



Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee

Hearing Date: 6 December 2023

Question taken on notice

Directed to: Hon Harriet Shing MLC (later formally referred to the Victoria State Emergency Service [VICSES] by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action [DEECA])

Received Date: 8 February 2024

Please note: *The below questions taken on notice form part of a broader set of questions initially directed to the Minister for Water for response. Following formal referral by DEECA, VICSES has prepared responses to questions 4 and 6.*

4. **Samantha RATNAM, page 12**

Question Asked:

That is what we understand – that is what we have been told. That is what was being told by residents, that there were inconsistent messages, and I am wondering whether the government is looking into why those inconsistencies occurred and what can be done in future to prevent them.

Response:

See response to Question 6.

6. **Samantha RATNAM**

Question Asked:

Residents whose homes were flooded by the Maribyrnong were told, several days after wading through the flood waters, that they had been classified as black water due to sewage and heavy metals, and anything which had been touched by them should be thrown away. Others were told that the risk was minimal. Can you explain the inconsistent information given to some residents? What can the government do to ensure timely and consistent information next time there is a flood?

Response:

The Victorian Warning System provides information and warnings to communities through a range of channels including VicEmergency, emergency broadcasters, Emergency Alert, local automated warning systems and face-to-face engagement (e.g. door knocking).

Examples of messaging communicated to the Maribyrnong area during the Flood Event included VicEmergency notifications containing the guidance that “Floodwater is dangerous - never drive, walk or ride through floodwater”, as well as a “Threat is reduced” Advice message issued on 15 October 2022 at 9:30am, which advised:

- The Emergency Warning to Evacuate, following flooding at Maribyrnong River in Maribyrnong has been lifted and it is Safe to Return.*
- Dangerous hazards including floodwater, mud, debris, damaged roads and fallen trees may still be present.*
- Only residents or people with a pecuniary interest should be in the area.*
- It is now safe to return to the evacuated area to assess impacts as the threat is reduced. Be aware of any hazards that may still exist in the warning area.*
- If cleaning after damage has occurred, protect your health and safety. Wear strong boots, gloves and protective clothing and wash your hands and clothes regularly.*

A community meeting was also held on October 2022. At this meeting the Regional Controller and a VICSES representative advised residents that flood waters were contaminated and that they should take precaution.

Additionally, Community Newsletter number 1, produced by Maribyrnong City Council, provided advice to residents on how to clean up safely and the risks of flood waters and health.

The implementation of lessons from the Flood Event, including those related to information and warnings, is integral to the emergency management sector’s ability to learn and inform change based on community and personnel experiences. It is expected all lessons are considered by all emergency management agencies as part of ongoing or new projects/programs if this has not already occurred, and where appropriate, directly addressed.