Emergency Response Plans (ERP)

A simple guide for aviation operators

What is an Emergency Response Plan?

An Emergency Response Plan (ERP) is a written guide that tells people what to do when something serious goes wrong.

In aviation, emergencies are stressful, fast-moving, and often confusing. An ERP removes guesswork by setting out:

- What actions to take
- Who to contact
- What information to collect
- What should and should not be said

An ERP is written before an emergency happens, so people don't have to think under pressure.

Why is an ERP important?

Emergencies rarely happen when the "right" people are available.

Often, the first person involved is:

- Inexperienced
- Working alone
- Not a manager
- Not trained to make big decisions

A good ERP gives that person:

- A clear starting point
- Confidence to act
- A structure to follow

If someone can open a document and calmly work through it step by step, the ERP is doing its job.

How do you create an ERP?

The easiest way to start is to work backwards.

Imagine:

An emergency has just happened.

The least experienced person in your organisation is the one dealing with it.

Ask yourself:

What do they need in front of them to get through the next 30 minutes?

The Solution:

That document is your ERP.

It does not need to be perfect.

It needs to be clear, usable, and realistic.

Two ways to build an ERP

Option 1 – Use an external provider

- Built by experienced specialists
- Often detailed and comprehensive
- Can be expensive and slow
- May be larger and more complex than needed

Option 2 – Build one internally

- Faster and lower cost
- Tailored to how your operation actually works
- Can feel difficult if starting from scratch

Tip: Do not start with a blank page. Instead, find an example, use it as a template, and adapt it to your operation.

What does a good ERP look like?

A good ERP is:

- **Simple**: written with short sentences and clear actions
- **Practical**: written for real people who need some help. It is not written in legalise or for a regulator to tick a box.
- **Accessible**: It has to be easy to find during an emergency. You should be able to put your hand on it immediately.
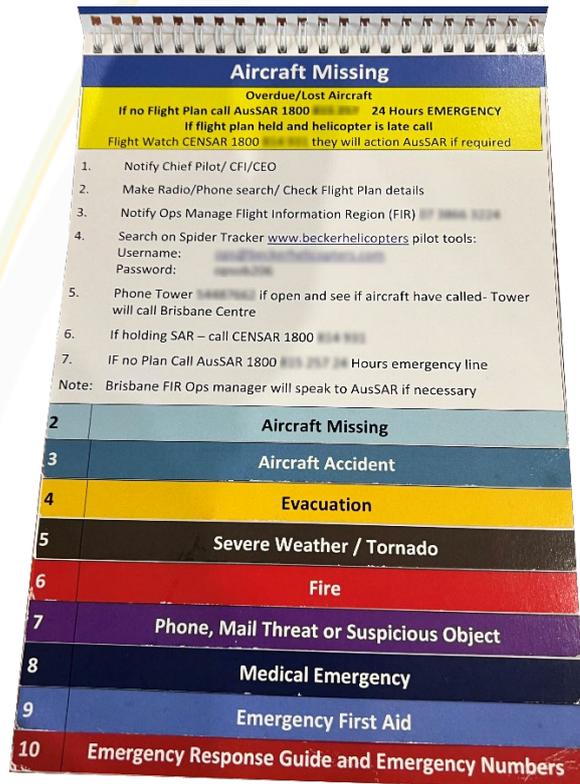- **Scalable**: It is appropriate for the size of the organisation

The Format is flexible; it can be:

- Printed posters or flip charts
- Digital documents
- Apps or intranet access

If it is hard to read or hard to find, it will not be used.

Example ERP

The image below shows an example flip-chart ERP.

What should be in an ERP?

Start by listing emergencies that could realistically affect your operation, based on:

● Aircraft, type of operation and activities

● Location and facilities

● Available resources

● Number of staff

● Operating hours

Each ERP should reflect your organisation, even though many emergency types are common across aviation. Common aviation emergencies include

● Aircraft accident or serious incident

● Overdue or missing aircraft

● Medical emergency

● Fire (aircraft or building)

● Fuel spill or hazardous materials

● Severe weather or natural disaster

● Security threat

● Media or public enquiries

Key point

An ERP does not stop emergencies.

It helps people respond calmly, consistently, and safely when one happens.