BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE THROUGH INFORMAL EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING

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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRUCTURE</th>
<th>TASKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old</td>
<td>Regular: TYPE I: ESTABLISHED</td>
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<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>Regular: TYPE II: EXPANDING</td>
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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!
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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