

Standing strong together

Kiwifruit's model for biosecurity and emergency responses

Lisa Gibbison - Kiwifruit Vine Health

What happens if a severe adverse event affects the kiwifruit industry? Who would step in and coordinate a response? This article details the progress in developing the industry's Emergency Response Management (ERM) framework.



Picture yourself on your orchard on a crisp spring morning - sunlight glinting off healthy vines, and the promise of a fruitful harvest ahead. We all know though that life on the land is unpredictable. From invasive pests to sudden storms, our kiwifruit industry faces challenges that demand not just hard work, but a united front.

That's where the industry, coordinated by Kiwifruit Vine Health (KVH), steps in to ensure that no matter what comes our way, our growers are supported by a robust, well-oiled machine ready to swing into action. Over the past 12 months, we've taken strides to boost our industry's resilience in this space.

Ready for anything

Biosecurity threats aren't just a distant possibility; they're a real and present risk for every grower. A single incursion can ripple out, jeopardising vine health, profitability, and even the future of our export reputation.

Over the past year, we've engaged in simulations, sometimes linking with Biosecurity New Zealand and other primary industry partners, to put plans through their paces. These drills don't just test operational readiness: they fine-tune communication, coordination, and the ability to act quickly and effectively when time matters.

The Fruit Fly Council's capability exercise in June 2024 was a standout, designed with lessons from the 2019 Queensland Fruit Fly response and good preparation for the early 2025 Oriental Fruit Fly responses. It served both as a timely stress test and a rehearsal for what may come, ensuring we're better than ever at working collectively in the face of emerging threats. The exercise stepped through the key elements of a response and used lessons learnt from the past as a framework to gauge how improvements have been incorporated into response systems.

KVH hasn't stopped at practice runs. Investments in digital surveillance tools like Onside, smarter data analytics,



and targeted staff training mean early detection and rapid containment are more achievable than ever. Response plans have been reviewed to reflect global best practices, putting the most up-to-date science at the fingertips of those who need it.

Building a safety net for all

Preparation doesn't end with biosecurity. Natural disasters - anything from wild weather to volcanic activity - can threaten grower livelihoods too. What happens when the unexpected hits?

The industry's Emergency Response Management (ERM) framework, coordinated by KVH, is a comprehensive approach to preparedness. We've been mapping out precisely how to pivot when adverse events take place with scenario planning, business continuity strategies, and inclusive training sessions (notably, in February 2025, with regional coordinators and representatives from NZ Apples and Pears, NZ Wine and NZ Avocados) all reinforcing the message: when disaster strikes, no grower is left behind.

These sessions are hands-on, immersive experiences and, at the time of writing, planning for late October sessions are well underway too. Industry personnel and others across the growing community come together at these sessions to learn to interpret and contribute to action

plans, participate in simulated incident management meetings, and walk away with the confidence that, when the alarm sounds, they know their part in the bigger picture.

The heart of the response

But what, exactly, is "the response"? It's not an organisation, nor just a plan. Whether we are supporting growers during a biosecurity or significant adverse event response, it isn't just one organisation doing things: it's a big co-operative effort of lots of groups across the kiwifruit industry.

When we activate a response and give it a home (for example, our response centre at our office in the Bay of Plenty and sometimes regionally too) staff are put into teams with different jobs to do.

These jobs/functions are outlined in a framework called Coordinated Incident Management System (or CIMS). This system is used to organise an emergency response anywhere in New Zealand by the likes of Civil Defence, Fire and Emergency New Zealand, the Ministry for Primary Industries, and Health New Zealand.

In a response there is a leader or 'Controller' supported by the Intelligence, Planning, Welfare, Public Information Management, Safety, Operations, and Logistics teams. Technical liaisons and advisors also support the response.

Limited resources, and an overwhelming demand for help mean everyone will need to pitch in and support one another so that we make use of local knowledge and understanding of the unique needs, vulnerabilities, and strengths of affected areas.

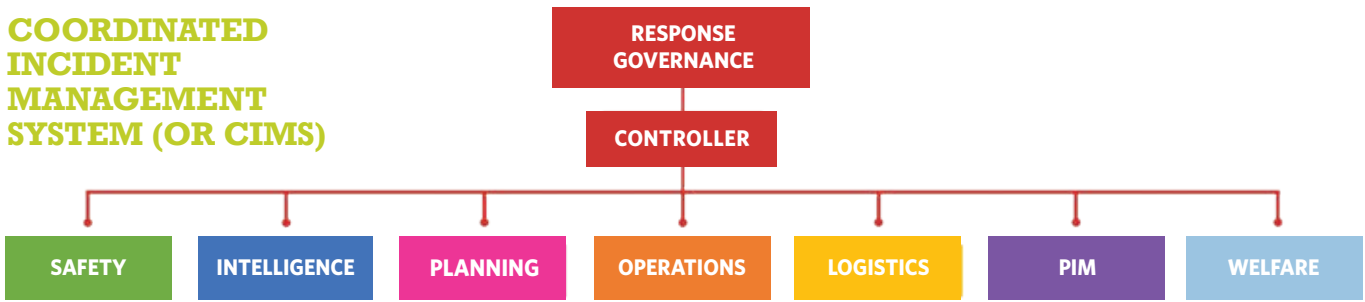
"The response" and CIMS means there is a place to put all this energy, in a coordinated and formal way so we can provide and prioritise support where it's needed most.

What exactly is the ERM framework?

The ERM framework is a living document designed to support governance and operational activities during an emergency. It activates the Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) model, aligning the kiwifruit industry's response with New Zealand's best practices used by emergency services nationwide.

The framework is triggered by an event causing significant impact to kiwifruit growers - triggers are assessed based on the event's severity, scale and the industry's ability to cope with some emergencies clearly warranting immediate activation.

COORDINATED INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (OR CIMS)



Meet the teams

CONTROL

In a response, the Control team are the ones that oversee and direct the response effort.

The Control team includes the Controller (in white) and the Response Manager (in red).

The Controller leads and directs the response. They are responsible for setting the priorities, delegating tasks, identifying critical resources and directing activities while taking effect to legislative powers and legislation that might apply. They can't do this alone, so rely on all the other teams to make sure the response is progressing in the best interest of kiwifruit growers, the kiwifruit industry, and the responders.

The Response Manager makes sure the activities within the coordination centre are running smoothly (like information flows, meetings, timings, and resourcing). They also provide management expertise to support the Controller in solving problems.

Sometimes, depending on the type and scale of the response, there will also be other experts that help provide advice to the Controller and the response. For example, technical and science advisors; legal advisors; and Iwi/Māori representatives who bring cultural knowledge and perspectives to the Control team.

Fun Fact

The Controller runs briefings which can be scheduled regularly throughout the day and be conducted when there's a new shift coming on, or a significant change in the situation. Briefings help to make sure everyone is on the same page and has a good overview of what is happening in the response.

SAFETY

In an emergency, the Safety team is all about looking after our most important resource, the people.

The main goal of the Safety team is to make sure that everyone involved in the response can operate safely in a

challenging and often unpredictable environment.

The Safety team works closely with the other teams in the response to make sure everyone on the ground is safe and well – it's basically Health & Safety for response workers. This could be people on-orchard undertaking damage assessments or people travelling to, or between growing regions on damaged roads.

Fun Fact

Both the Safety and Logistics teams have a role in looking after the health, safety, and wellbeing of responders. The Safety team focuses on creating an environment where people feel comfortable speaking up about hazards or unsafe practices. Their job is to make sure risks are identified and addressed quickly. The Logistics team makes sure responders have what they need to stay well. This could be rest areas, the right gear (such as rain jackets and gumboots), or access to mental health support.

TECHNICAL

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WELFARE

In an emergency, Welfare are our manaaki team. They make sure that the right support services are available to our affected people.

When we're in a response, people may have a range of different needs and require all sorts of assistance to get an orchard back up and running - including financial help or psychosocial support. The Welfare team assesses these needs to provide the right services, to meet the actual needs of those affected in our industry (rather than assume what they need and it's not right).

Fun Fact

Large-scale emergency responses after adverse events can involve many organisations and government departments working together. The Welfare team coordinates their efforts to avoid duplication and overlap in providing support services and our industry response may tap into these efforts alongside specialist groups like Rural Support Trust.

Welfare's strength lies in collaboration. Together, the team works to get people the care they need during emergencies so that all our growers and industry people are looked after.

LOGISTICS

The Logistics team is all about ensuring response needs are met by having the right resource, in the right quantity, at the right time and location, and in the right condition.

They're the team in yellow and ensure everyone has what they need to do their job.

The team looks both internally at resource needs for the coordination centre (like coffee, kai, computers and staff), and externally to the resources required out on the ground (like accommodation, vehicles, generators, sampling and collections kits, and even in big adverse events - trucks and helicopters).

Whether the resources are big or small - the Logistics team does it all!

Fun Fact

During a response, resources can be in short supply or in high demand, so Logistics works with the leader of the



Photo 3. Intelligence team members, always in blue, collect information from other members of the response to build understanding.



Photo 4. The response model KVH uses is the same as Civil Defence, Biosecurity New Zealand, and all emergency services.



We are Chartered Accountants and kiwifruit farmers too. Bee season is a great time to be on the orchard - and with the lead in to pollination, it sure would be good to see some sunshine and less cloud cover. As we all know, **YIELD, TASTE, and TIME** are the Big Three drivers of orchard profitability.

Successful pollination is a critical feature of YIELD. A big driver of OGR is the tray production a grower can achieve from their orchard. This production is heavily reliant on the number of fruit, and size achieved, both of which are dependent on successful pollination. Each variety of kiwifruit requires its own unique pollination system.

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Photo 5. Operations team members, always in orange, work with people in the field visiting orchards to ensure the agreed actions of the response are being undertaken.

response (the Controller) and the other teams, to determine what resources are 'critical'.

This means that these critical resources can be prioritised across the areas that need them most, reducing competition and possibly even duplication, and allocating them on a needs rather than a first-in-first-served basis.

INTELLIGENCE

In an emergency, the Intelligence team is like the brain of the response, they gather and piece together all the important information. They're constantly collecting updates from different sources to build a common understanding of what's going on.

When new details come into the response, it's the Intelligence team that check the facts, make sense of the information, and then collates it and shares it with the right people so they can make informed decisions.

Fun Fact

Part of the Intelligence team's role is creating maps and visual tools that help show what's happening on the ground. These maps can display everything from affected areas and restriction zones to road closures, to specific locations of affected orchards, helping everyone stay on the same page.

PUBLIC INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

The Public Information Management (PIM) team's role is all about making sure the right information gets to the right people, when they need it.

In a response, PIM provides information and advice across various communication channels. From industry emails and newsletters to social media updates, to

media briefings and direct information for affected growers face-to-face or on the phone, they ensure that critical messages help people understand what's happening and what they can do to limit further impacts, keep safe, and recover.

If someone asks questions or comments on our social media pages for example, the PIM team members are the ones responding.

It's the PIMs responsibility to also coordinate messaging across multiple industry organisations so everyone is on the same page. This means whether you hear from a post harvest company or see something on the 6pm news, you hear the same messages, and they are correct, and up to date.

Fun Fact

Even if power and communications are down in an affected growing area after an adverse event, PIM will still share updates through social media and digital channels. It might sound a bit counterintuitive, but there are many people and groups across growing regions who want to make sure their friends, whānau and peers in the impacted area are okay.

PLANNING

In a response, the Planning team are the ones wearing pink.

They are responsible for weaving all the

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other teams' tasks and objectives into an overall 'Action Plan'. The Plan captures who's doing what and when, to help everyone stay on the same page and know where they're headed.

The Action Plans are living documents and based on the best available information at the time they are produced. So, when the situation changes, as it often does in responses and during emergencies, the plan may also need to adapt and change.

While other teams implement the Plan, Planning also looks ahead, to figure out what might happen next and what needs to be done.

Fun Fact

The Planning team don't make 'The Plan' on their own. They weave together information they collate. The team must ensure all the other teams are represented, including wider grower support agencies and subject matter experts or on-orchard technical expertise. This ensures that planning captures all perspectives and has the best possible outcomes for all impacted growers.

OPERATIONS

The Operations team is responsible for overseeing all the 'doing' on the ground in an emergency response. While they're not responsible for the doing of all the tasks, they make sure the response Action Plan is being implemented.

The team works with staff in the field, like people visiting orchards to take samples or collect plant material, to make sure that these people know where they're going and what they're doing and work closely with the Logistics team to make sure they have the tools and resources to get the job done right.

Fun Fact

The Operations team also often communicates with utility companies to better understand impacted essential services like transport, electricity, water, and telecommunications in regional growing areas so we know as an industry where and how we can best get in touch with our growers to help their orchards.

Strength in unity

What shines through, is that resilience isn't built in isolation. It comes from a shared commitment to each other, grower to grower, orchard to orchard, and across all levels of our industry. Whether it's a biosecurity threat or a blow from Mother Nature, the message is clear: together, we're stronger.

So next time you spot a suspicious bug, hear about a new training session, or receive an industry update, remember that it's all part of the invisible shield protecting your vine. ■



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