



GOOD PRACTICE

DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND FIRE SERVICES IN POLOKWANE

BY PHUTI KABE

MANAGER FOR DISTASTER MANAGEMENT AND FIRE SERVICES, CITY OF POLOKWANE

Partners of Connective Cities



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Overview

The disaster management and fire services manager Phuti Kabe presents achievements of positive outcomes from actions and approaches taken in the municipality of Polokwane in South Africa. This Good Practice shows continuous improvement by providing the need for ongoing learning and sharing of knowledge, experiences and expertise among participants.

In February, flash floods struck the municipality of Polokwane, overwhelming the infrastructure and causing widespread damage. A swift, multidisciplinary team was formed to assess and document the aftermath, leading to emergency funding allocation. Best practices for flood response were developed, emphasizing resource efficiency and collaboration. Innovation flourished, fostering personal and professional growth of the team. Social responsibility was prioritized, with teams dispatched to aid affected communities. Looking ahead, ongoing evaluation and adaptation are key to ensuring resilience in future disasters.

Activities

A team consisting of Roads and Stormwater Technicians along with Disaster Management Officials was assembled to conduct assessments in the affected areas. Their findings were compiled into an assessment report, which was presented to the Council and subsequently forwarded to the Provincial Disaster Management Centre to request funding for Disaster Emergency Response. Currently, efforts are focused on regular cleaning of debris and sand deposits from stormwater systems requiring upgrades. Notice boards have been installed at all illegal dumping spots, and plans are underway to procure and install concrete bollards behind catch pits frequently overrun by trucks. Additionally, there are plans to upgrade and line existing earth drains with concrete and pave damaged roads. It has been identified that streams need to be lined with concrete and maintained regularly, as the current stormwater design is outdated and inadequate for the city's growth.

Objectives

The objective is to promote effectiveness and efficiency in the subject matter, fostering responsible decision-making. This includes advocating for the adoption of good practices to stimulate innovation and creativity, encouraging adaptation to emerging challenges and opportunities. Additionally, the objective aims to enhance accountability within operations, ensuring transparency and reliability. It also seeks to facilitate knowledge sharing, the exchange of ideas, and the sharing of experiences through interactions to foster continuous improvement and growth.

Focus

The idea revolves around leveraging disaster management and fire services to showcase successful outcomes resulting from implemented actions and strategies. Central to this concept is the emphasis on continuous improvement through ongoing learning and the exchange of expertise, knowledge, and experiences among all involved participants.

Challenges

In February, a flash flood struck the municipality, overwhelming both stormwater control and drainage systems. This led to subsequent flooding that affected internal streets, nearby suburbs, houses, and businesses, especially those with inadequate roof maintenance, resulting in damage to furniture. The increased runoff volume caused earth channel banks to collapse, worsening the flooding situation. Furthermore, heavy flow dislodged and lifted stormwater lines, exacerbating the flood's impact. Collapsed earth channel banks redirected rainwater back into houses, while collapsed riverbanks narrowed stream flow, compounded by vegetation and debris obstruction. Flooded roads saw stranded vehicles and collapsed fences. The Central Business District was submerged, affecting offices, shops, and homeless individuals. Villages along flood lines were submerged, leading to evacuations to community halls. Washed-away gravel roads hindered community access and transportation, and bridges connecting villages were severed or damaged. Additionally, the flash flood inundated the



Description of Impact

The municipality has developed the best practices for responding to floods, emphasizing the effective utilization of available resources and improved efficiency. Communities have received positive feedback on these efforts, which have optimized team assessment processes and ensured cooperation among various stakeholders, including community structures. Furthermore, partnerships between communities and the municipality have been fostered to respond not only to floods but also to security threats on open businesses, enhancing overall disaster response capabilities.

Lesson Learned

The experience has laid the foundation for established processes and methods to assess and implement immediate actions in times of crisis. It has underscored the importance of regularly evaluating infrastructure performance for better maintenance. Embracing a lifelong learning system and adaptability has become imperative. Recognizing the power of collaboration, partnership, and knowledge sharing as the best approach to addressing flooding or major disasters has been evident. Responses to disasters have emphasized the importance of catering to the needs and expectations of those affected. A key lesson learned is the necessity of proactive risk management to mitigate associated risks during incidents. This experience has demonstrated that informed decisions can be made promptly, highlighting the importance of providing quick feedback. Moving forward, there is a pressing need to identify risks, develop preventative strategies, and implement measures to mitigate the impact of disasters effectively.

Impact of good practice

The monitoring program underwent significant improvements, allowing for the proactive mitigation of potential risks. This initiative also facilitated the integration of social responsibility aspects, with dispatched teams providing services in affected areas, thereby benefiting the community. Furthermore, the team of experts contributed to enhancing the knowledge and experiences of less experienced members, thereby improving their skills and capabilities. This not only paved the way for career advancement but also fostered professional growth within the team.

Conclusion

The recent crisis has served as a catalyst for establishing robust processes and methods for assessing and implementing immediate actions during emergencies. It has highlighted the critical need for regular evaluation of infrastructure performance to ensure effective maintenance. Embracing lifelong learning and adaptability has become essential in navigating future challenges. Furthermore, the power of collaboration, partnership, and knowledge sharing has proven to be invaluable in addressing flooding and major disasters. Responses to disasters have emphasized the importance of prioritizing the needs of affected individuals. A crucial takeaway is the necessity of proactive risk management to mitigate associated risks promptly. This experience has demonstrated the feasibility of making informed decisions swiftly and providing timely feedback. Looking ahead, it is imperative to continue identifying risks, developing preventative strategies, and implementing measures to mitigate the impact of disasters efficiently.



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info@connective-cities.net
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