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NEW WAIKATO CIVIL DEFENCE DRAFT PLAN ADOPTED

A new five-year plan to enhance the capability of the Waikato region to respond to disasters has been formally adopted today by the Waikato Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Group.

The so-called second generation plan (2GP) was signed off at a meeting of the Group's Joint Committee, made up of the region's mayors or designated elected political representatives.

Highlights of the plan actions include:

- four new full time Civil Defence staff
- a clearer framework for working together involving all supporting agencies
- a new regional hazards forum
- development of a Group risk reduction programme
- implementation of new public education and public information management plans
- a new professional development programme for staff and a Group exercise plan
- development of a Group mass evacuation plan.

Another feature of the new 2GP is the development of a detailed Group recovery plan for helping communities affected by disasters to get back on their feet as soon as possible. The results of the Canterbury earthquakes have highlighted how important it is to manage the recovery phase of disasters well so that communities can come back from disaster.

The committee agreed to expand the Group's budget by \$515,000 to \$985,000 from 2012-13 to implement and maintain the changes. The \$985,000 is equivalent to \$5.10 per rateable property in the region and the funding will now be collected through Waikato Regional Council.

Group chairman Hugh Vercoe, the mayor of Matamata-Piako district, said the new five year plan outlines a pathway forward to enhance regional civil defence capacity to ensure the Waikato is better prepared for disasters and can respond to them even more effectively.

"Recent natural disasters in New Zealand – particularly the Canterbury earthquakes – and around the world underline graphically how disasters can strike at any time and the widespread impacts they can have on communities."

Mr Vercoe said a review of the previous plan had been influenced by a capability assessment of the Waikato Group by the Ministry of CDEM. It found the Group was well placed to respond to localised or short duration emergencies but raised concerns about its ability to handle a bigger or longer duration event. "This new plan, which takes on board that ministry advice, strengthens our capacity to deal with all types of events."

A letter from Civil Defence Minister Craig Foss said the new plan met the relevant legal requirements: "I commend your Group's enthusiasm and commitment to CDEM issues. The work you do is fundamental to our achieving a resilient New Zealand."

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