

Manawatū – Whanganui Civil Defence Emergency Management

Elected Officials Guide

October 2025



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Introduction

This guide is designed for elected members of the Manawatū–Whanganui region. It introduces the essentials of Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) and their role within it.

Emergencies can be disruptive, frightening, and costly for our communities. Elected members are looked to as trusted leaders who provide reassurance, clarity, and advocacy.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- Introduce CDEM and how it works in our region.
- Clarify the role of elected members before, during, and after emergencies.
- Highlight the governance responsibilities and legal powers in CDEM.
- Provide practical examples and tips to help you connect with communities.



Who is an Elected Member?

Under the Local Government Act 2002, elected members are mayors, councilors, and community board members chosen by the public to govern local authorities.

An elected member:

- Represents the interests and wellbeing of the community.
- Makes decisions about services, infrastructure, and local and/or regional priorities.
- Provides democratic oversight of council and CDEM activities.
- Is a connector between communities, iwi, hapū, and decision-making bodies.

Emergencies and how we respond?

An emergency is an event that poses serious risk to life, health, or property, and cannot be managed by standard emergency services without a coordinated response.

In other words, an emergency is any serious situation that:

- **Can be caused by many things** – such as a natural disaster (earthquake, flood, storm, fire, tsunami), a major accident (explosion, gas leak, chemical spill, technological failure), a health crisis (epidemic, plague), or even an attack or act of war.
- **Puts people or property at risk** – it may cause death, injury, illness, distress, or danger to the public or property anywhere in New Zealand.
- **Needs more than the usual response** – it's something that normal emergency services cannot handle on their own and requires a large, coordinated response.

Emergency Management teams respond to emergencies in partnership with relevant stakeholders to support those affected. The same partnerships drive recovery – helping communities rebuild, restore, and adapt with a focus on fairness, inclusion, and building long-term resilience.

Glossary

This table provides an overview of the key terms that elected members are most likely to encounter. It is intended as a quick reference guide, particularly useful for those who are new to the role.

Term	Plain-English meaning
4Rs	The four parts of emergency management: Reduction (reducing risks), Readiness (being prepared), Response (acting during an emergency), and Recovery (helping communities rebuild).
CDEM (Civil Defence Emergency Management)	New Zealand's overall system for dealing with emergencies. Sometime abbreviated to 'Emergency Management'.
CDEM Group	A Joint Standing Committee (JSC) of the Local and Regional Authorities in the region. The CDEM Group set the vision, goals, and high-level arrangements for the CDEM Group Plan.
CDEM Group Plan	The five-year strategy and plan that sets out how hazards and emergencies will be managed in our region.
Controller	A trained leader appointed to direct and coordinate the emergency response. There are Local Controllers (district or city) and a Group Controller (regional).
Recovery Manager	The person responsible for leading and coordinating the recovery after an emergency.
Welfare Manager	Oversees support for people, whānau, and animals, including food, shelter, and psychosocial services.
EOC (Emergency Operations Centre)	A coordination centre for the local response, which links in with regional coordination centre.
ECC (Emergency Coordination Centre)	The main facility where a Group emergency will be coordinated. This can also provide support to impacted districts.
Civil Defence Centre (CDC) / Community Emergency Hub	Places where the public can go during an emergency for shelter, support, or information. CDCs are council-led; hubs are often community-led.
CEG (Coordinating Executive Group)	Comprised of representatives from local authorities and emergency services. Provide advice to the CDEM Group, and oversee the implementation of their decisions.
Hazardscape	The big picture of all the hazards that could affect our region.
Lifeline Utilities	Essential services such as power, water, roads, fuel, and communications.

PIM (Public Information Management)	The team responsible for making sure the public get accurate and timely information during an emergency.
CIMS (Coordinated Incident Management System)	The system used by emergency services, councils, and agencies to work together in a structured way during an emergency.
NEMA (National Emergency Management Agency)	The government agency that leads and supports emergency management across New Zealand.
State of Local Emergency	A formal declaration that gives Controllers special legal powers to act quickly (for example, to order evacuations).
Transition Notice	A legal step that allows some emergency powers to continue into the recovery phase after a state of emergency has ended.

CDEM Structure

Emergency Management is based on a partnership model. It brings together central government, local authorities, iwi and hapū, emergency services, lifeline utilities, welfare agencies, and communities. Elected members play a key governance role in this system.

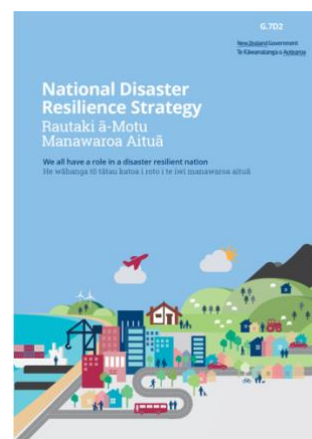
National and regional emergency management systems are closely connected, working together across all areas of emergency management – known as the 4Rs: Reduction, Readiness, Response, and Recovery. The Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) supports this by providing a common framework that agencies use to coordinate during Response and Recovery. This ensures decisions and actions are consistent, efficient, and joined up across different agencies.

National Framework

The **Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002 (the Act)** is the cornerstone of emergency management. It requires councils to come together to form regional CDEM Groups.

It's also supported by a set of national and regional documents that put it into practice. These include the National CDEM Plan and its Guide, the National Disaster Resilience Strategy (NDRS), Directors' Guidelines (DGs), and each region's Group Plan along with other regulations and practical frameworks developed by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

At the national level, NEMA provides leadership, coordination, and policy guidance. NEMA also maintains the National Crisis Management Centre (NCMC) based in Wellington, which is activated for large-scale or nationally significant events.

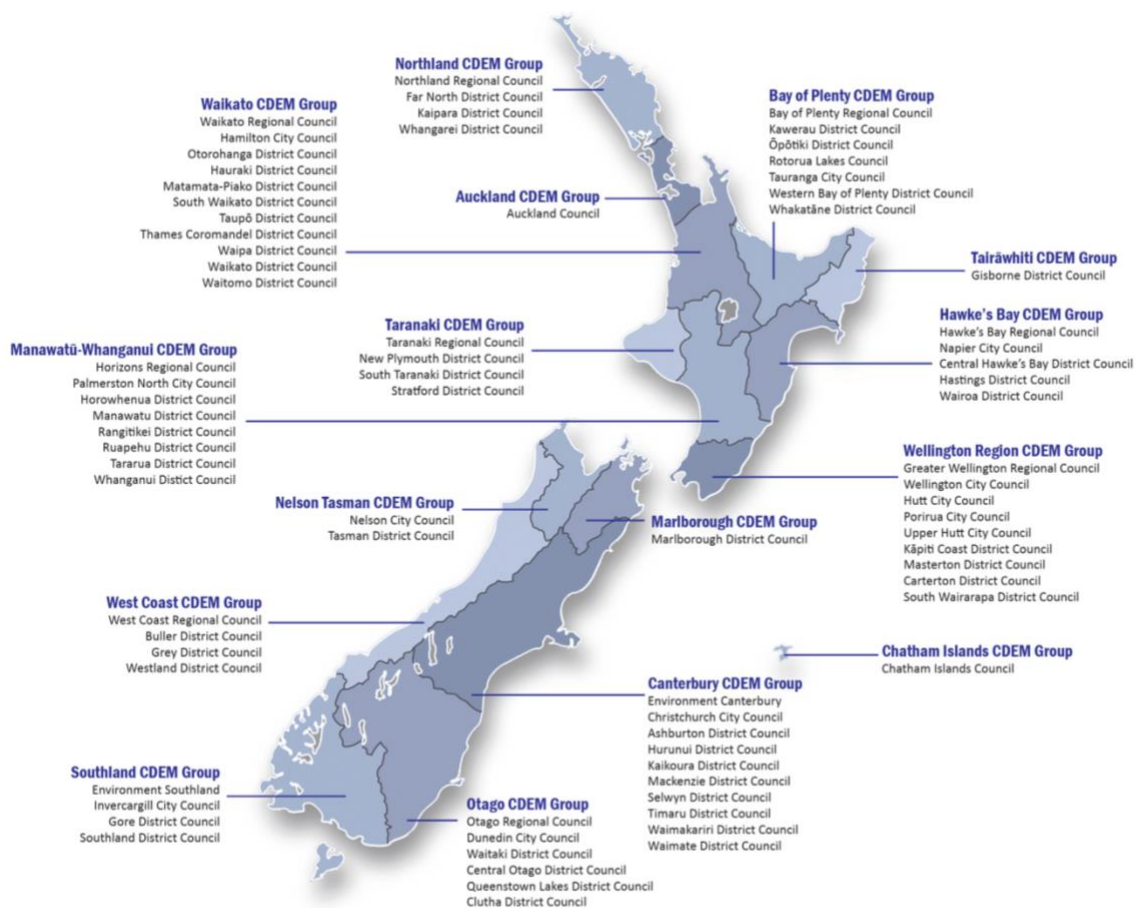


CDEM Groups

Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups (CDEM Groups) are a core component of the Act. There are 16 CDEM Groups across New Zealand.

Each Group is responsible to deliver Emergency Management through its senior leaders, operational staff and partner stakeholders. Groups can be viewed as a collaboration of the local authorities in a region with a mandate to:

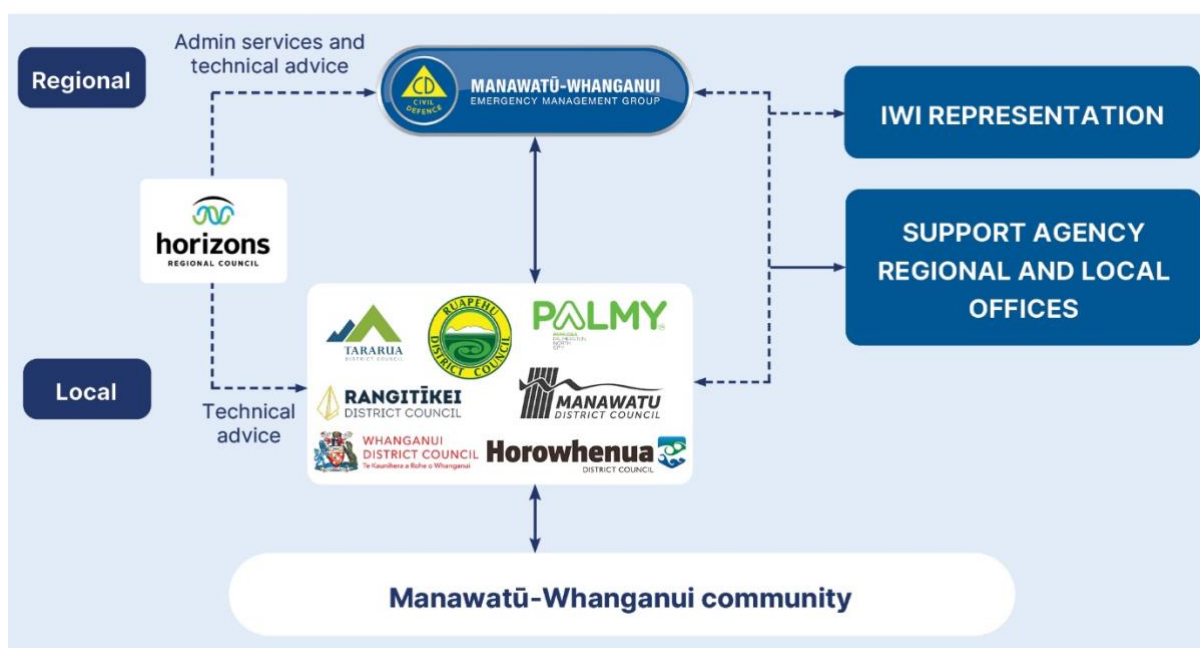
- identify and manage hazards and risks,
- prepare and implement Group Plans,
- coordinate 4Rs, and
- work in partnership with councils, iwi, emergency services, lifeline utilities, government departments and communities.



Manawatū – Whanganui CDEM Group

The Manawatū – Whanganui CDEM Group (MWCDEM Group) consists of eight councils:

- Horizons Regional Council
- Palmerston North City Council
- Horowhenua District Council
- Manawatū District Council
- Rangitikei District Council
- Ruapehu District Council
- Tararua District Council
- Whanganui District Council



This Group operates under a decentralised model where coordination of CDEM activities between local authorities happens at the regional level through the Group Office, while local service delivery is provided by each council's emergency management team.

There is also recognition of iwi and hapū as key partners in emergency management, contributing to governance, planning, response, and recovery across the region.

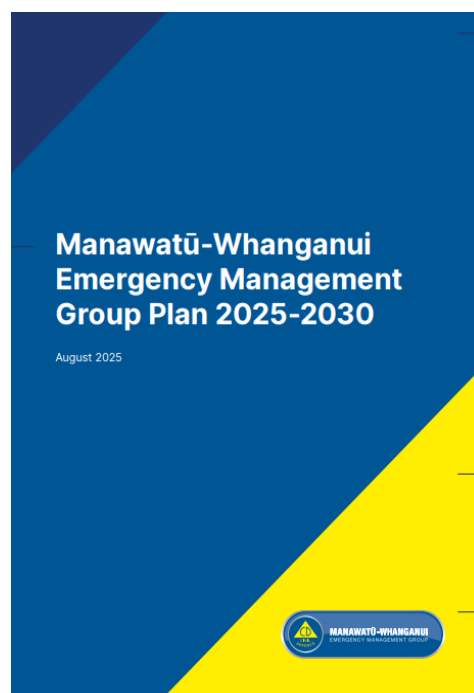
Support agencies, through their regional and local offices, provide expertise, resources, and services such as health, welfare, policing, and emergency response to help deliver CDEM across the region.

Manawatū – Whanganui CDEM Group Plan

The MWCDEM Group Plan sets the strategic and operational management of the MWCDEM Group over a 5-year period, through its vision, strategic objectives across the 4Rs and high-level emergency management arrangements.

The Group Plan is a shared strategy. It is primarily developed for the MWCDEM Group office, regional agencies (such as emergency services, local government, non-government agencies), local agencies and iwi involved in emergency management in the Manawatū-Whanganui region.

The Group Plan also provides the public with an overview of how regional and local agencies are planning to manage hazards and risks in the region.



Our Vision

“A resilient region that understands, anticipates, and proactively manages risks – empowering communities to build resilience, respond effectively to emergencies, and recover stronger together.”

Strategic objectives

Objective 1: Managing risks.

Objective 2: Effective response to and recovery from emergencies.

Objective 3: Enabling, empowering, and supporting community resilience.

Governance

Governance for emergency management in the Manawatū–Whanganui region is provided by the Joint Standing Committee (JSC) of local authorities and Horizons Regional Council. Horizons also acts as the administering authority, hosting the MWCDEM Group Office and providing governance and administrative support. Governance management and implementation are carried out by the Coordinating Executive Group (CEG).

Joint Standing Committee

The MWCDEM Group is comprised of elected officials of Local Authorities which have formed a Joint Standing Committee (JSC) under a30A The Act. This membership consists of the Mayor or Chairperson (or their delegated representative) from each of the seven territorial authorities and the regional council. In addition, three non-voting iwi representatives participate to ensure the views of tangata whenua are included.

Coordinating Executive Group

The Coordinating Executive Group (CEG) is responsible for overseeing the development implementation, and ongoing review of the Group Plan.

In addition to its functions under the Act, the Manawatū–Whanganui CEG also:

- Advises on the strategic direction of emergency management in the region.
- Prepares and recommends a draft work plan to the Joint Standing Committee (JSC) for approval.
- Recommends appointments to the JSC for key CDEM positions, including Group and Local Controllers, Recovery Managers, and those authorised to declare a state of local emergency or a local transition period.
- Coordinates input into council planning processes (such as annual plans and long-term plans) to ensure CDEM is integrated across the region.
- Promotes and advocates for CDEM activities across the 4Rs – during both business-as-usual and emergency operations.

CEG Membership

Under the Act, membership must include:

- The Chief Executive of each local authority (or a representative acting on their behalf who has been delegated the authority to Act for the chief executive officer),
- A senior member of the police,
- A senior member of Fire and Emergency NZ,
- The Chief Executive of the hospital and health services operating in the area (or a person acting on behalf of the Chief Executive.

In addition to the statutory membership, the MWCDEM Group also includes the following representatives as members:

- Chairs of coordination / advisory groups (welfare, rural, and lifelines)
- Iwi representatives,
- Medical officers of Health,
- New Zealand Defence Force,
- Hato Hone St. John.

MW CDEM Group Office



The administering authority for the MWCDEM Group is Horizons Regional Council. They provide administrative and related services through the MWCDEM Group Office¹. These services include:

- Convening of meetings, preparing agendas, and taking and disseminating minutes,
- Providing a response capability including the Group ECC facility, staff, and resources,
- Financial management for the CDEM Group Office and Group Emergency Coordination Centre,
- Providing support to local authority activities across the 4Rs,
- Development of plans, policy and procedures,
- MWCDEM Group representation,
- Hazard and risk analysis functions.

¹ Section 17 of the Act

Hazards in our Region



The Manawatū–Whanganui region is one of the largest in New Zealand, covering both rural and urban communities. The region is home to diverse communities, with significant Māori populations, strong rural networks, and urban centres such as Palmerston North.



It is important for elected members to understand the hazards that affect the region and the unique challenges communities face. These hazards form our regional hazardscape. They influence planning investment and the way we work with communities to build resilience.



The Manawatū–Whanganui region is exposed to a variety of natural, biological and technological hazards.



As a part of the MWCDEM Group Plan a risk assessment is undertaken to understand how these hazards could impact the region across the four main environments (social, built, economic, natural) including rural and cultural impacts. Below is a sample of some of the most likely regional hazards for this region and the levels they were assessed at.

Hazard	Assessed risk level
Cyclones	Very high
Flooding	High
Earthquakes	High
Hikurangi Subduction Zone (earthquake and tsunami - local source)	High
Animal disease	High
Human pandemic	High
Wildfires	High
Volcanic activity – Maunga Ruapehu	High
Tsunami (regional and distant source)	Medium

Likely Effects of Hazards in our Region

Flooding and Severe Weather

Rivers such as the Manawatū, Rangitīkei, and Whanganui are prone to major flooding. Heavy rainfall and storm systems can cause slips, road closures, and damage to farmland and communities.

Earthquakes

The region is crossed by active fault lines and lies in close proximity to the Hikurangi Subduction Zone. Earthquakes can cause damage to buildings, roads, utilities, and pose risks to life. Even moderate events can disrupt communities and services.

Landslides

Steep hill country throughout the region is vulnerable to slips and landslides, often triggered by heavy rain or earthquakes.

Volcanic Activity

The region encompasses portions of the central North Island volcanic plateau, with Maunga Ruapehu the most prominent source of volcanic activity. A substantial eruption can result in significant effects to infrastructure, tourism, and agriculture primarily through ashfall and its associated impacts.

Drought

Extended dry periods affect agriculture, water supply, and rural livelihoods. Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of droughts.

Pandemics and Public Health Emergencies

Events such as COVID-19 show how disease outbreaks disrupt communities, health services, and economies.

Technological and Infrastructure Failures

Power outages, fuel shortages, or telecommunications failures can quickly impact daily life and emergency response capacity.

Challenges and Opportunities

Communities face several ongoing challenges that affect resilience and emergency management:

- Climate change: More frequent storms, flooding, and droughts.
- Ageing population: Older residents may need extra support in emergencies.
- Cost of living pressures: Some households have fewer resources to prepare.
- Technology reliance: Power and internet outages have wider impacts than in the past.

Together these challenges show why it's vital to build strong and connected communities. By sharing knowledge, supporting one another, and making sure people have what they need to prepare, we can help everyone respond and recover more easily when emergencies happen.

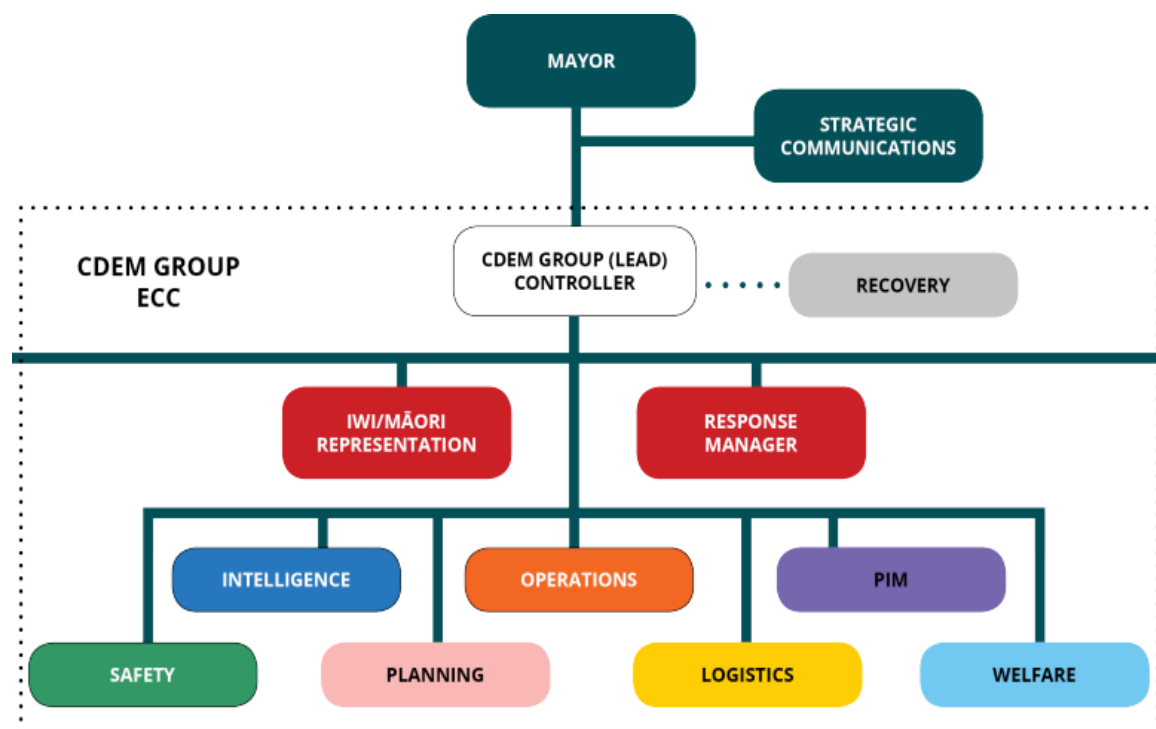
Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS)

Emergencies in New Zealand are managed using the Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS). This system provides a common structure so that all agencies (Police, Fire and Emergency NZ, Health, local government, and others) can work together effectively during a response.

This system is built around several functions:

- Control: Overall direction of the response.
- Operations: Delivering tasks and actions on the ground.
- Planning and Intelligence: Collecting information, assessing risks, and planning next steps.
- Logistics: Providing resources, equipment, and facilities.
- Welfare: Coordinating support for affected people, whānau, and communities.
- Public Information Management (PIM): Ensuring accurate, timely information is shared with the public and media.
- Intelligence: Analyzing and sharing information to guide decisions
- Recovery: Starting early to plan for transition from response into long-term recovery.

It's a system that is scalable and can be applied at an Incident Control Point (ICP) on the ground, in a local Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), at the regional Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC), or nationally at the NCMC. Elected members will likely interact with Controllers; their support may be particularly visible in Welfare and Public Information and Recovery Functions.



The 4Rs

Emergency management in New Zealand is guided by the 4Rs² – Reduction, Readiness, Response, and Recovery. These four areas describe how we work to understand and reduce risk, prepare for and respond to emergencies, and support communities to recover. For elected members, the 4Rs provide a simple way to see how all parts of emergency management fit together as a continuous cycle of improvement and resilience.

4Rs	What it means	What elected members can do
Reduction	Taking steps to reduce risks before emergencies.	Support risk-reducing policies, highlight vulnerabilities.
Readiness	Preparing people and councils for emergencies.	Promote preparedness, encourage planning, support training.
Response	Immediate actions to protect people and property.	Provide visible leadership, reinforce official info, support welfare, advocate for isolated groups.
Recovery	Helping communities rebuild after an emergency.	Listen and advocate, support inclusive recovery, ensure transparency.



² Section 3 (d) of the Act

Key Appointments

Controllers

Group Controller (s26)

Appointed under the Act, the Group Controller must direct, and coordinate CDEM Group resources made available to them during declared emergencies, and perform any other functions delegated by the CDEM Group.

A Controller can use CDEM arrangements outside of declared emergencies, but some powers under the CDEM Act can only be used during a declared state of emergency.

Local Controller (s27)

Also appointed under the Act, the MWCDEM Group may name Local Controllers to carry out any of the functions and duties delegated to the Group Controller.

The Local Controller follows the directions given by the Group Controller during an emergency. Local Controllers' powers are only for the area appointed (i.e. their local authority).

Recovery Managers

Group Recovery Manager (s29)

The Group Recovery manager is responsible for coordinating the recovery and/or transition period activities for the CDEM Group area. The MWCDEM Group has a permanently appointed Group Recovery Manager to fulfil this requirement. The powers associated with this appointment are available while a transition period is in force.

Local Recovery Manager (s30)

Local Recovery Managers are delegated the same powers as the Group Recovery Manager for the area for which they have been appointed. Local Recovery Managers, responsible for the local coordination of recovery efforts, are appointed by the JSC and report to their Local Authority.

The MWCDEM Controllers and Recovery Managers are named in the MWCDEM Group Plan.

Coordination Centre

Group Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC)



The MWCDEM Group Controller leads the coordination of multi-agency responses to regional events from the Group ECC. This facility is provided by the Horizons Regional Council and the majority of the functional roles within the centre are provided by the Horizons Regional Council staff. This facility is located at Te Ao Nui building, Palmerston North.

Emergency Operating Centres (EOCs)

Local EOCs are the operational centre for the local response. They link in with the regions Group ECC. The local EOC may be activated at the request of responding agencies, the Local Controller, or Group Controller. The MWCDEM Group has EOCs located in each local authority.



Local State of Emergency

When an emergency occurs and extraordinary powers from the Act are required to effectively coordinate the response, a state of local emergency may be declared (s68). A declaration is not required to activate CDEM plans and resources, and not all emergency events require a declaration.

A state of emergency comes into force at the time and date that a declaration is made and expires seven days after coming into force unless terminated prior. A local state of emergency can be extended by a further seven days if required.

In accordance with s25 of the Act the person(s) authorised to declare a state of local emergency in the Manawatū-Whanganui CDEM Group area are:

- The Chairperson of the Horizons Regional Council
- Mayors (or nominated elected members) of Local Authorities in the Manawatū - Whanganui CDEM Group area.

Transition to Recovery

While recovery begins from the moment the event occurs, the transition from formal response to recovery activities starts once significant risk to life has been removed and basic services have been restored to impacted communities.

To aid this change and ensure there is a seamless transition into recovery, provisions have been made within the Act (s25, 30A) to provide the Recovery Manager powers to manage, coordinate, or direct recovery activities.

This local transition period is for a maximum of 28 days. This may be extended one or more times (for a further 28 days) or be terminated at any time.

Roles and Responsibilities of Elected Members

All elected representatives have key roles to perform in an emergency – whether a state of local emergency is declared or not. This includes providing reassurance to communities and acting as an important pathway for information (to and from an affected community). Elected representatives whose area has been impacted by the emergency may have a key role in community leadership by:

- > being there to identify high level needs of the community
- > directing community members towards the right place to get the support they need
- > acting as a conduit for information as requested by the Controller or Public Information team
- > dispelling rumours, correcting information and validating issues
- > considering recovery issues.

During an emergency, the Controller is then responsible for all decisions on how the emergency is managed, and this includes the release of information. This means that elected representatives act under the Controllers' authority for the duration of the emergency.

The Mayor, Joint Committee Chairperson and Deputy's role during emergencies

In an emergency, the Mayor, Chair of the Joint Committee and their deputies have additional responsibilities including:

- > supporting the controller
- > demonstrating leadership and maintaining public confidence during the emergency by having a visible presence in the community
- > represent their local authority politically
- > make or extend a state of local emergency declaration (this is the same for Local Transition notices as the emergency progresses towards recovery)
- > make media comment (in partnership with the Controller)
- > reassure the community
- > liaise with external agencies including central government and local iwi
- > receive visiting VIPs

Readiness: Practical Tips

Readiness starts with you. As an elected member, people will look to you for calm, informed leadership when an emergency happens.

Being personally prepared means you can focus on your role and your community, knowing that your whānau and home are safe and supported.

Personal Readiness Checklist

- ☐ Have a household plan – know where to meet and how to stay in touch.
- ☐ Arrange care for dependents, pets, or property if you're away.
- ☐ Keep several days' worth of food, water, and essential supplies.
- ☐ Prepare a grab bag with key documents and personal items.
- ☐ Save important contact numbers and follow official alert channels.
- ☐ Know how you'll carry out your role if travel or power is disrupted.
- ☐ Take care of your wellbeing – rest, eat well, and ask for help if needed.

Key Points for the First 24 Hours

- Check your whānau is safe.
- Stay in touch with Mayor/Chair, CE, and Controller.
- Provide calm reassurance and share official info.
- Listen to communities and pass feedback to response teams.
- Look after your own wellbeing.

Want to learn more?

You can find practical checklists, templates, and up-to-date information at:

- getready.govt.nz – national emergency preparedness advice.
- horizons.govt.nz – local CDEM Group updates and contacts.
- Your local council's website – for local emergency arrangements, resources, and contacts (these may differ between districts).

Emergency Warnings and Messaging

Warnings and alerts are notifications used to advise agencies, authorities and the public of potential or actual emergency events, so they can get prepared and support the timely mobilisation of resources and effective response.

In any emergency, providing clear, accurate and timely information through multiple channels and to different audiences is critical. As per the Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS), the Public Information Manager (PIM) is responsible to the Controller for all messaging and communications from the ECC / EOC as well as stakeholder and community liaison.

The public's response and cooperation with the emergency services is affected by the information and comments issued to the media during an emergency. It is important to ensure a consistent and accurate approach when it comes to media liaison.



Emergency Mobile Alert (EMA)

Emergency Mobile Alerts are messages about emergencies. They are sent by authorised emergency agencies to capable mobile phones. For more information visit NEMA's [Get Ready](#) website.



Social Media Channels

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/civildefencemanawatuwhanganui>



Website

<https://www.horizons.govt.nz/>

You can also visit your Local Council website for information regarding your district / city.



Radio

If the power goes out, a solar or battery powered radio (or your car radio) can help you keep up to date with the latest news via:

- Radio New Zealand
- MoreFM
- NewstalkZB
- The Hits

Resources

These resources below outline how emergency management is structured and delivered nationally, regionally, and locally. They form the key reference materials that guide the Manawatū–Whanganui CDEM Group and its partners. All resources below are available online.

Legislation and Core Frameworks

- [Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002](#)
- [National Disaster Resilience Strategy 2019–2029](#)
- [National CDEM Plan \(2015, updated 2019\)](#)
- [Guide to the National CDEM Plan \(2015\)](#)

National Guidance

- [Director’s Guidelines \(DGLs\)](#)
- [Coordinated Incident Management System \(CIMS\) 3rd Edition, 2019](#)

Regional Documents

- Manawatū–Whanganui CDEM Group Plan 2025–2030 (draft)³

Websites

- [National Emergency Management Agency \(NEMA\)](#)
- [Horizons Regional Council – MW CDEM Group](#)
- Local Council websites

Apps and useful links for personal preparedness

- [Emergency Mobile Alert](#)
- [GeoNet](#)
- [MetService NZ Weather](#)
- [Horizons Regional Council – River Alert System](#)
- [Get Ready \(NEMA\)](#)

³ As at the time of publishing this document the draft plan is open for public consultation.

Closing Message

As an elected member, you are more than a decision-maker – you are a leader, connector, and advocate. Communities look to you for reassurance, clarity, and trust. By working in partnership with CDEM professionals, iwi, and communities, you can help ensure that the Manawatū–Whanganui region is better prepared, more resilient, and able to recover strongly from future emergencies.



