

THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

REPORT ON PROGRESS IN RISK MANAGEMENT APRIL 2007

Introduction

The Cayman Islands Government has recognized the need for a fulltime hazard management agency for the country. Historically, the country focused primarily on preparedness and response to hurricanes, which are the major threat. There was a part-time committee – the National Hurricane Committee – in charge of the hurricane preparedness programme. The new agency will have the responsibility for management of all hazards which threaten the country and will take a comprehensive approach, integrating prevention, mitigation and recovery in the national programme.

The National Context

The impact of Hurricane Ivan in September 2004 reminded the Cayman Islands of its vulnerability to tropical cyclones. Ivan caused US\$3.432b in damage, a per capita damage figure of \$75,700 per resident. ECLAC notes that this is the highest figure ever encountered in Latin American and the Caribbean. The remarkably quick recovery made by the Cayman Islands shows the importance of a bouyant economy as well as the usefulness of risk transfer mechanisms for national resilience.

In December 2004, Grand Cayman felt the effects of a magnitude 6.8 earthquake just 30 miles off its southern coast. This was a reminder that the very active northern margin of the Caribbean Plate lies just to the south of the island, and can be expected to generate strong earthquakes.

There have also been several major fires, the most recent being in 1984.

In addition, there is potential for disasters in the areas of transportation – cruise shipping, aircraft crashes; technological hazards – hazardous materials incidents; as well as medical emergencies and pandemics, and agricultural related epidemics.

The increasingly accepted effects of global climate change and the global reality of terrorism would also need to be factored into the country's hazard assessment as potential threats.

Projections for global climate change indicate that changes in climate parameters such as rainfall, temperature, mean sea-level and storm/hurricane frequency and intensity. In the region, a rising sea level would increase risks of coastal erosion and inundation, threatening key tourism, energy, transportation and communications infrastructure. In addition, warmer waters may cause the bleaching and extinction of coral reefs which act as natural barriers against storm surges, tsunamis and other damaging coastal waves. The impact of these hazards upon island states, demonstrates a disproportionate impact not usually experienced by continental countries.

Thus, past events as well as future threats demonstrate the need for a multi-hazard approach to planning.

The *Cayman Islands National Strategic Plan 1998 -2008* lists “comprehensive contingency planning” and “establishment of a national emergency management agency” among its strategies. The document also mentions prevention and mitigation as desirable activities to be undertaken to safeguard the country. The proposal for a national agency with a comprehensive mandate to lead the risk management process is therefore in keeping with the plans for national development.

The post Ivan project “A Strategy for Risk Management in the Cayman Islands: Phase One” included “increased capacity for vulnerability reduction and hazard management” as one of its outputs, and includes a number of activities which could be undertaken by the new national agency.

Launch of Agency

The new agency “Hazard Management Cayman Islands” was launched in January 2007, and is currently recruiting staff. Once the agency is fully functional, the national risk management programme will be guided by the Hyogo Framework.

Progress so far is summarised below.

Priority 1: Ensure that national disaster risk reduction is a national priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation

1. Establishment of a full time agency
2. Development a national strategic framework to guide risk reduction. This document includes the priorities of the Hyogo Framework.
3. Establishment of an institutional framework including a National Hazard Management Executive and Council which will set policy. Ongoing development of legislation related to risk management

Priority 2: Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning

1. A risk assessment exercise will be carried for the Cayman Islands. This will establish priorities and guide risk management and reduction interventions.
2. A good early warning system for hurricanes already exists. A seismic monitoring network is currently being established. It is expected that the country will be part of the Caribbean Tsunami Warning System when that becomes operational.
3. Storm surge mapping is being completed for the country. In addition a valuation exercise for every property on Grand Cayman has been completed. With the use of Geographic Systems Technology, combination of the storm surge mapping and valuation will allow forecasting of impact and damage from storm surge and will permit estimation of losses. This will also eventually allow the risk to each property to be defined.

Priority 3: Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels

1. There is a long standing public awareness programme for hurricanes. This includes brochures, booklets, use of the electronic media and in 2005, an intervention specifically targetting 10 – 14 year-olds.
2. In December of 2006, the country marked its first Earthquake Awareness Day on the anniversary of the December 2004 earthquake (Magnitude 6.8). The day was used to increase awareness of the seismic hazard and precautionary measures which can be taken for protection of life and property.
3. Public Awareness building is an area of major emphasis in the strategic framework.

Priority 4: Reduce the underlying risk factors

1. The Cayman Islands upgraded its building code after Hurricane Ivan in 2004. Every damaged structure had to be inspected and approved during reconstruction. Inspection of new buildings is compulsory and is enforced. The National Development Plan is now under review, a process which includes public as well as technical inputs.

2. Emergency shelters are being built to withstand Category 5 storms and are equipped with emergency power and water.
3. A national assessment of living conditions is currently being undertaken. This will provide valuable data on vulnerability factors related to economic issues among the lower income population.
4. Legislation to further protect the environment is being reviewed, and the disaster-related legislation should also address issues related to protection and preservation of wetlands and other natural coastal features which reduce the risk of coastal flooding

Priority 5: Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

1. Increasing national preparedness and response capacity is a continual process which includes ensuring availability of emergency equipment for first responders and emergency management agencies, maintaining a functioning emergency telecommunications system, development of plans, including Continuity of Operations plans for Government, drills and exercises and training. One major incident exercise has already been completed in 2007 and another is planned for May. The National Hurricane Plan is updated annually.

2. The Cayman Islands Red Cross has a community preparedness programme which trains community response teams. These teams will be integrated into the national response system.