

CITY OF CAPE TOWN DISASTER MANAGEMENT CENTRE



The City of Cape Town Disaster Management Centre is strategically situated in Goodwood

Strategically situated in Goodwood, the City of Cape Town Disaster Management Centre was established in July 2005.



Head of the centre, Greg Pillay

The centre has 24-hour operation functionality and is staffed by three to four personnel per 12-hour shift. The most common incidents that are responded to are fires and floods. Disaster Management Journal visited the DMC and spoke to Greg Pillay, head of centre for the City of Cape Town Disaster Management Centre, to gain insight into the DMC's history, operational aspects and challenges.

History

"The centre came into being with my appointment as head of the Disaster Risk Management Centre of the Metropolitan City of Cape Town, on 1 July 2005," said Pillay. The building that constitutes the centre was officially opened on 10 October 2011, which fell on International Disaster Risk Reduction Day.

Cape Town became a Uicity in December 2000, which led to the amalgamation of the surrounding metropolitan local councils (MLCs) that included of the erstwhile City of Cape Town, ie Tygerberg Municipality,

Oostenberg Municipality, Helderberg Municipality, South Peninsula Municipality, Blaauwberg Municipality and the Cape Metropolitan Council (CMC) into the now City of Cape Town Metro.

Budget

"In the last financial year, the DMC had an operating budget of R111 million and a capital budget of R8,183 million," said Pillay.

The actual building of the centre was accomplished in various stages and on a piece meal basis over a period of three to five years. The total cost of the outlay for the building of DMC headquarters (HQ) at Goodwood amounted to R25 million. In addition to the DMC HQ at Goodwood, there are four decentralised area offices situated at the Civic Centre in the central business district (CBD) Cape Town (Area West), Brackenfell (Area North), Ottery (Area Central) and Melton Rose, Eersteriver (Area East) respectively. The training centre is situated at Alphen Centre, Constantia.

Organisational structure and staff

The organogram of the DMC consists of a flat structure of 83 staff members, with the head of the centre at the apex and 11 persons reporting to him. These 11 functionaries consist of four area heads and seven specialised portfolio heads. The area offices and specialised portfolio divisions consist of disaster management officials, emergency communicators, logistics personnel, finance and human resources administration personnel. There is in-house and on the job training as well as attendance of external training courses.

When asked whether he had enough competent staff for the incidents at hand, Pillay confirmed that the centre was adequately staffed.

As the head of the centre, Pillay is responsible for the coordination of disasters and emergencies and in terms of the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002, is charged with undertaking the powers and duties of a municipal disaster management centre.

Pillay started his career in the emergency services as an ambulanceman, with the Port Elizabeth Municipal Ambulance Service in 1977. He was part of the group that undertook the Ambulance Medical Assistant (AMA) Training in Cape Town in 1979, under the supervision of Dr Alan MacMahon, the erstwhile emergency services consultant for the then Cape Province. Following the expansion in the neighbouring Divisional Council Dias Ambulance Service, which later became the Algoa Regional



The team on duty: Gavin Gordon, Ilona Petersen, Llewellyn Stevens and Kim Schoon

Services Council, he progressed through the ranks as an officer to the appointment of deputy chief officer of the service in the early 1990s. He had in the interim commenced part-time studies through the University of Port Elizabeth, obtaining his BA Degree in Public Administration and Psychology in 1987 and his Honours Degree in Public Administration in 1988. He was appointed chief ambulance officer of the Cape Town Ambulance Service in 1996 and transferred to the post as the head of disaster management of the City of Cape Town in 1998. He obtained his Masters Degree in Public Management through the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in 2006.

“I have enjoyed an illustrious career in the emergency services and my background has equipped for my current position as head of centre,” said Pillay.

Operations

The disaster operation centre (DOC) is a 24/7 centre, resourced by emergency communicators that monitors emergency incidents taking place in the city that could escalate into disasters. At short notice, SMSs can be sent en masse to members of the disaster coordinating team (DCT), requiring their attendance to deal with a disaster at hand with the activation of the disaster operations centre (DOC). In addition, disaster management personnel are on call after normal office hours and can be activated according to the standby roster to respond to emergencies.

The centre’s headquarters at Goodwood consist of a suite of offices, a disaster operations centre comprising a tactical section and strategic section. This is complemented further with a large auditorium that can be utilised for briefing sessions or training or media conferences. In addition, there are boardrooms available that can be used for meetings or, in an event of emergencies/disasters, can serve as break-away rooms for specialised groupings to meet away from the plenary section.

The headquarters houses a logistics section that has equipment, vehicles, etc in storage at this facility as well as a decentralised facility at Ottery. ▶



Gavin Gordon and Ilona Petersen on shift, in the 24-hour disaster operations centre



Strategic disaster operations centre

- ▶ There are four satellite area offices, respectively at the Civic Centre in Cape Town CBD, Brackenfell, Ottery and Melton Rose in Eersteriver, as part of the decentralisation of staff resources, as well as a training centre at Alphen Centre in Constantia. Furthermore, the area office at Civic Centre Cape Town CBD is the Alternative Disaster Operation Centre, as part of contingency arrangements.

The DMC HQ at Goodwood is centralised and is close to the epicentre of Cape Town whilst the four satellite area offices provide decentralised facilities close to communities and businesses, as is the case for the training centre situated at Alphen Centre in Constantia that is situated in tranquil surroundings, ideal for the training environment.

The City of Cape Town DMC is fairly well resourced with 73 vehicles and 43 specialised trailers in its fleet. Specialised vehicles include two mobile onsite joint operation centres (JOCs) including one that has 4x4 wheel drive capability, 4x4 vehicles SUVs and LDVs, motorcycles, high-powered lighting plants, emergency generators, bilge pumps, fire fighting trailers, emergency signage trailers, etc.

Software

The centre will shortly be implementing the Emergency Policing Incident Control (EPIC) system, which is an electronic system that will allow for spacial recognition of emergency resources with computer aided dispatching within the city and enhance deployment of such resources.

Provision is made for backup hard copies, as well as an IT redundancy process, as part of the contingency arrangements.

Preparedness

“There are various hazard specific emergency plans and standard operating procedures (SOPs) to guide one in dealing with a disaster,” stated Pillay. “In addition, there are regular emergency exercises organised with multiple roleplayers to test and assess workability of these plans and where ▶



Personnel and fleet of DMC



The DMC's 111 seater auditorium

► necessary, adjust these plans and SOPs accordingly.”

Challenges

Cape Town is a growing Metropolis with in-migration that has led to the formation of large informal settlements in the City. These informal settlements are affected by the hazards of fires and floods. In addition, during the summer dry months, the hazard of wildfires exists.

Incidents

We asked Pillay to mention some of the notable incidents during which the centre was activated. “The tornado in 1999 affected 15 000 people. On 29 August 1999, a powerful tornado struck the Cape Flats causing damage along a path at least 1,6km long and 910m wide. Approximately 5 000 people were left homeless. In 2000 we experienced a major oil spill when The Treasure, a bulk carrier, sank in heavy seas off Cape Town, spilling at least 200 tons of heavy fuel oil. The incident severely affected two large breeding colonies of African penguins on Robben and Dassen Islands and resulted in the evacuation of 21 000 penguins that had to be cleaned.”

Another major incident was the Joe Slovo informal settlement fire on Saturday, 15 January 2005. Seven people, including two children, were seriously injured and thousands of houses destroyed leaving about 12 000 people homeless.

Interagency involvement

Stakeholders that are involved in the DMC includes all municipal departments within the City of Cape Town and external role players such

as Provincial Disaster Management, Koeberg Nuclear Power Station, Metro EMS, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), the South African Police Service (SAPS) and various national and provincial departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), etc.

Volunteers

The City of Cape Town has a proud legacy of maintaining an active disaster management volunteer corps over the years. There are currently over 400 active disaster management volunteers in service who are trained in first aid, fire fighting as well as other relevant training courses. The volunteers do weekend duty at functions and events and are activated during times of emergency for eg the

Cape Peninsula fires in March 2015 and the Somerset West floods in November 2013.

“They fill the gap with the multiplier effect by being a useful, trained resource that can be of assistance during times of emergency and so contribute towards building a resilient city. The 400 active volunteers are spread through 12 disaster management volunteer corps that are strategically situated throughout the city,” added Pillay.

Besides training, the volunteers are supplied with uniform, vehicles, equipment and be activated at short notice to respond to emergencies/disasters. Provision is also made for the supply of meals when they are on duty.

Over the last two financial years, ten disaster management volunteer facilities costing R1 million each were erected as a means to boost the morale of the volunteers, replacing previous, old facilities that were used. These disaster management facilities consist of a large meeting/training room with overhead projector and air-conditioning, kitchenette, ablution facilities, storeroom and office for the coordinator.

We asked Pillay what he would do better if he had the opportunity and he responded, “There is always the need to improving service delivery and reworking your SOPs to achieve maximum benefit for the organisation and the community it serves. The City of Cape Town Disaster Management Centre yields good results and has proven itself to date as a service rendering organisation. 🇷🇺



The kitchen and dining area of the auditorium