



Be prepared

**Steve Terry,
Director of
Communications
at the Emergency
Planning Society,
explores
partnerships and
professionalism in
emergency
planning...**

Emergency Planning in the UK (otherwise known as Civil Protection or Civil Contingencies)¹ is concerned with ensuring that our communities are 'resilient' to a range of eventualities: from natural disasters such as flooding, through health pandemics and industrial accidents, to acts of terrorism. Whilst the UK has a long tradition of preparing for and managing emergencies, a succession of high profile incidents at the turn of the Century² prompted the UK Government to undertake a fundamental review of our Emergency Planning arrangements. As a result, in 2004, the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA)³ was introduced to '...deliver a single framework for Civil Protection in the UK, capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st Century.'

The CCA identifies a range of organisations at the core of emergency response⁴ that now have a statutory responsibility to engage in a series of activities (see Table 1). A number of 'co-operating bodies'⁵ who, while less likely to be involved in the heart of Emergency Planning work but would have a vital role to play in managing emergencies in their sector, are also required under the CCA to share information and to co-operate with partners.

In some cases, the CCA has served to simply reinforce existing partnerships, arrangements and activities that have been developed over many years. In others, it has created partnerships between organisations that had not previously worked together or, indeed, had not formally engaged in Emergency Planning.

- Assessing the risk of emergencies occurring and using this to inform plans;
- Putting in place plans to manage emergencies (Emergency Plans), should they occur;
- Putting in place Business Continuity Management (BCM) arrangements to ensure continual provision of critical functions and services;
- Putting in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintaining arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency;
- Sharing information with other local responders to enhance co-ordination;
- Co-operating with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency; and
- Providing advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about BCM (local authorities only).

Table 1: Statutory duties under the CCA (2004)

Some four years on from the introduction of the CCA, what does the future hold for Emergency Planning and what are the challenges ahead?

In Spring 2008, the Cabinet Office's Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS)⁶ will be undertaking a '6,000 mile service review' of the CCA: a stock take of where we were and where we are now. In advance of the review, early indications from the CCS are that we have

achieved much over the past four years and we are more capable of dealing with the challenges we currently face.

However, there are a number of areas in which there is 'room for improvement'. Specifically, Bruce Mann, Director of the CCS, recently identified⁷ a number of areas of improvement, which are outlined next.

Implementation: have all the statutory duties laid down in the CCA been fully implemented by all named organisations?

The last four years have seen multi-agency partners across the UK coming together to share information on common risks and to plan, train and exercise (both individually and collectively) for such eventualities. However, despite this now being a statutory responsibility, it has become clear that many agencies have not been engaging to an extent that was envisioned when the CCA was first developed. What is more, in some cases, this has been cited as having a detrimental impact on our ability to manage emergencies. Indeed, the Interim Report of the Pitt Review⁸ into the flooding of summer 2007 found that '...inconsistencies in the level of engagement...in the work of Local Resilience Forums⁹ contributed to a lack of preparedness in some aspects of the response'. The reasons for this lack of engagement will not be unfamiliar to the reader, eg. competing priorities; lack of senior management buy-in and resourcing; and conflicts with other legislative requirements.

With this last point in mind, how best to secure the commitment needed? The feeling amongst some Emergency Planners is that buy-in at a political and policy-making level is where change will be most readily felt. It would be tempting to revise the legislative framework of the CCA to introduce more draconian measures to ensure compliance. However, the CCS has counselled that the key will be to finding the right balance of 'permissiveness vs. prescription'. The former approach will be a test for the CCS' powers of persuasion and, perhaps, will be a good indicator of the Government's backing for the resilience agenda. There is a feeling that the final recommendations of the Pitt Review are likely to provide a useful bargaining tool here. For the latter approach, it looks as if there may be more prescription and statutory guidance forthcoming, which is something of a double-edged sword for most Emergency Planners; good in that it provides much-needed clarity, but yet more work to be done in order to assimilate these into our existing plans and arrangements. However, the challenge here is for practitioners to agree the priorities for resource allocation with strategic managers/representatives.

Effectiveness: have those activities and arrangements implemented been effective?

The National Capabilities Survey (NCS)¹⁰ and other studies such as the Chartered Management Institute (CMI)'s annual BCM survey¹¹ suggest a lack of resilient BCM arrangements, both within local responders and the communities they serve. Local authorities throughout the UK have been working hard to fulfil their duty under the CCA to promote BCM in their communities and there are many excellent examples¹² of good and innovative practice from which we can all learn. However, in 2007 the CMI found that less than 50%¹³ of organisations interviewed have BCM plans in place, and this has been broadly constant since 2002. It seems that not everyone has yet got the message or, perhaps more importantly, is acting upon it. With pressure in the public sector to demonstrate value for money, there is a feeling that alternative approaches and incentives will be needed if we are to sell the resilience agenda to our communities and to change hearts and minds. Key to this will be preaching from a position of experience. We must surely tighten-up our own BCM arrangements if we are to convince the public to buy-in too.

Currency: do the arrangements in place require reviewing/updating in light of significant developments within the profession or the environment in which we operate? Also, what is on the horizon and are we adequately prepared?

One of the key findings from recent incidents¹⁴ is the need for better awareness of, and preparedness for, managing the recovery from wide-area emergencies. Often crossing administrative and jurisdictional boundaries, such incidents require specific attention and a consistent and partnership approach. Pandemic flu is still at the top of everyone's agenda and work continues in earnest to prepare for when (not if) such an eventuality arises. However, wide-area power outages and flooding have now been elevated to the 'premier league' of risks the UK faces¹⁵. For the former, Emergency Planners have become well-acquainted with just how reliant we are on power to carry-out our critical activities. The outage in London in 2003 demonstrated just how much impact a short-lived (30 minute) incident could have on our day to day lives. What if we were to lose power for 24-48 hours or to suffer rolling blackouts for seven days? How would your organisation cope; could you continue to provide your critical functions and services?

The flooding in Gloucester last summer was a timely reminder of just how vulnerable our organisations

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Steve Terry
Director of Communications
Emergency Planning Society
c/o Emergency Planning
London Fire Brigade (LFB)
3rd Floor
Clapham Fire Station
29 Old Town
Clapham SW4 0JT
Tel: 020 8555 1200 x51905
steve.terry@london-fire
.gov.uk
www.the-eps.org

could be in the event that the critical infrastructure¹⁶ we rely on is compromised. Moreover, predictions of future climate change suggest that flooding such as that witnessed in 2007 is likely to become more commonplace and more severe in the future. With this in mind, we must plan now to respond to climate change; turning a blind eye will only create even greater challenges in the future. Climate change has to be acknowledged as one of the major strategic challenges for all organisations in future years and, if we are to manage this challenge effectively, it will require a partnership approach involving policy-makers, strategic managers, land-use planners, environment managers and risk practitioners from a variety of disciplines and sectors. With this in mind, I would encourage all those with an interest in this field to attend the Emergency Planning Society (EPS) Annual Conference & Exhibition 2008 – Climate Change: Be Prepared where we will be addressing this issue in the round.¹⁷

‘Professionalising’ the profession

The Emergency Planning profession has evolved and expanded considerably over the years, incorporating a whole range of specific and transferable skills, to become a truly holistic management process (sometimes referred to as ‘Integrated Emergency Management’). In view of this, there is a growing appreciation that Emergency Planning practitioners require a whole range of knowledge, skills, attitudes, experience and qualifications in order to undertake each element of their roles effectively. However, there is currently no formally recognised scheme in place to assist practitioners to demonstrate their competence. Indeed, it has long been recognised that Emergency Planning is one of the few professions (in the public sector at least) for which formal academic qualifications are not required.

Further to this last point, the EPS, in partnership with the Cabinet Office, Skills for Justice (the Sector Skills Council) and other key partners are developing a set of National Occupational Standards (NOS)¹⁸ for Civil Protection practitioners working in the public, private, voluntary and not-for-profit sectors. A ‘Core Competences Framework’¹⁹ will build upon the foundation of the NOS, and provide additional guidance and benefits for the practitioner, for employers, and for training providers.

Both focus on the key transferable skills required to perform our functions, with the aim of bringing a more professional standard for resilience by:

- Raising the skill sets of those employed in the field, thereby establishing resilience as a more formalised career;

- Providing a footprint for practitioners to develop themselves to defined levels of competence. It will also detail requirements for individuals to keeping their skill sets current and relevant to the challenges of their roles;
- Bringing a more ‘professional’ standing to our profession, particularly a much more academically focused one. It will set a basis for educational streams to train resilience practitioners.

Once the Core Competences Framework is published (at the end of 2008), individuals can be assessed and accredited by the EPS as ‘Fit to Practice’ based on the framework, which will include governance and assurance arrangements to assist individuals in demonstrating to employers that their competences are current and up-to-date. With this in mind, the framework will be a powerful benchmarking tool for employees and employers, and I would strongly encourage readers of this article to find out more about how it applies to you and your organisation.

In summary, this article has provided a brief snapshot of some of the progress made to date and some of the challenges ahead in the field of Emergency Planning. We have achieved much to be proud of over the past four years, but there is much yet to be done. What is quite clear is that a partnership approach, across sectors and disciplines, represents our best chance of success.

Steve Terry is an Emergency Planning Officer for the London Fire Brigade (LFB), but this article is written in his capacity as the Director of Communications for the Emergency Planning Society (EPS). It is not authorised by or published on behalf of LFB. It represents his personal views, which may not coincide with those of LFB.

¹ Although this article refers to the UK, similar arrangements exist in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and the challenges discussed are broadly applicable to planning in the ROI.
² For example, the fuel crisis and severe flooding in 2000; the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001.
³ www.ukresilience.info/preparedness/ccact.aspx.
⁴ For example: emergency services, local authorities and health authorities.
⁵ For example: transport and utility companies.
⁶ The government department responsible for overseeing resilience activities in the UK.
⁷ www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Bruce_Mann.pdf.
⁸ www.ukresilience.info/news/pitt_interim_report.aspx.
⁹ Multi-agency forums of local responders formed for the purpose of sharing information on, and preparing for, emergencies.
¹⁰ www.ukresilience.info/preparedness/ukgovernment/survey.aspx.
¹¹ www.ukresilience.info/news/emi_survey_2007.aspx.
¹² www.ukresilience.info/upload/assets/www.ukresilience.info/bulletin_beacon_events.pdf.
¹³ This figure may be as low as 20% for SMEs (Continuity Forum, pers. comm. 2008).
¹⁴ For example: the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006 and the summer 2007 flooding.
¹⁵ www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/Bruce_Mann.pdf.
¹⁶ For example: electricity sub-stations and water treatments works.
¹⁷ www.the-eps.org/events/events/is/eps-annual-conference-2008.
¹⁸ www.skillsforjustice.com/civilnos.
¹⁹ www.resilience.gov.uk/upload/assets/www.ukresilience.info/bulletin_competency_project.pdf.