

ALARMSystem & toolbox

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BACKGROUND

Local governments are under increasing pressure to 'do more with less'. The current environment is one of constant legislative change and increasing devolution of powers to Councils. In addition, financial constraints and the *National Competition Policy* have reduced the resources available to provide services to the community. This has impacted on local government's ability to perform its core business, which includes regulatory compliance, enforcement and assessment functions.

Councils around Australia provide similar services to their community. Carrying out these roles requires the use of guidelines and procedures to interpret acts, regulations and local laws. Each Council is generally responsible for interpreting legislation and developing procedures for their staff to use. This can lead to inconsistency between Councils, especially when procedures become out of date or when legislation changes. In addition, staff within the same Council can have access to different information, which leads to inconsistent service delivery and confusion for the customers.

Costs are UP

Demand is UP

Resources are DOWN

WHAT IS ALARMS & TOOLBOX?

In 1998, Brisbane City Council has been using a risk-based framework called **ALARMS** (Alarm & Risk Management System) aimed at managing workloads for Councils to use in approvals, and complaint management processes across a range of service types. The framework has assisted in estimating (based on risk) the requirement for the frequency of inspections, development of checklists, service levels for managing workloads and documentation for responding complaints.

Flexible **software** that fits easily into any organisation

A web-based software product called the **Toolbox** has also been developed to provide staff with consistent documentation and procedures to assist them to do their job. In South-East Queensland, it is envisaged that the Toolbox would be hosted on the Internet as a one-stop-shop for Councils to access consistent information.

A question commonly asked by the community is 'why should Councils deal with the same issue differently?'

The Toolbox would reduce the apparent inconsistencies the community perceives and acts as a regional collaboration and knowledge-sharing tool.

Risk-based prioritisation of work

Flexible **software** that fits easily into any organisation

WHY THE CHANGE?

There have been a number of key drivers for change, including:

- Increases in population, development activity and population density, which in turn leads to increased impacts on individuals and the community.
- Improved understanding of health and environmental risks faced by the community, and how best to resolve them.
- Increased public reliance on government agencies to solve problems regardless of scale.
- Increased community awareness of rights and less tolerance of perceived violations.
- Lack of strategic approach to prioritise complaints and requests for licences and approvals.
- Financial constraints and available resources within Councils.

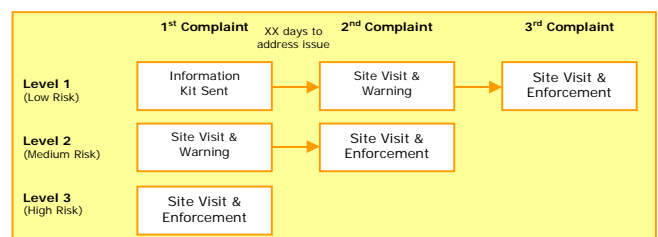
WHAT IS THE RISK FRAMEWORK?

A risk management framework is the development of a methodology to determine the level of risk, and hence the priority of Council's response to issues. Simply put, a risk framework assists in 'focusing efforts on what is important for Council and the community.' In order to determine the appropriate process for managing complaint, the following criteria are now considered:

1. Complaint **Risk Rating**. (how serious is the issue if not attended to? - life threatening, etc).
2. Previous complaint **History**. (and previous actions taken - should we go straight to court?)
3. If the complaint is about a licensed premises, the premises 'Risk Rating' type, **Last Inspection Date** and **Compliance Status** are also considered.

Within the framework there are several options for response dependant on risk rating:

- Information kit and advisory letter.
- Site visit and warning. (eg. notice)
- Site visit and enforcement. (eg. on-the-spot fine, prosecution)
- No further action letter.



FLOW CHART - RISK RATING & ACTION BENEFITS REALISED

The Environmental Health area of Brisbane City Council and Gold Coast City Council has already adopted the framework to manage their workload issues. To date, implementation of the concept has resulted in:

- clearer processes, defined standards of service and improved decision-making tools,
- faster, more consistent and targeted decisions resulting in better outcomes,
- improved staff, organisation and customer satisfaction,
- integrated, consistent and complete customer information with better management of expectations,
- methodology and learning's that can be applied to extend risk management to other areas,
- resources shifted from lower risk services to high-risk services due to the development of tools to manage low risk issues,
- a more proactive rather than a reactive approach.

DISCIPLINE AREAS COVERED

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Example - Noise Complaints

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An initial (1st) complaint generates a **letter & fact sheet** sent to both the offender and complainant advising them of the requirements, outlining how they can manage the issue and encouraging them to resolve it themselves. A subsequent (2nd+) complaint after a period of 21 days requires an officer to **visit the site** and take enforcement action.

Previously, officers would have attended 100% of complaints. However, in the first 12 months there was a total of 1016 initial complaints and a subsequent 260 complaints received. This is a **75% reduction** and equates to a saving of approximately 1 full time staff member to be reinvested into higher risk activities.

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Within Brisbane City Council, the risk model has been applied to a range of regulatory and compliance areas. These functions include Environmental Health, Development Compliance, Building, Plumbing and Signs. In addition, the Development Assessment Section has begun identifying the areas in assessment to which the risk management framework can be applied.

Initially, this has focussed on improving the integration between assessment and compliance through risk-based case management of those development matters that are focused on important community outcomes.

The Gold Coast City Council is also working through their Regulatory Services area (with the Brisbane City Council) to look at functions such as animal management, parking and general local law enforcement. Other interested Councils may have specific areas that they have developed a strong interest or expertise in and would add value to the content of the Toolbox.

South East QLD Partnership Approach

Brisbane City Council and Gold Coast City Council believes that the ALARMSystem and Toolbox can benefit Councils across the South East Queensland (SEQ) region and potentially the state by assisting to manage increasing workloads and resource constraints. The Toolbox has been made with the core content being 'generic' (little or no change required) to ensure that the SEQ region is consistent in interpretation and application of our legislative responsibilities.

In order to do this, Brisbane City Council and the Gold Coast City Council been undertaking a **partnership approach** across the SEQ region, which is aimed at:

- working together for common goals across the region,
- increasing certainty for business via consistent approaches,
- reducing costs via maintenance of one system for most Councils,
- influencing state government policy,
- sharing key knowledge and learning's,
- collaboration on the development of new technologies,
- providing opportunities to participate in commercial development.

REALLY IMPORTANT TAKE HOME MESSAGES

Councils (and other government organisations) are required to do more with less. **ALARMS** enables organisations to identify what is important to them and allocate resources accordingly. The **Toolbox** provides simple access to procedures and other tools to ensure staff are undertaking services consistently and effectively.

DOES THIS INTEREST YOU?

The ALARMSystem and Toolbox reflects Council's need to focus resources on high-risk matters, while better managing the lower risk work through the application of a range of tools. If you are interested in knowing more about these products and are a Council organisation in SEQ region, please contact either of the presenters for more information. However, if you are from an organisation outside the SEQ region (or not a Council), please contact:

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