

# Annual Forward Plan of Reviews

2023–24



**IGEM**  
Inspector-General  
for Emergency  
Management

**Acknowledgement of Country**

IGEM acknowledges and respects Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. IGEM honours Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practice.

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

April 2023

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# 1 Introduction

The Inspector-General for Emergency Management (IGEM) is an independent role established under the *Emergency Management Act 2013* (the Act).

The objectives of the IGEM are to:

- provide assurance to the government and the community in respect of emergency management arrangements in Victoria
- foster continuous improvement of emergency management in Victoria.

The *Assurance Framework for Emergency Management* guides all IGEM assurance activities and provides the foundation for a coordinated and collaborative approach to sector-wide assurance.

Under section 64(1)(b) of the Act, IGEM conducts system-wide reviews, including the emergency management functions of responder agencies and government departments.

In accordance with section 66 of the Act, each year IGEM develops an Annual Forward Plan of Reviews (the forward plan) in consultation with the emergency management sector<sup>1</sup> (the sector) which it shares with the Minister for Emergency Services (the minister).

The minister may also request that IGEM conduct a review under the provisions of section 64(1)(c) of the Act.

## 1.1 Document purpose

This document outlines IGEM's planned review for 2023–24, describing its intended outcomes and anticipated timeframes. It provides a high-level description of the review's objectives, context, scope and stakeholders.

The primary audience is government and the emergency management sector in Victoria.

The document is publicly available on the IGEM website ([igem.vic.gov.au](http://igem.vic.gov.au)).

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<sup>1</sup> Defined in the *Emergency Management Act 2013* as '...comprising all agencies, bodies, departments and other persons who have a responsibility, function or other role in emergency management'.

## 1.2 Development of the plan

The extent and frequency of change within the sector presents a challenge to predicting and/or prioritising review topics in advance. When coupled with the dynamic nature of emergencies, IGEM considers current and emerging risks on an annual basis to inform the forward plan.

IGEM considered numerous factors when developing the forward plan for 2023–24, including ongoing sector reforms, recent reviews and other assurance activities.

It identified themes arising from the implementation of recommendations, performance monitoring, as well as recent and potential risks to Victorian communities.

IGEM considered enduring issues for Victorians before, during and after emergencies. IGEM also conducted targeted stakeholder engagement to inform the review described in this forward plan.

Sector organisations with roles and accountabilities related to the review were provided with a draft copy for comment prior to the publication of the forward plan. Their feedback was considered and incorporated as part of the finalisation of this document.

## 1.3 IGEM contact

For further information, or to contribute to this review, please contact the IGEM office:

Email: [igem@igem.vic.gov.au](mailto:igem@igem.vic.gov.au)

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## 2 Planned review for 2023–24

### 2.1 Review of Victoria's preparedness for major chemical, biological and radiological incidents

#### 2.1.1 Context

IGEM proposes to review the emergency management sector's preparedness to coordinate an effective response to major chemical, biological, and radiological incidents.

Through its 2022 *Review of Victoria's preparedness for major public health emergencies, including pandemics* IGEM identified these incidents as an area of concern for stakeholders. As part of consultation for the preparation of this forward plan, stakeholders also nominated incidents involving various kinds of hazardous materials as significant risk to Victorians.

Chemical, biological and radiological agents have the potential to seriously threaten the health and safety of the Victorian community. Major incidents can have severe human health impacts, and can harm the environment, agriculture, livestock or property. Likewise, the health and safety of responder personnel is placed at significant risk during response, clean-up and recovery.

Chemical, biological, and radiological substances are used, stored and transported throughout Victoria sometimes in large volumes or highly populated areas. Their safe and legitimate use in industries such as medicine and manufacturing improves the quality of life for many Victorians, however, the storage, transportation, use and disposal of these substances poses an ongoing community risk.

Chemical incidents may have impacts and consequences for people, wildlife, agriculture and/or the environment. Incidents may be caused by substances that are toxic, corrosive, combustible or explosive resulting from a spill, leakage or other contamination scenarios.

For example, in July 2022 several communities in Melbourne's northern suburbs were advised to stay indoors while emergency services responded to a road accident which caused a pesticide spill.

Incidents may also be caused by materials that are reasonably benign in typical circumstances but pose public and environmental health threats if inappropriately stored, accidentally released or are otherwise mishandled. Recently, Victorian agencies have responded to chemical risks and incidents caused by materials such as stockpiled soft plastics, large milk spills, and a vegetable oil spill.

The combustion of chemical substances has also been a source of emergencies leading to toxic smoke plumes, dangerous explosions and highly contaminated run-off. There are many incidents of chemical fires affecting populated areas of Victoria. Both the Coolaroo SKM recycling plant fire in 2017, and the West Footscray industrial fire in 2018 where a large quantity of hazardous waste ignited were incidents of this nature. IGEM independently reviewed both incidents.

In March 2019, the issue of industrial fires caused by the illegal or inappropriate stockpiling of dangerous chemicals was examined as part of a parliamentary inquiry into recycling and waste management. IGEM proposes to look at the response to chemical emergencies associated with the storage of waste and recyclable material as part of this review.

Biological incidents involve the release of viruses, bacteria, fungi and toxins dangerous to human health and/or the environment.

These incidents may be caused by deliberate or accidental activity and the scale of the incident is dependent on the specific biological agent, the mode of release, and the amount released.

Radiological incidents involve the release of radioactive material through spillage, leakage, contamination, deliberate acts or the theft or loss of such materials.

In the absence of a nuclear power industry in Victoria, the most likely causes of incidents requiring an emergency response are loss, theft or finding of a radioactive source, or an accident involving the transport of radioactive material.

## 2.1.2 Background

The control agency for emergencies involving explosions, gas leakage, hazardous materials, high consequence dangerous goods or dangerous goods is Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) for incidents occurring in the FRV Fire District or the Country Fire Authority for incidents occurring outside this district. These incidents are designated as Class 1 emergencies. The Department of Health is the lead support agency for health services and protection.

The Department of Health is the control agency for emergencies involving biological and radioactive materials (including leaks and spills). Both types of incidents are designated as Class 2 emergencies.

Victoria Police assumes control for incidents involving explosive devices and other scenarios where the emergency is confirmed or suspected to be security-related (a warlike act or act of terrorism, hijack, siege or riot) or caused by other malicious acts. These incidents are designated as Class 3 emergencies.

Ambulance Victoria provides health command for the pre-hospital response for all chemical, biological and radiological emergencies. Its role includes leading any required field responses, ambulance services, first responder assistance and non-emergency patient transport.

Chemical, biological and radiological incidents require a coordinated multi-agency response. Preparedness to respond requires appropriate, well-rehearsed arrangements and suitable resourcing in terms of personnel, equipment, facilities and technology.

There are several acts, plans and regulations to guide the response to these incidents in Victoria including:

- *Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021*
- Dangerous Goods (Explosives) Regulations 2022
- Dangerous Goods (High Consequence Dangerous Goods) Regulations 2016
- Dangerous Goods (Storage and Handling) Regulations 2022
- Dangerous Goods (Transport by Road or Rail) Regulation 2018
- *Dangerous Goods Act 1985*
- Domestic Health Response Plan for Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear Incidents of National Significance (CBRN plan) (Commonwealth)
- *Environment Protection Act 2017*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*
- Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- *Radiation Act 2005*
- State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) and relevant subplans.



### 2.1.3 Review aim

The review aims to identify opportunities to strengthen emergency management arrangements and preparedness activities for responding to chemical, biological, and radiological incidents.

At a broad level, the review will examine roles and responsibilities, planning, coordination, consequence management and other strategic arrangements.

It will also evaluate capability and capacity planning, and the strategies in place to support both strategic and operational preparedness for chemical, biological and radiological incidents.

Risk assessment and hazard monitoring systems will be considered, as will preparedness for communicating with the public during and immediately after a major incident.

The review will make findings and observations related to system-level matters that have implications for the safety of Victorians. IGEM will make any necessary recommendations to improve the efficiency or effectiveness of preparedness initiatives for major chemical, biological and radiological incidents.

### 2.1.4 Preliminary scope

The review will focus on preparedness to provide an emergency response and immediate relief to major chemical, biological and radiological incidents. Preparedness for recovery is out of scope.

The review will examine plans and strategies to identify the consequences of chemical, biological, and radiological incidents. It will also evaluate the communication and decision-making pathways, and accountabilities in place to manage these consequences.

Immediate relief activities are those related to the containment and initial clean-up of the hazard and measures taken to address public safety, including the relocation of people, management of treatments to minimise human and animal health impacts, and public communication strategies.

IGEM will consider spills, contamination, combustion and leakages of a range of specific hazards, including explosives, nuclear materials, and large quantities of waste material. While hazard-specific plans will be a valuable source of evidence for the review, IGEM will focus on plans and arrangements driving system-level preparedness for chemical, biological and radiological incidents more broadly.

While health command and pre-hospital care will be considered as part of this review, the medical response is out of scope. IGEM will evaluate the health and safety of personnel responding to chemical, biological and radiological incidents. This will include capability development and the resourcing associated with providing adequate and appropriate personal protective equipment and clothing.

The review will not include the response to malicious acts or security incidents (Class 3 emergencies) where Victoria Police is the control agency. It will assess the arrangements in place to ensure effective control of major chemical, biological and radiological incidents, which may include a determination of the cause of the incident.

The review will consider emergency management activities in place to mitigate and prepare for scenarios that pose a risk for major incidents. For example, the risk assessment activities and planning related to the transportation of high-consequence chemical loads is in scope. Regulators monitor and enforce the use of chemical, biological and radiological agents in Victoria. These business-as-usual arrangements guiding the safe and appropriate purchase, use, storage, transportation and disposal of these agents are not in scope for this review.

The review will consider preparedness to manage the impacts of chemical, biological or radiological incidents on wildlife, the environment and the agricultural industry. It will not include specific animal diseases or other biosecurity hazards.

While IGEM will focus its review on relevant Victorian organisations and arrangements, many chemical, biological and radiological incidents trigger national arrangements and associated responses. IGEM will review how Victorian arrangements interact with national and international arrangements, and how key agency leaders at all levels work together in planning, during response and immediate relief activities.

IGEM will develop a comprehensive review scope as part of project planning. It will validate the scope and associated lines of inquiry with key stakeholders prior to commencing evidence collection and analysis.

## 2.1.5 Stakeholders and consultation

Stakeholders for this review include relevant emergency management sector organisations as prescribed in section 60A of the Act. Organisations with regulatory responsibilities related to the use, storage, transportation and disposal of chemical, biological and radiological agents will be involved throughout the review.

IGEM will consult with other organisations and subject matter experts as required. This may include peak industry bodies, technical specialists and Australian Government representatives.

Throughout the review, stakeholders will be asked to provide evidence and commentary to support the aims of the review and its lines of inquiry. There will be opportunities for stakeholders to validate preliminary observations and findings as part of the finalisation of the review.

## 2.1.6 Proposed approach and timing

IGEM will consider evidence that demonstrates preparedness for chemical, biological and radiological incidents. The review will focus its evaluation on system-level issues and strategies, informed by operational examples as required.

The review will include an examination of publicly available documents and doctrine, and evidence provided by stakeholders. To reduce burden on the sector, IGEM will use relevant evidence received through its other assurance activities to inform the review. Observations from key strategic forums, site visits and other preparedness activities will further inform the review where appropriate.

IGEM anticipates that the review report will be delivered to the minister by 30 June 2024.

## 2.1.7 Review output, publication, implementation and outcome

The primary output from the review will be a report for the minister detailing the key observations, findings and recommendations for improvement as appropriate.

In accordance with sections 70(1) and 70(3) of the Act, IGEM will provide agencies affected by the review with a draft copy of the report for comment and will consider any relevant feedback before finalising the report for the minister.

Public release of the report is subject to the minister's approval under the provisions of section 70(6) of the Act and will be supported by a detailed communications strategy.

The minister (in agreement with other relevant ministers) may provide the review to the State Crisis and Resilience Council for implementation under section 70(8) of the Act.

IGEM will promote and support sector-wide continuous improvement through monitoring and reporting on the implementation of recommendations from the review if it is approved for public release.

The intended outcome of the review is to strengthen the safety of the Victorian community through greater preparedness of the sector to respond to major chemical, biological and radiological incidents.

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