Engage with relevant agencies to learn more about this emergency
  - Describe this potential emergency
  - Understand the impact of the emergency and consequences for the community.
  - Identify actions to manage the emergency

- **Emergency 4**
  - Engage with relevant agencies to learn more about this emergency
  - Describe this potential emergency
  - Understand the impact of the emergency and consequences for the community.
  - Identify actions to manage the emergency

**Step 4.** Developing Community Emergency Plans
- Identify the actions that are common to all emergencies.
- Discuss these common actions and group them into themes.
- Identify and discuss those actions which are specific to a particular emergency.
- Discuss the themes and specific actions and decide which Actions are most relevant and important.

For all of the actions identified:
- Decide who (person or group) will be responsible for actions.
- Decide when each action needs to be completed by.
- Decide if resources are required and identify how these will be organised.
- Inform and promote within the community.
Step 1. Establishing an Emergency Planning Group

Developing a local emergency management plan will be most easily accomplished by assembling an Emergency Planning Group to undertake the work, provide leadership and oversee implementation. It is suggested that 6 - 10 people would be an effective working group.

It is important that the Emergency Planning Group include people who have broad experience and a genuine interest in the wellbeing of their community.

The Emergency Planning Group could be made up of representatives from:
- the host (auspice) group / organisation
- interested local residents
- local emergency service representatives
- community group representatives

Consideration should be given to engaging administrative support or an Executive Officer. This will reduce the work load of the planning group members, enabling them to concentrate on the planning process. Wellington Shire Council's Emergency Management Team will be able to advise on the availability of any support to assist the working group.

Possible sources of funding and support
Department of Planning and Community Development

Fire Ready Community Grants
www.dpcd.vic.gov.au

Wellington Shire Council

Community Assistance Grants
www.wellington.vic.gov.au

Developing a Terms of Reference

A Terms of Reference describes the purpose, scope, membership, roles and responsibilities of the Emergency Planning Group along with detailed administrative arrangements. A Terms of Reference will provide clarity of purpose and should be approved by the auspice group or organisation to enhance communication and understanding.

A suggested draft Terms of Reference is provided at Appendix A of the Community Emergency Planning Workbook.

Engaging community members, agencies and organisations

While a small planning group is most effective, it is important to ensure that all community members have the opportunity to be involved in the planning process. This is important in order to gather information, ensure that the final result is collaborative and there is broad ownership of the plan within the community.

A range of engagement options can be used (dependant on the size of the community) such as:
- Updates in local newspapers/community newsletters
- Accessing community groups through their existing structures/networks;
- Community meetings;
- Surveys;
- Community websites;
- Word of mouth, door knocks and informal networks; and
- Telephone trees, SMS groups.

The method/s you choose will depend on what you are aiming for.
- Are you seeking data or information?
- Are you providing information?
- Are you seeking feedback?

Step 1 – Getting Started

☐ Identified that emergencies are an issue for your community?
☐ Contacted Wellington Shire Council Emergency Management Team?
☐ Emergency Planning Group formed with appropriate membership?
☐ Emergency Planning Group properly auspiced under an existing community group?
☐ Identified need for professional support and funding source if appropriate?
☐ Terms of Reference developed and approved by auspicing body?
☐ Communicated the emergency planning purpose and process to the community?
Step 2. Defining and Describing Your Local Community

It is important to define and describe your local community as a means of identifying what is significant and important for your community in emergency management planning.

Communities are complex and many things contribute to their wellbeing and sustainability. A useful model for describing communities is the Four Environments of Community model.

**Built Environment**
- Buildings - community, administrative, business, domestic
- Utilities - power, water, gas
- Transport - roads, bridges, rail, air
- Communications - fixed line and mobile networks,
- Essential services - hospitals, schools, public buildings, etc

**Social Environment**
- Health
- Social networks and connectedness
- Cultural – heritage assets
- Vulnerable individuals

**Economic Environment**
- Employment and income
- Tourism
- Agriculture
- Manufacturing
- Retailing

**Natural Environment**
- Land, air, and waterways
- Flora and fauna
- Landscapes

**ACTIVITY (see Workbook Part 2)**

**Area Description**
Briefly describe and record the geographic features and boundaries of your community.
- Are there any significant or exceptional geographic features (topography, climate) that might influence emergencies?
- Include a map of the area.

**Built Environment**
Describe the important built elements of your community.
- What and where are essential service facilities?
  - Communications
  - Power
  - Water
- Are there any buildings or structures that are critical to ongoing viability of the community?
- Are there any cultural or historically important buildings or structures?
- What buildings or structures might be important during or after an emergency?

Describe transport that can be used to access your community (including all options, air, water, road, rail, etc)
- Is access limited? Might it be impeded by an emergency event?
- Are there alternative transport options that could be used in an emergency event?

Are there any specific issues in the built environment of this community that need to be considered when planning for emergencies?

**Once you have identified the infrastructure that is important to your community list the address, owner and contact details and any other relevant details in Workbook: Part 2**

**Help with community information**

Local Community Plans are available on the Wellington Shire Council website and provide social and economic information.

www.wellington.vic.gov.au

Additional information can be sourced from Australian Bureau of Statistics


Department of Environment and Sustainability, Parks Victoria and local Landcare and/or Conservation groups, might have information on natural assets.

**Social Environment**
Describe and record the social elements of your community.

- How many people live here?
- What is the age distribution?
- Where do people live in this area?
- Are there people who need extra support in their daily lives?
- Are there any social issues critical to this community?
- Are there any specific issues in the social environment of this community that need to be considered when planning for emergencies?

Once you have identified the social elements and networks that are important to your community, list the organisations and contact details and any other relevant details in Workbook: Part 2.

**Economic Environment**
Describe and record the economic features of your community.

- How and where do people earn their income?
- What business/industry operate in this community?
- How important are the businesses to this community?
- Are there any specific issues in the economic environment of this community that need to be considered when planning for emergencies?

Once you have identified the businesses that are important to your community, list the address, owner and contact details and any other relevant details in Workbook: Part 2.

**Natural environment**
Describe and record the natural features of your community.

- Are there any natural features important or critical to this community?
  - waterways
  - landscapes
  - bushland or forest
  - rare or threatened animals or plants?
- Are there any specific issues in the natural environment of this community that need to be considered when planning for emergencies?

Once you have identified the natural features that are important to your community, list them and any other relevant details in Workbook: Part 2

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**Step 2 – Define and describe your community**
- Described the geography and boundaries of the area, including a map?
- Identified and described important community buildings?
- Identified and described essential services?
- Described road, rail, water and other transport links?
- Described the area’s population – How many, where, vulnerable people, any specific issues?
- Identified important business and industry?
- Identified important natural features?
- Recorded the information in Work Book Part: 2 – Community Description.
**Step 3. Identify, Prioritise and Describe Community Emergencies**

This step helps you work through:

- Identifying and prioritising community emergencies;
- Describing when, where and how these prioritised emergencies might impact your community;
- Describing the consequences to your community if these emergencies occur;
- Identifying what is currently being done to manage the priority emergencies; and
- Identifying what your community can do to manage the consequence of emergency events.

**Identifying and prioritising community emergencies.**

While there are many events which can be considered emergencies (e.g., car crashes, house fires, major injuries or medical emergencies), when developing a community emergency plan, emphasis should be placed on those emergencies or events which could threaten the wellbeing or sustainability of your community.

Some are obvious and might be possible every year such as bushfires and floods. Others are less obvious but might have devastating impacts on local communities, such as epidemics, tsunamis or agricultural disease outbreaks.

**ACTIVITY**

View the emergency risk list in the Wellington Municipal Emergency Management Plan. This is a list of emergencies that the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee recognise as possible within the municipal area.

Wellington MEMPlan
www.wellington.vic.gov.au

Using this list, identify emergency events that might impact your community.

- Are there other emergencies that you think could have a significant impact on your community?
- Which of these emergency events would require outside help for your community to cope with and recover from?
- Which of these events could threaten the wellbeing or sustainability of your community?

**Once you have a list of likely emergencies, discuss and prioritise the emergency events that pose a significant threat to your community.**

**Understanding the impact and consequences of community emergencies.**

**ACTIVITY**

Working on one emergency at a time starting with the emergency event you believe is most likely to impact your community:

- Identify and engage with the agency or organisation with responsibility for managing the emergency. (Consult the EMMV Part 7 Emergency Management Manual Victoria, or contact Emergency Management Team at the Wellington Shire Council, for advice);
- Discuss and record when, where and how this emergency might impact on your community; and
- Discuss what could be the consequences for your community if this event occurs? (consider the Four Community Environments - refer to Step 2).

**Help with identifying emergencies**


Most of the agencies will have regional offices that can provide information on emergencies. Contact them directly or contact Wellington Shire Council, Emergency Management Team, who will put you in touch with the relevant people.
Record the outcomes of your discussion in Workbook Part 3
Identifying actions to manage the emergency.

The impact of emergencies on communities and people’s safety and wellbeing can be managed:

- **Before an emergency** - preventing the emergency from occurring, managing the impacts on people and preparing emergency services and communities.
- **During an emergency** - managing the emergency event and protecting people and assets.
- **After the emergency** - providing for the immediate, short and longer term needs of the emergency affected community.

**ACTIVITY**
With the responsible agency, discuss:

- **What is currently being done** by all stakeholders to manage this emergency (before, during and after)?
- **What actions can your community take to manage the potential consequences** of this emergency (before, during and after)?

Record the outcomes of your discussion in Workbook Part 3

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**Step 3 - Identify, Prioritise and Describe Community Emergencies**

- [ ] Identified priority emergencies?
- [ ] Engaged the appropriate agencies?
- [ ] Discussed and recorded the impact and consequences of emergencies?
- [ ] Identified what is currently being done to manage emergencies?
- [ ] Identified what additional actions your community can undertake?
- [ ] Recorded the outcomes of your discussion in Workbook Part 3?
Step 4: Developing Community Emergency Plan

While emergency services have prescribed roles and responsibilities to manage emergency events, there are many things that communities can do themselves which will reduce the consequences of the emergency on their community.

ACTIVITY

Consider the outcomes of the last activity (Step 3):
What actions can your community take to manage the consequences of the emergency (before, during and after)?

Considering the community actions across the priority emergencies:

• Identify the actions that are common to all priority emergencies. Discuss these common actions and group them into ‘Themes’;
• Identify and discuss those actions which are specific to a particular emergency; and
• Discuss the themes and specific actions and decide which actions are most relevant and important. They must be realistic and achievable.

Add the Themes and Actions to Workbook (Part 4)

For all of the actions identified:

• Decide who (person or group) will be responsible for actions;
• Decide when each action must be completed by; and
• Decide what resources are required and identify how these will be organised.

Complete the Community Emergency Plan (Work Book Part 4)

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Step 4 - Developing the Community Emergency Plan

☐ Grouped common actions into themes?
☐ Identified actions specific to priority emergencies?
☐ Ensured that actions are relevant and important, realistic and achievable?
☐ Identified persons or groups responsible for each action?
☐ Identified appropriate completion time?
☐ Identified resources required?
☐ Completed the Community Emergency Plan Work Book Part 4
Developing networks with key agencies to identify and research possible hazards which may impact your community is essential to successful community emergency planning.
Turning the Plan into action

Once the Community Emergency Plans (the Plan) are developed, it is important to actually implement them. Effective implementation will require cooperation between the Emergency Planning Group, emergency services, Wellington Shire Council, agencies, community groups, households and individuals.

**Promote and discuss the Community Emergency Plan**
- Present and discuss the plan with the auspicing organisation;
- Promote the planning process and proposed activities though local newsletters and community networks;
- Present and discuss the plan with the Wellington Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee;
- Add the Community Emergency Plan to the community/Council website;
- Organise community meetings and events to promote/instigate key community actions; and
- Provide relevant information to residents / households.

**Supervise and support people or groups to undertake actions**
To ensure that the Plan actions are undertaken successfully, the Community Emergency Planning Group will provide a coordination role by:
- Allocating tasks;
- Providing appropriate supervision and support to those undertaking the tasks;
- Seeking funding and resources as required;
- Receiving feedback on tasks, identify need for resources and source; and
- Providing ongoing monitoring to ensure that actions are actually completed.

**Practice activities as appropriate**
Where there are important community activities identified, it will be important to practice or exercise these actions. For example, providing community information establishing a community resource database. These activities will be most effective if they are practised. Impediments and difficulties will be identified during practices providing opportunities to continuously improve processes.

A practice might be simple and for just one specific action, such as activating a communication network. A practice might involve a small number of people and could be undertaken regularly.

Alternatively a community exercise, in consultation with the Wellington Shire Council Emergency Management term, might involve emergency services, community members and organisations. Exercises are very useful in understanding each other’s roles, checking that proposed actions actually work and testing coordination. Exercises can require significant effort to organise and might be undertaken annually or biannually.
Ensuring the ongoing effectiveness of Community Emergency Plan

Establish a permanent and sustainable Community Emergency Group.
It is essential that an ongoing Community Emergency Group is in place to ensure the community emergency plan is implemented, practiced, monitored and reviewed.

This group should be made up of members of the Emergency Planning Group, with new or interested community members involved in the ongoing implementation of the Community Action Plan. The original Terms of Reference can be reworded to reflect the differences between the Community Emergency Group and the Emergency Planning Group.

The Community Emergency Group will meet less regularly than the Emergency Planning Group. Two - four times a year would be adequate. The Community Emergency Group should also meet when an emergency is imminent or following the impact of an emergency.

Establish a schedule for reviewing the Plan annually.
It is essential that the Plan is reviewed annually. Some actions will be completed in the first year and can be reported on and closed. Others will not be completed or might be ongoing.

A range of additional factors should also be considered such as:
• Are the community emergencies identified still relevant?
• Have any new emergencies emerged in the past 12 months?
• Has anything significant changed in our community which might affect the consequences of an emergency?
• Does our list of priorities need to be updated?
• Have the tasks in the Community Emergency Plan been completed?
• What still needs to be done?
• What is required to make these happen?
• Updating contact details?

Establish a procedure for conducting a thorough review every 3 years.
While annual reviews will maintain the plan, it is important that a major review is conducted every three years. Utilising this planning Guide for the major review will:
• Ensure that the emergencies and community risks are updated in a consistent manner.
• Ensure that the actions and preparedness plans are appropriate and up-to-date.