



A Natural Hazard Guide For Cairns Accommodation Providers



Plan, Pack, Listen

More information: www.cairns.qld.goc.au/disaster
Disaster Management Unit (non-emergencies) 4044 3377



Introduction

Disaster may strike any community at any time. Most people tend to think of the natural disasters most likely to occur in their area, such as a cyclone or flood, but other natural hazards or events, such as a disease outbreak or violent threat to a community, are also possible. Thinking “it would never happen here” is not an effective strategy for being prepared!

This guide aims to help accommodation providers in the Cairns region be better prepared for any disaster that arises. It is based on experience of previous disasters in the region and ongoing community engagement in disaster resilience. It provides basic information to help accommodation providers be ready for a disaster and develop a suitable response.



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Responsibilities

Building disaster resilience is an ongoing process and the responsibility of all Queenslanders. Resilience in businesses and key industries is critical to minimise the impact of disasters on communities and the Queensland economy.

By ensuring they understand their exposure to disaster risks and have prepared continuity plans, businesses are able to reduce adverse impacts, recover more effectively from disasters and continue to provide services and employment to affected communities.

Visitors to the area will naturally be anxious in the face of an emergency and will look to you for assistance. As the operator of a commercial business, taking all practical steps to keep clients safe in a disaster is your responsibility. Even if you're only providing a couple of rooms for visitors, your emergency plan needs to include their safety.

The over-arching approach to community disaster response in the Cairns region is self help. While emergency management agencies have a responsibility to advise and support communities, residents are expected to take the recommended basic actions to look after themselves, their households and businesses.

In practice this means knowing what to do and having the capability to do it in an emergency. Help is obviously available when it is genuinely needed and specific arrangements are in place for our most vulnerable communities.



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Disaster management arrangements in Cairns

The Disaster Management Act 2003 forms the legislative basis for the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements (QDMA). The Act provides for establishment of disaster management groups at state, disaster district and local government level and also provides the legislative basis for preparing plans, guidelines, disaster declarations, establishing the SES and community information.

Queensland's disaster management arrangements are based on partnerships between government, government-owned corporations, non-government organisations, commerce and industry sectors and local communities. The arrangements provide for each level of the disaster management arrangements working collaboratively to effectively coordinate everything necessary for comprehensive disaster management.

The principal structures that make up Queensland's disaster management arrangements are:

- Disaster management groups operating at local, district and state levels, responsible for planning, organisation, coordination and implementation of all measures to mitigate/prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.
- Coordination centres at local, district and state level to support disaster management groups to coordinate the information, resources and services necessary for disaster operations.
- State government functional agencies that manage and coordinate the responsibilities of the state government and state government threat-specific agencies.



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Local government and local disaster management groups

The functions of a local government under the Disaster Management Act include:

- *Ensuring it has a disaster response capability.*
- *Approving its local disaster management plan (the Cairns Local Disaster Management Plan).*
- *Ensuring information about an event or a disaster in its area is promptly given to the District Disaster Coordinator.*

Local government is best situated to provide first-hand knowledge and understanding of social, economic, infrastructure and environmental issues within communities and ideally placed to support communities from a disaster management perspective. This is achieved through local disaster management groups (LDMGs) that coordinate the local government disaster response.

LDMGs are responsible for:

- *Developing, regularly reviewing and assessing effective disaster management.*
- *Assisting local government to prepare a local disaster management plan.*
- *Ensuring communities are aware of ways to mitigate the adverse effects of an event and prepare for, respond to and recover from a disaster.*
- *Identifying and coordinating use of resources that may be used for disaster operations.*

The mayor, or another elected member of the local government council, chairs an LDMG.

The Cairns LDMG meets monthly during the wet season and every two months the rest of the year.

Cairns Regional Council Disaster Management Unit

The Cairns Regional Council's disaster management team works year round on preparedness, awareness and management. It is based at the Cairns Local Disaster Coordination Centre in Woree, which becomes the centre of the LDMG's coordinated disaster response (activation). The local disaster coordination centre is not a public shelter nor a place of refuge.

It's a disaster! How and when?

A declaration of a disaster situation under the Queensland Disaster Management Act (2003) provides special powers to the District Disaster Coordinator and declared disaster officers. This declaration enables coordination of resources and services to manage the situation.

If the disaster event impact is significant, it may trigger activation of the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA). The NDRRA provides for jointly funded state/Australian government financial assistance to communities affected by eligible disaster events. In the days following a disaster, people who are unable to meet immediate essential needs for temporary accommodation, food, clothing and medication may be eligible for financial assistance. Immediate hardship assistance is available as a contribution to support people directly impacted by a disaster to meet their immediate essential needs for food, clothing, medical supplies or temporary accommodation. Other support and assistance such as psychological first aid counselling may also be provided.



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Disasters and procedures

The following pages describe the types of disasters and the specific response procedures for the Cairns region. These may be different to neighbouring areas, no matter how close. If you run operations in other local government areas you will need to check on arrangements specific to that location.

Note that these guidelines provide advice on preparation for disasters and the immediate response to help protect life and property. You will need a separate plan for actions and recovery after the immediate threat has passed.

Basic preparation and procedures

- Have a comprehensive emergency preparedness plan that covers all the hazards likely to affect your property/business.
- Know how you will communicate with your guests, particularly if rapid action is required. How will the situation be explained to people who do not speak English or have a hearing impairment?
- Where will you go and how will you get there if you need to evacuate the property? The most practical option may be to make a pre-arrangement with an alternative provider, remembering you may not have much time to get there and may have a large number of guests. If there is a long warning period your plan may be to move your guests out of the area completely.
It may be most effective to also have a pre-arrangement with a transport provider.
- How will you look after your guests for a minimum of three days if infrastructure, supplies or your property are significantly affected?

More information is available in the resources section of this guide.



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Tropical cyclones

We may experience one or more cyclones during the wet season (November-April). In the Cairns region evacuation is advised only if a threat of storm tide surge accompanies a cyclone – not for wind alone. The Bureau of Meteorology advises if a storm tide surge is expected. Public information about this and associated safety advice is issued widely (see Warnings and Alerts section).

Steps you need to take:

- If you do not already know, check whether your location is in a storm tide zone (coloured red, orange or yellow). You can search by address for free here: <http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/community-information/cyclone-emergency-information/tools/property-search> or through our maps, or by contacting the disaster management unit.
- Note that these maps only apply to inundation occurring through a storm tide surge associated with a cyclone. They are different to maps showing flood inundation from events such as heavy rain, rapidly rising rivers, or a combination of factors, or very high tides (see the next section).
- If the property is in a storm tide surge zone, you will need an evacuation plan that includes moving your guests to “higher ground” and self-sufficiency for up to three days. You cannot bring all your guests to a public storm tide cyclone shelter. These are places of last resort for people with absolutely no other option and have very limited capacity. People who do not need to be there will be turned away.
- If your premises were built before the mid-1980s and a cyclone of Category 3 or above is predicted, your best option is to make similar arrangements.
- If you’re located in premises built after the mid-1980s and are not in a storm tide surge zone, your best option is to stay where you are – shelter in place. Follow the advice provided on our website, taking into account the number of guests you need to move and/or shelter.



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Flooding

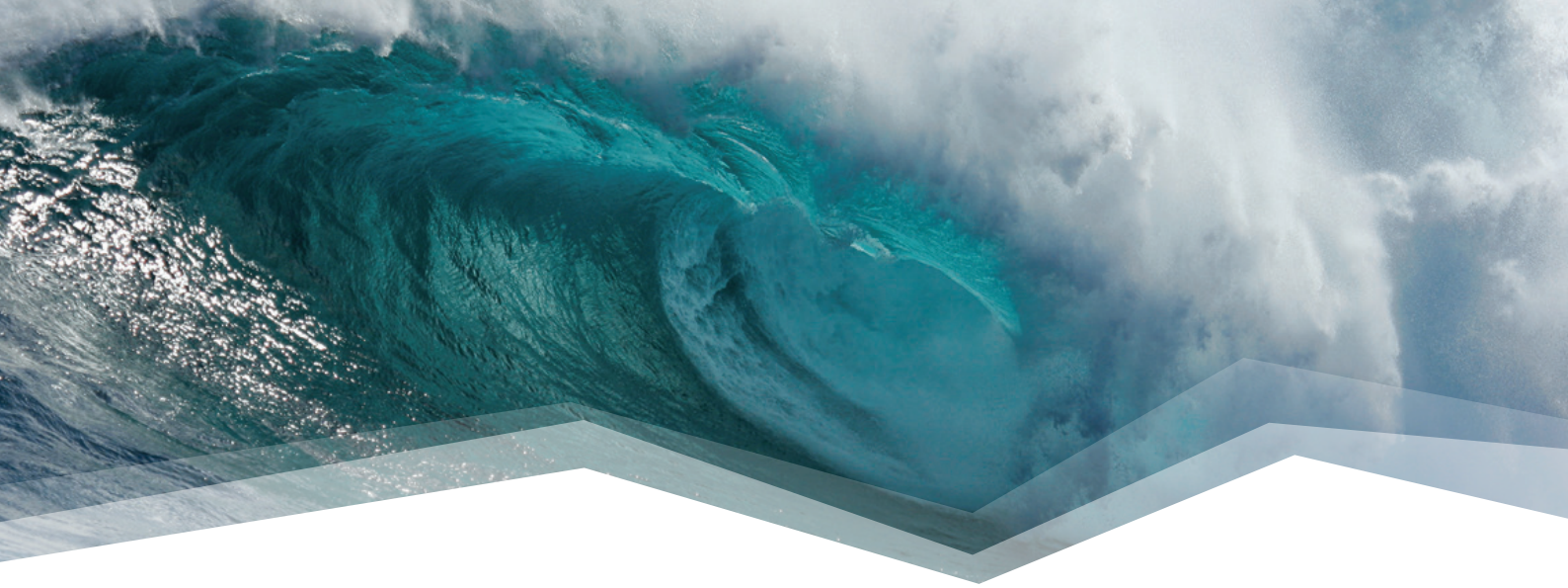
We may experience flooding at any time of year, although it is more likely during times of higher rainfall – typically our wet season (November-April). In the Cairns region we have flash floods, where water levels rise very rapidly and usually recede rapidly. Floods may happen in association with cyclones (un-related to storm tide surge although they may occur in combination), because of “tropical depressions” or as a result of heavy rain in higher catchments, such as the Tablelands. Heavy rain may occur in some parts of the region and not others, so specific early warnings are not always possible. Rivers may also rise extremely quickly with little notice. The power of floodwaters should not be underestimated and all warnings must be taken seriously.

Steps you need to take

- If you do not already know, check whether your business is in a flood-prone area. General maps are available through the CairnsPlan 2016 by using the layer options provided:
<http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/building-planning-and-infrastructure/planning-schemes/cairnsplan2016/interactive-mapping>, or
<http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/building-planning-and-infrastructure/drains/maps>
Or you can request a specific property search for a fee:
http://www.cairns.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/9103/LandRecordSearch.pdf
- Depending on your location and the likely severity of flooding, you will need a response plan that includes possible evacuation (even if this is to higher floors or from certain rooms or areas) and ways to mitigate other threats to life and property (eg sandbagging, moving items to higher locations). Do not rely on anecdotal advice such as “the area has never flooded before” or “it was only a little bit of flooding”. If you have a plan to evacuate your guests from your premises, follow the same advice as for tropical cyclones.
- Consider how emergency supplies for clients will be provided. Personal items can be carried by guests themselves in a backpack or small bag.
- Be sure your plan covers self-sufficiency for up to three days. Even if you do not suffer major damage, you could be isolated by flooding and/or infrastructure could be affected, such as loss of power or water contamination. Critical supplies include drinking water, non-perishable food, lighting (eg torches), battery-operated radios, toiletry and sanitary supplies and cash.



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Tsunami

The Cairns region can be affected by a tsunami. Although the Great Barrier Reef is likely to mitigate the effects, it will not stop a tsunami. A tsunami could also be generated inside the reef and reach the region with little warning. While it is less likely to affect us than some other natural hazards, a tsunami that does not sound particularly threatening can produce extremely powerful, dangerous waves.

Steps you need to take

- Use the tsunami maps at www.cairns.qld.gov.au/natural-disasters/tsunami to determine whether you are in an area likely to be affected by a tsunami.
- Ensure your response plan provides for rapid evacuation to higher ground. Check nearest evacuation routes, methods and options. Remember there may only be a few hours' warning, so guests will need to move quickly. As a lot of people are likely to be moving at one time, the most effective way to evacuate may be on foot. Clients can carry their most important personal supplies in a small bag or backpack that stays with them. Do not try to take clients up the range roads or to Copperlode Dam.
- If you have multiple floors your quickest option may be to move everyone upwards, remembering the integrity of lower floors could be compromised by the tsunami.
- Plan how you will manage your clients' return to your location, depending on the impact of the tsunami.
- Follow the same steps as for flooding, in terms of providing for clients should infrastructure be affected. It could be several days before emergency supplies are available.



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Earthquake

Although we do not have records of Cairns being severely affected by earthquakes, they are still a significant potential hazard for the Cairns region with many occurring around the area since records began. The impact of an earthquake depends on its depth as well as rating or magnitude from 1-10 (1 may not be noticeable to 10 causing significant damage) and proximity to inhabited areas.

We may receive little if any warning of an impending earthquake – it's possible you may feel it before emergency services know it's going to happen. Earthquakes can occur at any time of day and any time of year. They are sometimes preceded by stillness and sounds such as rolling or rumbling. You could feel a jolt or series of jolts of varying intensities or a rolling sensation. Items may fall from the ceiling, walls or out of cupboards, the water in toilets may slosh around, and walls may crack if the shock is severe. The electricity may go out and sprinkler or fire alarm systems may turn on.

Steps you need to take

Indoors

- How will staff and guests take immediate cover? For instance, under a sturdy table, bed or other piece of furniture or doorway. People need to hold onto this until the shaking stops. Otherwise, curl into a tight ball and protect their face and head.
- Keep everyone away from glass, windows, outside doors and walls and anything that could fall.
- Stay inside until the shaking stops; there may be aftershocks.
- Don't use lifts.
- Follow any instructions from emergency services.

Outdoors

- If people are already outside, advise them to stay outside and move away from buildings, streetlights and utility wires.
- Stay in the open until the shaking stops.
- Follow any instructions from emergency services.

Guests and staff need to know that if they become trapped:

- Not to light a match or use a lighter
- Keep still
- Cover their mouth with a handkerchief or clothing
- Tap on a pipe or wall or call out
- Call 000 if a mobile phone is available or try 112 if 000 does not work



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Landslip

Landslips can injure people and animals and damage property, as well as interfere with supplies and isolate communities. The largest recorded event in the Cairns region is the 1951 Ellis Beach debris flows, which buried 10km of the Captain Cook Highway. Many smaller landslips have occurred around the region since records began in the late 1870s.

If a landslip is imminent or underway, you may notice changes in and around the property such as:

- Leaning trees, slumping earth, movement in fences or trees and cracks in paths
- Outside walls may start to pull away from the building, new cracks appear in plaster, tile, brick or foundations, doors or windows stick for the first time.
- You may hear a rumbling sound which increases as the landslip nears. A trickle of falling mud or debris may precede a larger slip.
- If you are in a hillslope area and there has been a period of heavy rain, you may be at risk of a landslip.

Emergency services may have little or no warning of a landslip. Steps you need to take

- Check whether your location is in a hillslopes area as these areas are more likely to be affected by landslip. Is there steep or rocky land nearby or a history of landslips? You can check CairnsPlan 2016 to get a general idea, or pay for a limited town planning certificate through Cairns Regional Council.
- Be aware of the signs described above. If it is safe to do so, leave the area and go quickly to your identified alternate location. Advise neighbours and emergency services of the slip threat.
- If you cannot leave, move to a second storey if there is one. Otherwise people should curl into a tight ball and protect their head.
- Follow any instructions from emergency services.

After a landslip

- Be alert for emergency information or instructions.
- Stay away from the slip area - there may be danger of additional slips.
- Watch for flooding, which may occur after a landslip, or debris flow.
- Check for injured and trapped people near the slip, without entering the slip area.
- Look for and report broken utility lines, damaged roads etc.
- Seek help from emergency authorities as needed.



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Wild fire

There are many wild fire hazard zones around our region. If your location has a lot of vegetation nearby, you may be in one of these zones. Alternatively, seasonal burning may occur near you as a way of mitigating fire risk. Fires can start and spread rapidly and are often unpredictable. If there is a long spell of hot, dry weather and it's windy, the fire risk increases. Generally the fire season in Far North Queensland is through the winter ("dry" season) and spring months. It is important to take fire warnings seriously, even if you believe or have been told they don't happen in Cairns. If you are in or near a wild fire hazard zone, your emergency plan needs to include suitable procedures. Information about fire risk and fire danger periods will be issued by fire authorities as required.

Steps you need to take

- Find out whether your property is in or near a wild fire hazard zone. You can get general information from CairnsPlan 2016 maps or more detailed information from the Queensland Fire and Emergency Service.
- Keep grass cut and vegetation clear of the property.
- Identify locations well away from wild fire hazard zones that provide alternatives for quickly evacuating guests. Do not use locations at higher ground. Fire can move and change direction very quickly, particularly uphill.
- Be aware of what fire warnings mean. If fire danger levels are rising in your area, information will be broadcast on all usual media and websites such as Rural Fire Service Queensland and Cairns Regional Council. If a prescribed burn is going to happen near your area, you'll be told directly ahead of time via letter or property visit.
- If lives or property are threatened, you'll receive Advice, Watch and Act or Emergency warning messages. An Advice message tells you a fire has started and provides general information to keep you updated. A Watch and Act message represents a higher level of threat such as conditions are changing, a fire is approaching, or lives may be threatened. An Emergency Warning is the highest level message advising of impending danger and may be preceded by the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS). With any fire warning, follow instructions immediately.

After the fire front has passed

- Wait until the all-clear has been given by local emergency services before leaving your safe area.
- People may need a face mask or to cover their mouth with a hanky, flannel or clothing.
- Check around the property for live electricity, leaking gas, sewage leaks, hot embers, overhanging trees or branches, or structural damage.
- If unsure about the safety of the property, seek advice from local emergency services. Don't take risks.



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warning noun
Advice to be
warning

Warnings and Alerts

In a major emergency, information will be issued through all available media channels. This includes television, newspapers, email lists, radio and social media as well as loud-hailer announcements and door knocking. You and your guests may receive emergency alerts through landline and mobile phones.

Mobile phone users in affected areas will receive a text or SMS from a number starting with the number 4. You cannot opt out or reply to this number. The message will provide basic information on the nature of the emergency, the area affected and what to do. A voice message may be sent to landline phones, beginning with the words "Emergency, emergency, this is an emergency." The Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) may be used. The signal is a way of alerting people to stop what they're doing and immediately seek more information. It does not automatically mean a cyclone – it could be any other hazard – nor that evacuation is needed.

Your emergency plans need to include communication methods for clients who don't speak English or have trouble understanding it. This could include people who have hearing or vision impairments. Basic warning messages in a range of languages may be broadcast on ABC Radio Far North and Cairns Community Radio. Bumma Bippera Media may also use indigenous languages. In an emergency requiring activation, Auslan translators will be used.

You should only follow advice and information from the Cairns Local Disaster Coordination Centre, or other Cairns-based emergency authorities. Council web pages and the disaster management Facebook and Twitter sites will provide ongoing updates in emergency situations.

Radio is the primary source of public information in a disaster. Broadcasts will continue around the clock on ABC. It is therefore critical that your emergency supplies include a battery-operated radio. In the case of hazards occurring on a more minor scale or at a localised level, information will also be available from the Cairns Disaster Management Unit.



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Information sources and contacts

Cairns Local Disaster Coordination Centre www.cairns.qld.gov.au/disaster	4044 3377
Facebook www.facebook.com/CairnsDCC Twitter @CairnsDCC	
Bureau of Meteorology www.bom.gov.au	
QLD Tropical Cyclone Warnings:	1300 659 212
QLD Land Weather and Flood Warnings:	1300 659 219
QLD Coastal Marine Warnings:	1300 360 427
Australian Tsunami Threat Information (1300 TSUNAMI)	1300 878 6264
QLD General Warnings (call costs apply)	1900 969 922
Rural Fire Old Cairns Ruralfire.qld.gov.au/map.html	4042 5468
Transport and Main Roads tmr.qld.gov.au/Travel-and-transport.aspx	131 940
Ergon Ergon.com.au/network/outages-and-disruptions	131 670
Telstra servicestatus.telstra.com	132 203
Radio Stations ABC Far North - 801AM, 95.5FM, 106.7FM Cairns Community Radio - 89.1FM Bumma Bipperra Media - 98.7FM	
LIFE-THREATING EMERGENCIES	000 (112 for mobiles)
SES (national number)	132 500



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Resources

All disaster preparedness resources provided by the Cairns Regional Council are free and downloadable (except the Braille Preparing for Cyclones guide). Hard copies of all council resources are available through your nearest council office or service centre or by contacting the Cairns Disaster Management Unit on **4044 3377**.

Cairns Regional Council Disaster Preparedness web pages

www.cairns.qld.gov.au/disaster

Don't Risk It – Tourism Australia

www.tourismnt.com.au/en/industry-resources/tourism-resource-guide/resilience-kit

Weatherproof Your Business – Tourism Queensland

www.tourismqueensland.net/resource-centre/industry-assistance/risk-management/weatherproof-your-business/weather-proof-your-business_home.cfm

Business Roundtable Extend – Volunteering Queensland

www.emergencyvolunteering.com.au/home/your-community/menu/resources

Get Ready Queensland – Queensland Government

<https://getready.qld.gov.au/>



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Disaster Preparation Checklist

The following checklist should be considered for each type of event:

- How to prepare the property for an on-coming incident, eg. an approaching tropical cyclone, wildfire, flood, tsunami, earthquake or landslip.
- Identify who is in charge of managing the response if an emergency arises and/or an evacuation is needed.
- Identify evacuation routes and emergency assembly sites.
- Identify your trigger points (for relocation/evacuation).
- Identify alternative locations and transport options for guests.
- Identify how and who will communicate with employees and guests if an emergency occurs, including people with disabilities and special needs.
- Identify how and who will check that equipment, records and other assets are safe.
- Have a first-aid kit (or several) and advise employees and clients of location.
- Identify staff who have first-aid qualifications and train further staff if necessary.
- Have a list of telephone numbers and addresses of all staff members.
- Identify which staff have the skills to help you in an emergency and who you can rely on to react calmly and professionally.
- Talk to emergency service providers such as police, fire, SES and ambulance services to find out what they will want you to do if an incident happens.
- Identify how you will receive warning messages and be kept informed.

The outcomes of these tasks should be written down to form your emergency plan. Everyone who works at or visits your business should be aware of your emergency management procedures, even if it is only reading the emergency procedures on the back of their door in their room (see suggested format). Planning is a continuous process. To be effective in an emergency, plans must be regularly checked, tested and updated as conditions in your business and environment change.



CHECKLIST

Guest check sheet

Be prepared for emergencies

Visitors should be aware of the potential for natural disasters such as tropical cyclones, storm surge, floods, earthquakes, landslips, tsunamis and wild fires to affect the Cairns region.

You should immediately follow the advice of local government emergency information, your accommodation managers and Cairns emergency services.

You may hear a warning siren or receive a mobile phone message from a number with a series of 4s.

Ask management what to do. Do not rely on public information from anyone except Cairns emergency services.

If asked to prepare an emergency kit, use a small pack or other bag that is easy to carry these items:

- Water
- Snacks
- Medication
- Basic toiletries
- Torch/flashlight
- Cash
- Important documents (eg passport, tickets, insurance information)
- Special needs, eg for infants, people with disabilities
- Phone/tablet
- Book
- A change of clothes
- Wear practical clothes and strong shoes.