

DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL PROTECTION

MAJOR INCIDENTS REPORT

2003



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

For disaster managers the year 2003 was quite challenging as quite a number of serious disasters were experienced. The following are some of the major incidents that were experienced:

Incident	Date
Dete Train Disaster	1st Feb 2003
Cyclone Japhet	Started 27 th Feb 2003
Shurugwi Bus accident	18 th Sep 2003
Selous Bus Accident	30 th Sept 2003
Plumtre Bus accident	1 st October 2003
Bata Fire Incident	26 th Sept 2003
Chimanimani Forestry Fire	October 2003
Matopos National Park Fire incident	2 nd - 15 th
Kadoma Hail Storm	October 2003
	26 th Dec 2003

Fig 1.

2.0 DETE TRAIN DISASTER

Dete Train disaster of 1st February 2003 gave a devastating blow to families of victims and the country as a whole. Un specified number of people died with 38 bodies positively identified and 97 victims injured.

At about 0200 hrs on Saturday 1st February 2003, two NRZ trains collided head on at the 6Km peg from Dete town. One was a goods train laden with coal and empty fuel tankers among other goods. It was heading to Bulawayo from Hwange. The other was a passenger train carrying an estimated 1450 passengers from Bulawayo heading for Hwange and Victoria Falls.

2.1 Disaster Impact



Fig 2 (some of the remains of NRZ locomotives)

As a result of this accident, an unknown number of people died with 38 bodies positively identified and

ninety-seven others injured. The collision was so massive that the two locomotives were destroyed. Ten of the nineteen coaches caught fire as well as two wagons carrying coal. The resultant flames and smoke engulfed the ten coaches leading to the fatalities. The rapid spread of the fire suggests that some of the passengers may have been carrying fuel on board.

2.2 Response

ZRP received the initial call at 0220hrs and were at the scene by 0245hrs. The Hwange Civil Protection Committee was activated and response came from Bulawayo Fire Brigade, Hwange Colliery Fire brigade, ZRP, ZNA, Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe, Victoria Falls Fire Brigade as well as Department of Parks & Wildlife, Mission Hospital, ambulance Services and Non Governmental Organisations.

Ninety-seven were hospitalised due to a variety of injuries ranging from multiple compound fractures to burns and other injuries

2.3 Declaration of State Of Disaster

The accident was formally declared a State of Disaster in terms of the provisions of the Civil Protection Act. The Dete Disaster Fund was launched on the 4th of February 2003 due to the demand by well-wishers wishing to assist the victims.

The Government through the Department of Civil Protection spend in excess of Z\$2million for coffins, food, transportation, accommodation, air freight, fuel and other incidentals

Transport to ferry the deceased and their relatives was obtained from the Government, DDF, NRZ, Hwange Colliery, ZESA and Local authorities.

The Zambian nationals who were also on board were transported to Livingstone following a request by the Zambian High Commissioner

2.4 Identification of bodies

Identification of bodies was a problem in that some bodies were charred beyond recognition. Some victims had no identification cards on them. A Government pathologist and three forensic experts were on the ground to assist with the identification process.

Their task was very difficult given the status of the charred bodies.

2.5 Psychological Support

The Ministry of Health offered counsellors to provide psychological support to both victims and

those involved in the rescue operations in order to minimise post - traumatic stress. The Department of Civil Protection facilitated the team materially and financially. In addition, other psychologists were hired from a private company to provide counselling services.

Incidents such as the Dete Train Disaster inflict both physical stress and psychological trauma to victims and rescuers alike. Clinical psychologists were therefore engaged in the management of the emergency to cater for the often-ignored psychological aspects of disasters

2.6 National Railways of Zimbabwe inquiry

The National Railways of Zimbabwe was tasked to carry out an internal inquiry, which had to grapple with the observations made at the scene of the accident. Some of these related to the following;

- The signal and communication systems which appeared to be poor ie inability of train drivers to communicate with one another.
- The policy on allowing passengers to carry fuel in board,
- The absence of waybill for passengers.
- The serviceability of the rail tracks.
- The recurrence of accidents on this route.
- Disregard of recommendations of reports from previous accidents.
- Absence of training programmes for railway staff which seem to compromise safety.

2.7 Lessons Learnt Seminar

In order to learn more from the incident, the Department of Civil Protection organised for a lessons learnt workshop. The workshop came up with very critical recommendations in an endeavour to harness an upsurge in incidents involving National Railways wagons.

2.8 Recommendations

- Need for NRZ to collaborate with National Social security authority to allow for an independent critical analysis of NRZ operations,
- NRZ to redouble their efforts in exploring for possible sources of foreign currency for the procurement of vital safety equipment that are urgently required,
- National Railways of Zimbabwe need to enforce searches for flammable substances at all pick up points and the general public should be sensitised to assist on same,

- NRZ and Ministry of Transport should charge deterrent fines against those who take flammable substances on board
- National Railways of Zimbabwe should coordinate with District Civil Protection Committees and revamp disaster management systems and their Emergency Preparedness and Response plans,
- There is urgent need for NRZ to rely on the most recommended and efficient signalling system rather than relying on the human element,
- NRZ should maintain and sign post access roads to allow for speedy intervention during emergencies / disasters,
- National Railways to revamp water points along the railway line / access roads,
- NRZ to produce comprehensive directional maps of the railway net works and mark all related vital utilities,
- The District Civil Protection Committees should review and update their EPR plans and test them. The committees should also incorporate and coordinate councilors and psychologists in their existing plans,
- Need for prompt psychological support services to disaster victims and responders,
- Need for standard guidelines for the psychological support services,
- Need for community awareness on the importance of psychological support services,
- Need to make a follow up of the Mental Health Policy bill,
- The need for all sectors to consider adoption of psychological support services function,
- Provision of food and safe drinking water to disaster scenes should be well coordinated and systematic,
- There is need for a systematic and well coordinated body retrieval system in order to minimise loss of identity,
- Need for mobile first Aid facilities,
- Public transporters require first Aid training,
- Local Authorities should play an active role in mobilising resources,
- NRZ should consider redouble their efforts on breathalyzers,
- Need for NRZ to consider listing of passengers on board

3.0 CYCLONE JAPHET

Just as Zimbabwe was bracing itself for yet another successive drought, with most rainfall stations continuing to accumulate precipitation deficits

since the beginning of the year, a blessing in disguise manifested itself to the country, in form of Tropical Cyclone Japhet. Why a disguised blessing—because the relief that it brought to the country as a whole, far outweighed (excluding human death, which is not measurable) the suffering and economic loss that it brought along with it.

Drought was biting deeper; pastures were dwindling fast, with about 35,000 head of cattle in the Matabeleland region of southern Zimbabwe having died in the first three months of 2003. Crops were wilting, with a considerable percentage already on the verge of permanent wilting stage. Dam levels were critical with the authorities running the capital City of Harare considering water rationing. Food aid had become the order of the day, especially in the rural areas. Then, unexpectedly the Met Office announced that Tropical Cyclone Japhet was on its way to Zimbabwe and would start affecting the country in two days' time. Despite the heavy rains and floods expected over the southeast and central parts of the country, destruction was going to be minimal and far lower than the magnitude attained by Tropical Cyclone Eline in 2000, the Met office warned the public during the News Hour bulletin on ZTV.

Tropical Cyclone Japhet was formed on the 27th of February 2003 in central Mozambique Channel. It then slowly tracked westwards to make landfall over the Mozambique coast on the 2nd of March. It continued tracking further westwards and by the time it reached Zimbabwe on the 3rd, it had rapidly diminished in intensity, in terms of its wind circulation but continued to produce high rainfall intensities. When the centre of Tropical Cyclone was located near Gutu on the 4th, it had already been downgraded to a depression, which, according to tropical cyclone classifications, is far less intense than a cyclone and was therefore referred to as ex Tropical Cyclone Japhet. It however continued, up to the 6th, to produce high rainfall amounts, which were in form of showers and general thunderstorms in Masvingo, Midlands South, Manicland South and parts of Mashonaland East. Of note during this period were Masvingo, which received as much as 204 mm, Rupike 172mm, and Zaka 129mm in a matter of 24 hours. In some cases, the amount of rainfall received at the rainfall stations in 24 hours, was as much as a quarter of the total rainfall for the season.

Within these four days, Japhet induced floods killed eight people in southern Zimbabwe. Considerable but not nationally significant amount of crops, livestock as well as homes were lost in the flooding especially in eastern Zimbabwe. On the whole, Japhet left the nation with a sigh of relief as, many dams were spilling, crops were showing signs of

recovery and pasture had recovered tremendously. International Food Aid agencies as well as the Government, who had rushed to avert the looming disaster, especially in rural areas, were forced to reassign their men to the fields, so as to reassess the situation, in the hope of revising their food need figures downwards, to harmonize with the new levels which had been set by **Tropical Cyclone Japhet**.

4.0 ROAD TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS

4.1 Shurugwi Bus Accident

Twelve (12) people died in a tragic accident, which occurred between Takesure and Harrison bus and the Road Motor Transport haulage lorry on 18th September 2003 in Shurugwi.

In a press statement by the Minister of Local Government, Public Works & National Housing Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) was urged to redouble their efforts to weed out reckless drivers from our roads through stricter controls. He said that undisciplined drivers should be subjected to the full wrath of the law inclusive of stiffer penalties and or withdrawal of drivers' licences where such penalties are called for.

4.2 Selous Bus Accident

In a related incident, another fatal bus accident involving Tombs Motorways and a haulage truck occurred in Selous near the 89km peg along the Harare - Bulawayo Road on the 30th of September 2003. The accident resulted in the death of 21 passengers with several others injured.

4.3 Plumtree Bus Accident

As if it was not enough, the month of October started on a sad note when the country experienced yet another fatal bus accident in Plumtree on 1st October 2003. The accident involved a Kukurakurerwa Bus Company, which killed 17 people and injured 54 people. The bus burst its front tyre and overturned at the 68 km peg along the Bulawayo – Plumtree road. This incident occurred barely 24 hours after the Chegutu / Selous bus disaster, which claimed 21 lives.

The state through the National Civil Protection Fund assisted the families of the deceased in all these incidents.

5.0 FIRE INCIDENTS

On a slightly different note, a number of fire incidents were experienced in 2003. These include industrial fires, back yard fires, veld fires and plantation fire.

Some of the reported cases include the Bata, ZESA, Cold Comfort Farm, Chimanimani Forestry, and Matopos fire outbreaks. Two warehouses belonging to Bata Company were gutted by fire in Gweru on 26th September 2003 following a fire incident whose cause has not yet been established

5.1 Gweru Fire Outbreak

According to the preliminary report, the fire resulted in the destruction of two warehouses with the value of Z\$500 million, raw materials which consisted of rubber and chemicals in the two warehouses were destroyed and is valued at US\$555 000 or Z\$3 Billion on the official exchange rate.

The fire was so massive that City of Gweru Fire Brigade had to solicit assistance from Air Force of Zimbabwe, Kwekwe and Redcliff fire services. Bukawayo Fire Brigade was also called to assist but arrived when the fire was out.

5.2 Chimanimani Plantation Fire Outbreak

The Chimanimani fire outbreak was also serious that the local authorities requested for external assistance and assistance came from Harare, Masvingo, Rusape, and Chipinge and was in the form of manpower and fire fighting equipment.

5.3 Matopos National Park Fire Incident

Almost a third of the Matopos National Park was gutted by fire which burnt for almost a fortnight. The fire burnt from 2nd to 15th October 2003 resulting in serious loss of species of wild animals and vegetation.

The cause of the fire remained unclear but it was suspected that a member of the neighbouring community who was burning some bricks started the fire.

The Department of Civil Protection conducted a stakeholders' meeting to review the fire incident on 12th December 2003 at the Matopos National Park.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the Emergency Preparedness and Response plan for Matopos National Park
- Draw lessons learnt from the fire incident
- Ensure that the EPR plan is linked to the overall plan of the district and the province
- To consolidate and improve on the emergency plan.

The meeting came up with the following recommendations

The boundary fence of the park is almost non-existent and therefore needs replacement. [*It was reported that the park had inadequate financial resources to meet the costs therefore there was need to source for donor support*].

Vet Services is to be approached to put up appropriate fire guards.

There should be bill boards on fire control signs at designated areas.

There should be trained fire teams.

Fire fighting equipment and protective clothing should be purchased. [*Chief Fire Officer Byo reported that National Parks should find out about the availability of fire beaters that were purchased for parks by a well wisher: sometime in 2000*]

There should be an EPR plan for the park. The plan should not only cover fire incidents but all the known hazards. [*A request was presented to Civil Protection to facilitate and fund a workshop of stakeholders who would assist in the drafting of the EPR plan for the park*]

Public awareness campaigns for the surrounding community should be carried out. The campaigns are to be carried out by a local multisectoral team. Pamphlets are to be prepared and distributed during the campaign.

It was further discussed that since Matopos National Park was then aware that they must be members of the Matobo District Civil Protection Committee, they should ask for copies of the District and Provincial Civil Protection EPR plans from relevant authorities so that they familiarise themselves with issues pertaining to civil protection.

6.0 CHOLERA OUTBREAK (BINGA AND KARIBA)

On another serious note, cholera outbreak was reported in the two northern districts of Kariba (Mashonsland West Province and Binga (Matebeleland North Province). About 354 cases and 11 deaths were reported in Kariba and further 5 deaths were reported late November 2003. The Ministry of Health, UN agencies and NGOs responded to the outbreak. The Directorate of Civil Protection also responded and assisted with fuel supplies.

It is unusual for the country to experience such outbreaks before the onset of the rain season.

7.0 HAIL STORM INCIDENT (KADOMA)

The Directorate of Civil Protection and that of Save the Children UK responded to a strong hailstorm, which occurred in Kadoma on 26th December 2003. Four houses were destroyed during the storm and fortunately no deaths were recorded.



Fig 3 (The Deputy Director Civil Protection (right) inspects a completely damaged house)

Save the Children (UK) and Civil Protection department provided the storm victims with emergency kits which included tents for temporal shelter and food stuffs.



Fig 4. One of the storm victims mans his emergency kit whiles others wait for their turn.