

MEDIA RELEASE

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BCM gears up for Metro responsibilities as part of International Disaster Day

The United Nations has declared the second Wednesday of October **"International Disaster Reduction Day"**.

Every second year this day is used to launch the theme for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) for the following two years.

The 2010 – 2012 theme is **"Urban Risk Reduction: Building Resilient Cities, Addressing Urban Disaster Risk: Is Your City Ready."**

This is of particular significance for Buffalo City, as it will receive Metropolitan Municipality status in 2011. The Metropolitan status gives a legal mandate to the City to make Disaster Management a fully fledged competency.

The City is currently reviewing its Disaster management framework and is undertaking the process with the District Municipality (Amathole) and relevant stakeholders.

The National Disaster Management slogan is "Disaster Management is everybody's business – towards a resilient South Africa".

Over the next two years the Buffalo City Disaster Management Centre will focus on building a resilient Buffalo City by increasing the awareness of political and civil leaders, government and City officials, communities and individuals; about the risks, and how to prevent, mitigate and prepare for disasters. This is also particularly period as the City is facing a challenge of draught that is confronting the entire country.

The two biggest challenges facing cities around the world are poverty and urbanization; these are also the root cause of vulnerability to the hazards that cause disasters.

BCM is no exception especially around informal settlements where fires occur as a result of negligence around paraffin usage. Our firefighters battle approximately 3 500 infernos each year around the City.

Considerable misunderstanding surrounds disasters. Replacing the ignorance with awareness is the first step to building resilience to disaster.

In the next few weeks the BCM Disaster Management will be part of the team that ensures that major festive season events are disaster free (Switching of Lights, BCM Carnival, New Years Day etc).

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The Municipality has acquired four new 4x4 Land Rover bush firefighting vehicles worth R2,2-million. These smaller engines will allow firefighters to get to unfriendly terrain and areas where trucks can't go because of their size.

Many of the trigger events of disasters are natural occurrences that are essential for the survival of the environment. Floods flush out stagnant water and rotting animal and vegetable matter and replace it with fresh water. Fires remove dead plants and make place for new growth.

It is only when these events impact on humans and their livelihoods that they become disasters. It is possible to manage disasters by preventing or reducing the impact that they have on humans.

The high density of cities means that city disasters are usually of a greater magnitude. The reason is that a large number of people live in small areas.

A large number of deaths and injuries are possible should a multi-storey building catch fire or collapse. This is why the Disaster Management Unit has been an integral part of the operation that cracks down on entertainment areas to ensure that they comply with the City's Bylaws.

The close proximity of buildings in cities and informal settlements results in rapid fire spread where it is not uncommon to have twenty to thirty units totally destroyed in a single fire.

In Cities the large areas of hardened surfaces increases the risk of flooding by increasing the storm water runoff.

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