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Tsunami Preparedness Communication: Understanding the Business Audience

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Abstract

Previous research conducted by GNS Science pre and post the 2016 Kaikōura Quake identified that the New Zealand public does not sufficiently understand the risks posed by tsunami hazards, and in particular there is limited awareness about the different responses required for local, regional, and distant-source tsunami events.

This research was undertaken to delve deeper and generate new insights into the reasons behind that finding, specifically for one key audience: business leaders. This audience was primarily chosen because businesses play a key interdependent role in disaster response and community recovery. An audience-centred communication approach was chosen over the traditional mass communication approach most often applied in emergency management practice to date. A qualitative approach was selected because of its ability to provide complementary data to existing quantitative studies.

Data were collected from twelve business-focussed community leaders, and business owners/senior managers in coastal Tauranga (Pāpāmoa) and Wellington (Rongotai), through a series of semi-structured interview conversations and email questionnaires. The data gathering instruments were designed to better understand the participants': (1) tsunami knowledge and awareness; (2) tsunami risk perception; (3) existing tsunami preparedness; and (4) behavioural intent for future tsunami preparedness initiatives. Field observations and engagement with emergency management professionals provided greater depth of understanding and enhanced the contextual aspects of the research.

The overall findings and themes emerging from this research suggest that:

- As indicated in the wider survey, there is a lack of tsunami awareness and preparedness among the business audience

More specifically in the audience-centred context:

- There is confusion surrounding the roles and responsibilities of official emergency management organisations
- There is a need for improved organisational Health & Safety understanding and compliance concerning natural hazards in the business community
- Different stakeholders, even within the business audience, have different tsunami preparedness wants and needs

The research also identified that:

- Some business leaders are willing to act as conduits for tsunami preparedness in their organisations and communities; viewing it as part of their identity and responsibility as a business leader.

Specific suggestions for improved tsunami preparedness communication include:

- Ongoing stakeholder engagement and tsunami education with proactive ‘opinion leaders’ in the business community
- Adopting further targeted audience-centred approaches to improve the spread of preparedness messages through society

- A revision of existing official tsunami preparedness material and tsunami mapping to better meet the needs of end users, such as with customised co-developed material for business community needs in different regions
- Enhancing preparedness communication through the researcher's 'Five C's Model'

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