

# COMMUNICATING IN A CRISIS

## CHOOSING YOUR WORDS

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## Communicating in a Crisis

Choosing your words

**Flood**



# Communicating in a Crisis

Choosing your words

**Flood**



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**Fire**



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**Storm**



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**Engineering**



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**Tsunami**



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Choosing your words

**Chemical**

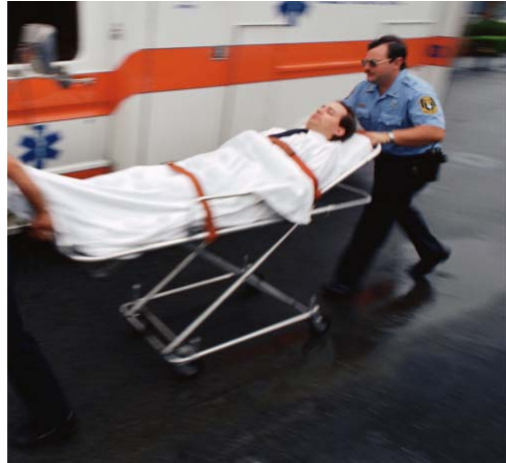


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Choosing your words

Urban emergency



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Choosing your words



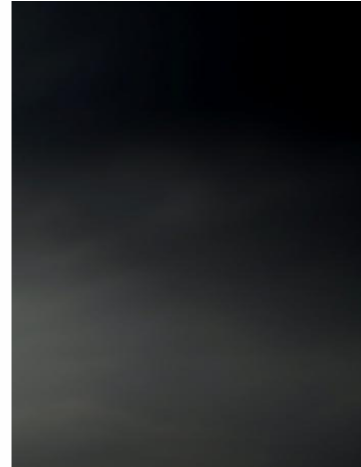
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# Communicating in a Crisis

Choosing your words

## NATIONAL BROADCAST OF EMERGENCY WARNINGS PROJECT:

- Collaboration of state and territories
- Attorney General's Department co-ordinating role
- Establish procedures by which emergency warnings are distributed and broadcast
- Identified a lack of information about the best way to write a warning – what words to use to achieve the desired reaction



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## Initial Research Need:

- To develop an optimal set of words that could be used when writing emergency warnings

Communicate information

Encourage desirable behaviours

Avoid panic



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## Problem for research

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PEOPLE RECEIVE EMERGENCY WARNINGS  
UNDER STRESSFUL CONDITIONS

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MOST RESEARCH SETTINGS ARE  
DELIBERATELY NOT STRESSFUL

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NOT ETHICAL TO SIMULATE AN  
EMERGENCY

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## Research Strategy – Stage 1

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REVIEW OF WORD LEVEL RESEARCH  
AND PRACTICE

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VALIDATION GROUPS TO SELECT THE  
MOST PROMISING SHORT LIST

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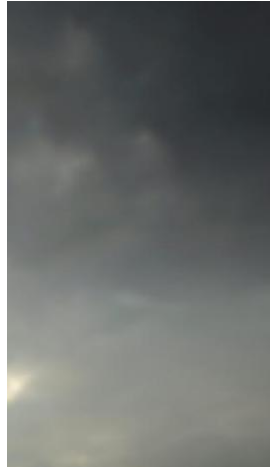
STRESS-TEST GROUPS TO IDENTIFY  
OPTIMAL WORDS

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## Eventual Strategy – Stage 1

REVIEW OF WORD LEVEL RESEARCH AND PRACTICE  
→ **NOTHING KNOWN / AVAILABLE**

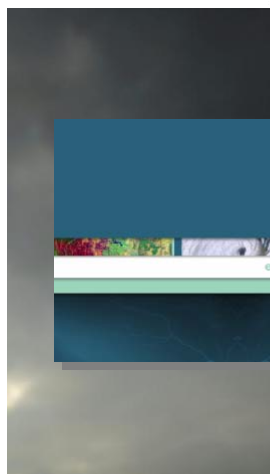
**EXPLORATORY** GROUPS TO **GENERATE** THE MOST  
PROMISING SHORT LIST

STRESS-TEST GROUPS TO IDENTIFY OPTIMAL  
WORDS

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## Outcome

DRAFT CHOOSING YOUR WORDS BOOKLET  
PREPARED AND LIMITED DISTRIBUTION  
TO STATES AND TERRITORIES

STARTING TO BE INCLUDED IN  
PROCESSES AND RESOURCES

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## Stage 2: Testing with Indigenous and CALD audiences

Can the same words be used with audiences who do not speak English as a first language

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## Methodology

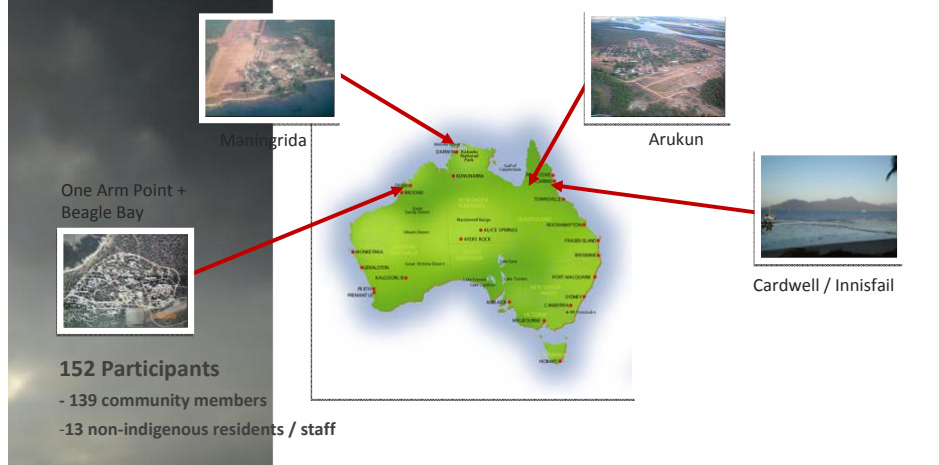
Expert interviews with language consultants to SBS television

Visits to four remote communities

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Maningrida

Arukun

Cardwell / Innisfail

One Arm Point + Beagle Bay

152 Participants  
- 139 community members  
- 13 non-indigenous residents / staff

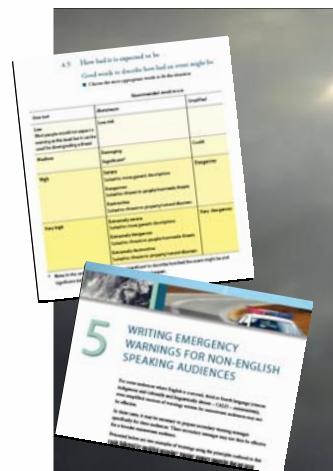


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Choosing your words

## Outcome

- Revised Choosing Your Words guide printed for distribution
  - Where English proficiency is reasonable, simplified versions of the general word choices are suitable
  - Where English skills are more basic, totally different warnings are required
  - → Simplified options in main guide / additional section on Writing for non-English speaking audiences
- Guide is being increasingly used



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Choosing your words

## Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

- “A valuable guide to best practice”
- “Provides excellent practical guidance as to the best method of drafting and constructing a clear and useful bushfire warning”
- “The State indicated...it would, before next fires season, refine fire messages based on the Choosing Your Words publication”



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Choosing your words

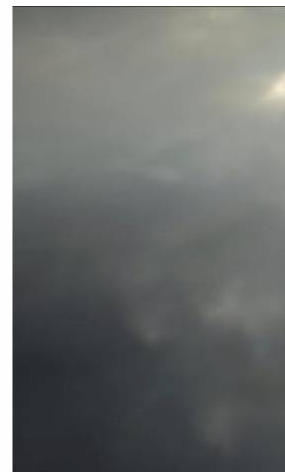
## What we have learned?

### About emergency warnings

- No time for getting cute with language
- Balance detail and succinctness
- Can never be 100% perfect – but can be optimised
- Just another form of communication
- Panic is actually very unlikely

### About research

- Making it real is an important consideration



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