

Australian Disaster Management Information Network

The Australian Disaster Management Information Network (ADMIN) is an informal joint project between the Federal and State Governments to enhance the effectiveness of disaster management through the improved co-ordination of information availability and exchange.

The purpose of ADMIN is to provide a forum for the exchange of information ideas and research among local, state and national public and private sector organisations about the prevention of, preparation for, and mitigation of risk associated with natural and human-made disasters.

ADMIN oversees and co-ordinates an information exchange service through the operation of an electronic bulletin board at the Australian Emergency Management Institute (AEMI), Mount Macedon. The bulletin board has been called ADMIX — the Australian Disaster Management Information eXchange, and can be used by anyone in the disaster management community who has access to a personal computer and a modem.

ADMIX was officially launched on June 19th, and is sponsored by Emergency Management Australian (EMA) and the Centre for International Research on Communication and Information Technologies (CIRCIT). It is managed by the AEMI at Mt. Macedon, Victoria.

The system has been developed with the assistance of several Victorian counter disaster organisations, including Community Services Victoria (State Recovery Unit), Country Fire Authority, Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Victoria State Emergency Service, Victoria Police, WICEN and Eastcom Pty. Ltd.

From a technical perspective, emphasis has been placed on the use of existing organisational resources, rather than the development and implementation of new and costly information technologies. As such, ADMIX is a pc-based system that forms the core of a new BBS network which links similar systems operated by other disaster management organisations as part of an Australian Disaster Management Information Network (ADMIN). Through the use of electronic mail gateways, it is anticipated that ADMIN will soon be linked to research and associated organisations across Australia and abroad. The primary technical functions of the network are electronic messaging, conferencing and file storage and exchange.

The project will initially be established in Victoria and the experience gained will be applied in the expansion of the network to agencies from other States and Federal Authorities as the system is more fully developed. When established, the network will allow for electronic mail between participating DISPLAN agencies and for conferences to take place on subjects common to various groups.

The WICEN Victoria BBS has Echomail Conference Areas set up as part of ADMIN:

- Area 40 Disaster Management (General Interest) Echo

Discussion of disaster-related matters of a general, non-specific nature, including the dissemination of information about upcoming events, the soliciting of advice or comment about draft plans, proposals, or to initiate new contacts within your own or related field of interest.

- **Area 50 Emergency Communications Echo**

Discussion on emergency communications and communication methods (including voice and data communication and secure traffic):

- (a) Prior to an emergency;
- (b) During the response phase of an emergency; or
- (c) During the post emergency recovery phase.

WICEN (Victoria) is providing the moderator for this area.

There are also direct message links set up between WICEN and SES and WICEN and VIFP but access to these areas are restricted by request of the other agencies.

Access to ADMIX is via the public switched telephone network — (054) 26 2594 at 1200-9600 baud, 8 data bits, no parity and 1 stop bit.

WICEN's Involvement

Representatives from counter disaster agencies attended a National Workshop on Information Exchange Needs Assessment in July 1990 where discussions included how to make information more freely available between the Agencies during all phases of a Disaster and the principles of Phone Bulletin Board systems. WICEN was not a participant, but as our BBS was the only one in existence in Australia (at that time), it was examined as a model.

In June 1991, WICEN joined the discussions between the ACDC, other DISPLAN agencies and CIRCIT regarding data communications and the benefits to counter disaster agencies. Regular meetings of the steering committee were held with WICEN being represented by Mark Dods VK3ZR, Leigh Baker VK3TP and David Tilson VK3UR. Discussions have been based in many areas including network integrity security, disaster mitigation as well as activation and recovery phases of operation. As WICEN was the only DISPLAN agency with BBS experience we have played a key role in these discussions.

WICEN has been a strong proponent for ADMIX for several reasons. Firstly it is a good, forward thinking project in its own right although WICEN itself will always have a very minor role in the final system. Secondly, in exposing the management of agencies to such applications of new technology, we are also assisting in the pursuit of a means of solving some of the communications problems between these Agencies and thus assisting ourselves at the same time.

Individual members of WICEN have expended a lot of time in ADMIX working party meetings, demonstrations for involved groups and providing training courses for various groups for ADMIX. We have done this because we see the possibility of creating a permanent and effective method of solving some of its inter-agency communications problems. We would prefer to solve this sort of problem now rather than in an activation and each agency will also gain other benefits.

Other Agencies

Several agencies are experimenting with BBS type equipment as a result of ADMIX although many they see primary benefits coming from within their own organisation. WICEN has been actively involved in assisting a number of Agencies in the installation of their BBS systems. Each agency will quite rightly be restricting the access of 'outsiders' to their information.

CIRCIT was responsible for the development of links into other Australian and overseas data networks to provide access to the available information for research facilities and their users. With assistance from CIRCIT and WICEN, other DISPLAN agencies are also preparing systems which will integrate into the network.

Community Services Victoria (CSV) are already involved with the necessary training and file preparation for the part of the ADMIX System which they will be responsible (RECOVERY). CSV has realised that by setting up their own BBS, they can use this system for obtaining information from their own region headquarters.

Therefore, a fast means exists for obtaining real time reports in a form that can be further manipulated later and also that internal Situation Report (Sitrep) pathways are already set up for any actual Emergency situation. Further, CSV will be able to either send or receive this Sitrep type information either to ADMIX or direct to any other agency that has its own BBS. Pathways have already been discussed between WICEN and CSV.

Victoria State Emergency Service is also looking at implementing its own BBS system for its own (regional) use. Currently, reports and other hard copy information are delivered to the SES Headquarters by the Victorian Government Courier Service, which takes time and is expensive. Using a BBS and taking advantage of night telephone rates for non-activation use will reduce this cost for SES by a significant amount.

Country Fire Authority already has computers and modems in most of their major centres and they are in the process of developing a dedicated BBS of this type to assist with information flow. There will be some public access to this system.

Metropolitan Fire Brigade is definitely setting up a system of their own but, with the exception of CFA and ADMIX involvement, their system is intended to be a totally private system.

Ultimately this will mean that WICEN, CSV, SES and CFA will have the means (and hopefully the desire) to set up formal lines of inter-BBS communication that can be easily adapted in times of Disaster. i.e. each system could "echo" SITREP or similar information to each agency that needed that information automatically. The BBS's themselves could be directed to pass all internal information direct to any computer within that organisation and also pass on any information that comes in on the echo direct to a computer in that organisations Disaster control room. This can be totally automatic and reduces the amount of administrative or non-essential traffic on phone or radio.

It also means that CSV, SES and CFA in each region could get automatic "echo's" of each others Sitreps. It is also possible for an agency to pass traffic for another agency and have the message arrive at the appropriate place automatically. If the phone system goes down then it is generally possible for WICEN to arrange for radio data communications to bypass the problem.

When Victoria Police join in ADMIX and get the pertinent computer equipment then it will be possible to get appropriate their DISPLAN information to and from all of the above agencies as well. Again automatically!

International Access

ADMIX and CIRCIT can provide access to other systems, including:

- The Emergency Preparedness Information Exchange (EPIX)

EPIX provides electronic mail service and also has specialized message and file areas containing discussions and information about selected topics in emergency preparedness. EPIX provides 24-hour direct communication with persons working in this field; thus, it is a means to exchange ideas with others in a given field, particularly during times when it is difficult to meet in person.

EPIX is designed to stimulate networking and to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas among federal, provincial, local, and private-sector organizations about the prevention of, preparation for and mitigation of risk associated with natural and human-made disasters; and this BBS is sponsored by Emergency Preparedness Canada and managed through the Department of Communication and Continuing Studies at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada.

- United Nations International Emergency Network (UNIENET)

This is a network of bulletin boards linked together electronically which contain databases of disaster-related information. UNIENET provides direct communication between members of the world-wide disaster management community, through the electronic mail facility and makes available both background and operational disaster-related information. It is possible to send telexes and faxes via the network as well as to access commercial databases.

UNIENET also operates as a joint venture with United Nations agencies and other inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The following organisations maintain bulletin boards on UNIENET:

UNDRO	— Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator
PCDPPP	— Pan-Caribbean Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Project
PAHO	— Pan-American Health Organisation
AIT/ADPC	— Asian Institute of Technology/Asian Disaster Preparation Centre
IDNDR	— International Decade for Natural Hazard Reduction
OAS/DRD	— Organisation of American States/Dept of Regional Development
UNHCR	— United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WHO	— World Health Organisation
FAO	— Food and Agricultural Organisation