



bushfire&natural
HAZARDSCRC

BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE THROUGH INFORMAL EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING

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An Australian Government Initiative



 **RMIT** University

DISASTER MYTH-BUSTING



- Disasters unleash **social chaos** and **disorganisation**?
- Citizens are rendered **passive victims**?; are **panic-stricken**? Engage in antisocial behaviours such as **looting**?

Myth-busting volunteers respond to the 2013 Forcett Bushfires in Tasmania. (**Source:** Fiona Jennings)

A MATTER OF DEFINITION

- **Traditional definitions of volunteerism:** activities that are **non-obligatory; unpaid;** undertaken for the **benefit of others,** society as a whole, or an organisation; undertaken **in an organised context; extend over time.**
- **In emergency management:** a volunteer emergency worker is someone who 'engages in emergency activity at the request or with **the express consent of the Chief Executive,** or of a person acting with the authority of the Chief Executive of an agency to which **either the State emergency response or recovery plan applies**' (EMA 1998, 114, emphasis added)
- **Informal volunteerism:** anyone who **freely helps those affected by emergencies or disasters** by working **outside of the established, formal emergency management system.**

INFORMAL VOLUNTEERS: TYPES AND ROLES

		TASKS	
		Regular	Non-regular
STRUCTURE	Old	TYPE I: ESTABLISHED	TYPE III: EXTENDING
	New	TYPE II: EXPANDING	TYPE IV: EMERGENT

Table 1: The DRC typology of organised response to disasters (Dynes, 1970)

SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS & EMERGENT GROUPS



- 1) May play critical roles in **first response**
- 2) **Flexible, innovative** and **responsive** to local needs
- 3) Often unaware of the **bigger picture**
- 4) Risk of **disrupting organised response & absorbing resources**
- 5) Rarely more than short lived(?) - **This may be changing.**

DIGITAL VOLUNTEERING

- 1) From **simple to complex** uses
- 2) Volunteered geographic information – **high chance of accuracy, speedy**, on-the-ground observations
- 3) **Crowd-sourced** crisis mapping – fast!

Home What is this? Stories I want to help I need help VET Before... Stuff Contact Mel

TASSIE FIRES

we can help

“Maybe I could do something...”
I don't doubt it for a second!

TASSIE FIRES WE CAN HELP

Tassie Fires - We Can Help
20,032 Likes

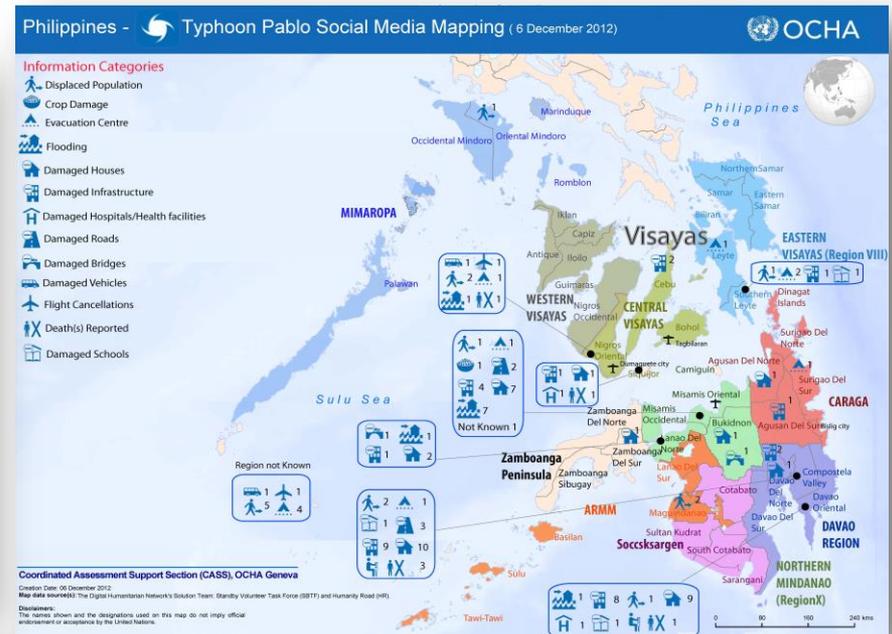
ALERT TAS WEBSITE

This is the Tasmanian Government Emergency Website.

HELP

I WANT TO HELP NOW

I NEED HELP NOW



INTEGRATION BARRIERS

- 1) **Cultural and organisational change** in emergency management organisations
- 2) Concern about **safety and legal liability**

“local authorities need to recognize that unsolicited volunteers will show up, and procedures must be developed for processing these volunteers and integrating them into the response”

(Auf der Heide 2003, 465, emphasis added).

INFORMAL EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERISM

Usually the first (and last) responders

Do not mean established organisations have failed

A normal, adaptive response to uncertainty and change

Community resilience in action

Diverse

Cannot be planned or controlled away

THANK YOU

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