

# Environmental scanning and emergency management

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## Introduction

Environmental scanning is not new, however it is a process that is very useful in assisting emergency management policy makers to make well-informed critical decisions related to law enforcement and emergency management issues across Australia.

Environmental scanning is not only an analysis of our environment (water, air and land), but complex analysis of our working environment. Environmental Scanning makes predictions as to what may or may not occur in the future.

Environmental scanning within a law enforcement environment is defined as:

*Environmental scanning involves an examination of factors with the potential to impact on the organisation's environment at various levels and may take a short or long time frame, usually 3-5 years. It involves scanning, monitoring, forecasting and assessment of the organisation's environment. Scanning is most usually described as the process of sifting through various types of information and other unclassified information, from the mass media, opened source information and other unclassified information available to the general public.*

*Scanning places emphasis on potential rather than its source. Breadth of coverage is a critical issue, with all levels of material considered. Environmental analysis provides a glimpse of 'the real world' and suggests the future.* (Adapted from the definition provided by Melinda Tynan to the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence Digest, January 1996.)

## Environmental scanning: a partnership between law enforcement and emergency management

During 1997 the Southern Rivers Police Region Commander, Chief Superintendent Gollan commissioned an environmental scan of his region to assist him to prepare for impending change to the New South Wales Police Service in the wake of the Wood Royal Commission.

The following information was gathered from opened source material and is just a small example of the

information gathered during the information collection phase.

The Southern Rivers Police Region covers 195,712 km<sup>2</sup>, from Goulburn to Albury and Wentworth to Kiandra, with a population of 358,060. The area is largely rural with some large country towns, including Wagga Wagga (pop. 52,197). The area is growing at 1.4% per annum. The local economy is booming in Wagga Wagga, with a new industrial estate going ahead at Bomen.

Eight major highways traverse the area, including the busy Hume and Newell highways, carrying cars, buses and heavy vehicles between Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. These roads have accounted for many fatalities over the years, however both are continually being improved. Every 24 hour period, 5932 vehicles travel the Hume Highway.

With the transportation of chemicals, fuels and other dangerous goods, there is a major disaster potential. Many potential disasters have been averted by a quick, professional emergency management response.

All towns on the Hume Highway will be bypassed in the near future. Currently there are two options available to bypass Albury.

The Murray, Murrumbidgee, Darling, Lachlan and Edwards Rivers flow through the area, playing an important role by supplying water to the irrigation channels that service a multi-million dollar rice industry.

The Murray River supplies water to three states and over 1.25 million people living in the supply area. There are various weirs and 13 navigation locks on the river. There are three main dams in the region: Burrinjuck (1,026,000 megalitres), Blowering (1,631,390 megalitres) and the large Hume Weir (3,038,000 megalitres), with its 1.6 kilometre wide, 39 metre high concrete spillway. Incorporated in the structure is a 50 megawatt hydro-electric power station. The rate and direction of run off from the weir will be determined by the ever changing factors of the Albury-Wodonga economy and infrastructure,

such as the new development of residential housing in east Albury.

The Hume Weir is undergoing \$40 million in repairs to the wall after a crack appeared. If the wall were to fail, the loss of life and damage to the local economy would be devastating.

## So what does it all mean?

The use of environmental scanning revealed certain concerns, such as by the EPA in Albury, that if a bypass was constructed close to the township heavy vehicles carrying chemicals and other dangerous goods would be travelling at 100kmh rather than the current 60kmh. If a heavy vehicle was to crash and spill its load the effects could be catastrophic.

The scan echoed the sentiments of emergency managers in Albury that a very real danger exists with the wall of the Hume Weir.

## Conclusion

'To achieve your objective in this fast paced, multi-national, information driven world, you need to know as much as possible about what's going on, and what's likely to go on, throughout the total environment in which you are operating'. (Adopted from Herbert Meyer, *Real World Intelligence*.)

The unique characteristic of environmental scanning is that, when properly carried out, it can effectively pinpoint emergency management concerns so that they can be prevented. Emergency management agencies can gauge the magnitude, scope and potential threats. This knowledge helps to plan the most effective counter-measures.

Environmental scanning can reveal information from varying sources that may otherwise be overlooked or may not have even been obtained. It may substantiate or refute a course of action being taken by emergency management.

## References

Gillett M. J., Rochester M. and Jackson S. 1997, *Southern Rivers Region, Environmental Scan*.

*Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence Digest*, January 1996.