

nicivilcontingenciesnews

Issue 05: February 2012

Welcome to the fifth edition of this update on what is happening in the civil contingencies field.



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Also: Meet the new face in CCPB – Gavin King.

New capabilities

In this edition we take a look at the NIFRS Command Support Units and the NIAS Hazardous Area Response Team (HART), which are two new additions to our civil contingencies planning and response capabilities. We also put the spotlight on two large scale exercises – Pharos and Larkspur. Hope you enjoy the read.

The NIFRS Command Support Unit

In complex and fast changing emergency environments, getting the full picture of an incident can be challenging. Responders must be able to communicate effectively with

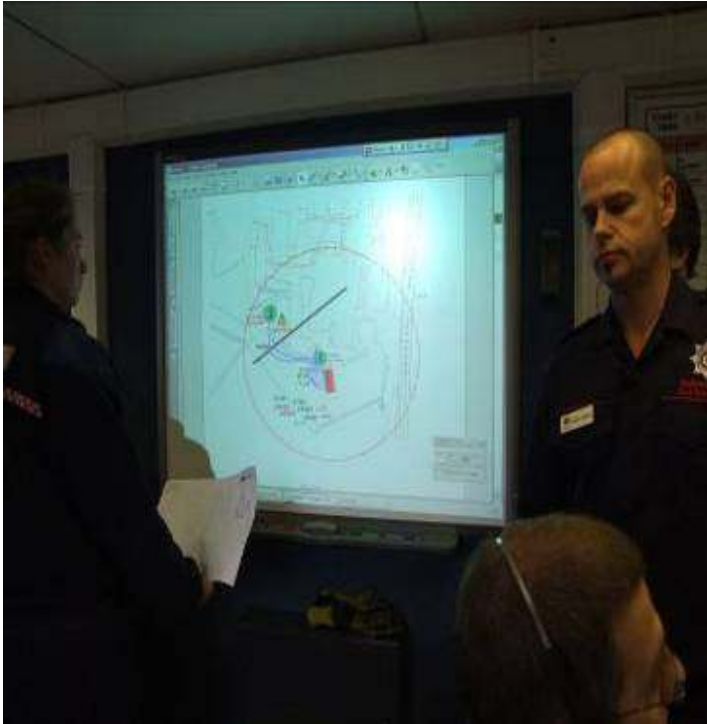


each other and with command centres. Providing a common operating picture using sophisticated yet resilient incident ground communications which includes GIS, Incident Management systems, Satellite Communications, body worn and aerial CCTV and Wireless MESH is increasingly something that Fire & Rescue and other emergency services require in order to provide timely situational awareness for Incident Commanders. In Northern Ireland this is achieved using four

Command Support Units (CSUs) which are deployed from Fire Stations located in Lisburn, Kilrea, Strabane and Irvinestown.

Satellite Communications

Satellite communications equipment on board the CSUs enables increased resilience of 'at incident' communications by accessing a secure extra-terrestrial private network to



enable transmission of critical incident intelligence to and from virtually any location. Self seeking satellite antennae are used on the vehicles which by design are perfectly suited for Command Unit use. In simple terms the solution fitted at the very least allows CSUs to have access to high speed broadband type connectivity via an extra-terrestrial bearer wherever they are deployed, whether a forest in Fermanagh or in a more urban environment.

Wireless solutions

The fire-fighter 'body worn' CCTV capability is designed for NIFRS Command Unit use and a helmet and/or shoulder mounted version of this hardware is currently used within one CSU setting (Lisburn). The solution allows commanders to observe and record close proximity Fire & Rescue operations being captured by fire-fighter 'body worn' CCTV equipment which is transmitted to wherever the CSU is situated.



MESH Technology

Wireless MESH network technology is also provided for Command Support use and NIFRS deploy this technology alongside CSUs for a variety of purposes. One such use is that data (and VoIP - Voice over Internet Protocol telephony) is supported on the MESH network enabling information to be passed to and from officers in charge of incident ground sectors and/or key resources.

Command Support Units – Technology led, People driven

At NIFRS we recognise that innovative and leading edge technologies, when used with safe systems of work, can enhance the way we control and manage our major incident response and help maintain fire fighter safety. Being able to communicate with, coordinate and support all fire-ground personnel is essential. The number of people and amount of equipment involved makes this very challenging but achievable using the Command Support Units we have developed.

Contributed by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

HART Launched in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service has recently invested in specialised training for its staff to work safely at the most hazardous incidents including chemical and terrorist incidents where patients require immediate care to be brought to them rather than, as previously happened, the patient being removed to a safe area before treatment commenced.

Ambulance HART (Hazardous Area Response Team) was officially launched at the Belfast Waterfront Hall in October by the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride. The HART initiative, which will be delivered by Northern Ireland Ambulance Service paramedics, enables these highly trained operatives to work alongside other emergency service colleagues within the inner cordon (also known as the hot zone) of a major hazardous incident.



Hitherto ambulance personnel had always operated within the “cold zone” areas, where threats were absent. But following incidents such as the terrorist bombings in London, it

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has been acknowledged that the absence of trained paramedics from the “hot zone” meant that the ambulance service was potentially being impeded in its ability to undertake the clinical interventions necessary at the early stages of an incident.

The Ambulance Service throughout the UK has trained and equipped personnel to work in the hot zone through its HART programme. Clinical care and interventions are now being brought to patients when they need them most.

HART capacity was demonstrated recently at the Belfast Waterfront Hall with exercises in decontamination of a chemical incident, a rope rescue of a patient from height and



retrieval from a boating incident. Northern Ireland’s Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride said: ***“The introduction of HART is a great achievement and the public should be assured of our ability to respond should a major incident occur within Northern Ireland. It is a key development in our continuing commitment to deliver an emergency service that is responsive to major incidents across Northern Ireland.”***

Contributed by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.

Exercises – Pharos and Larkspur

OFMDFM Delivers Exercise Pharos

Emergency responders will all too well remember the extremely cold weather of December 2010, followed by widespread disruptions to the water supply. Since then the CCG (NI) led by OFMDFM has been analysing the response to, and recovery from, this emergency to identify learning points and to put in place new and enhanced arrangements to further strengthen our resilience, not just to severe weather incidents but to any type of civil emergency.

The resulting suite of arrangements was assessed and tested at Exercise Pharos, a large scale, multi-agency exercise which tested awareness and application of the new arrangements both at the local and strategic levels. The exercise commanded a high profile among the civil contingencies community with some 150 participants drawn from a wide range of organisations including government departments, district councils, health and social care bodies and the emergency services.



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The exercise proved very successful, with a strong consensus among participants that the new and enhanced arrangements will significantly strengthen the multi-agency emergency response. OFMDFM is now working with stakeholders to adjust the new arrangements to reflect the learning points from the exercise before re-issuing them to civil contingencies organisations to embed into emergency plans, test exercise regimes and working practices.



Contributed by OFMDFM.

EXERCISE LARKSPUR – Driven by the Food Standards Agency

Following the contamination of pork and beef due to dioxins in animal feed in 2008, the NI Executive commissioned an independent review of the incident. Led by Kenneth MacKenzie CB, the review considered the handling and communications aspects of the response and lessons learned to prevent a recurrence of a similar incident in the future. One of Mr MacKenzie's key recommendations was that emergency plans and procedures should be thoroughly rehearsed. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) commissioned an external company to deliver the Larkspur Exercise Programme, which comprised of the following three elements:

1. Scenario-based workshop, 20 May 2011

The workshop enabled stakeholders to discuss current response arrangements and communication protocols, in the context of a major animal feed contamination incident resulting in a high level food safety scenario, as defined by the FSA Incident Response Protocol.



2. Full simulation exercise, 25 - 27 September 2011

The Exercise involved multiple stakeholders from Ireland, NI and Great Britain, with exercise participants working within a fully simulated environment.

Stakeholders responded in real time to a feed contamination leading to a high level food safety incident, as defined by the FSA Incident Response Protocol, with cross-border implications.

3. Lessons Identified workshop, 8 November 2011

The workshop considered the lessons identified from the outputs of the simulation exercise and gained stakeholder agreement on the recommendations and actions to continually improve a co-ordinated incident response.

Programme issues and Future Actions

As part of the programme a comprehensive set of issues and future actions were identified, relating specifically to the strategic aspects of the response, with individual Departments implementing recommendations where internal issues were identified. The final report of the exercise containing a number of recommendations will be published in the first quarter of 2012.

Contributed by the Food Standards Agency.

Food and Feed Incident Management Group (FFIMG) and Food and Feed Industry Advisory Panel (FFIAP) Established

The MacKenzie Review which led to Exercise Larkspur also recommended the establishment of two strategic groups in order to better co-ordinate food and feed incident response. These groups will meet on a six monthly basis and also as required during an incident.

FFIMG was established in 2010 and has met on a number of occasions. It is chaired by Bert Houston, DARD's Chief Veterinary Officer, and members include representatives from DHSSPS, FSA in NI, AFBI, DETI, NIEA and InvestNI. This group will ensure that the strategic approach to the management of food and feed incidents will consider the impact on the food and feed industry in Northern Ireland; that all relevant senior officials, including the Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive, are fully kept fully apprised of the situation and can feed into the strategic approach taken; and that emergency plans and communication protocols are in place and exercised, and that these are registered with the Civil Contingencies Group (NI).

FFIAP was established by the FSA in Northern Ireland as a means of sharing information and improving collaboration on food and feed safety issues with all sectors of the food and feed industry. It is chaired by Gerry McCurdy, the Director of FSA in NI, with representation from DARD, the NI Grain Trade Association, Ulster Farmers Union, Dairy UK, NI Food and Drink Association, NI Meat Exporters Association, Ulster Pork and Beef Federation and the National Beef Association.

Contributed by the Food Standards Agency.

‘Where did it all go wrong’?

The freeze/thaw during December/January 2010/11 really put us all to the test. It was an excellent opportunity to see how emergency plans worked, both in DRD and across the full range of emergency responders.

In the New Year, in tandem with the wider work to improve winter resilience initiated by Civil Contingencies Group (NI), the Department and NI Water carried out reviews of their Major Emergency Response Plans (MERP) to take account of the lessons learned. The work on the Department’s MERP took account of the new protocols and recommendations developed by CCG(NI), particularly the protocol to escalate an emergency from local level to strategic level, a protocol to address the needs of vulnerable people and recommendations to enhance communications.

Once the Department’s MERP had been updated, it was circulated to emergency planning officers in DRD and NI Water to make sure that the triggers and procedures dovetailed with their own plans. To make sure that everyone was aware of their roles and responsibilities, a training session was held for the Department’s emergency planning officers and members of the senior management team who would be members of Department’s Emergency Management Group (DEMG) in an actual emergency.

Then it got tough. The freeze/thaw of 2010/11 was nothing in comparison to the difficulties DEMG faced during the test of the revised MERP. In Exercise Jack Frost, lorries carrying dangerous chemicals fell off the Foyle Bridge, arctic blizzards

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approached, gale force winds blew, power outages were widespread and public transport came to a standstill with trains stuck in snow drifts.

DEMG successfully guided the Department through this five day nightmare scenario and identified improvements to enhance the operational effectiveness of the MERP. We also got a chance to test the MERP, the Roads Service major emergency plan and NI Water's major emergency plan at the major exercise convened by OFMDFM in late November.

Then we crossed our fingers and went home for a, thankfully, uneventful Christmas.

Contributed by the Department of Regional Development

Local News

Belfast City Council Web Editor's win award for 'Best Use of Social Media in a Crisis'

Belfast City Council Web Editors won a prestigious national award for their hard work during last year's water disruption emergency.

Paula Fee, Sinead O'Neill (both pictured) and Lee McArdle were awarded the 'Best Use of Social Media in a Crisis' gong at the 2011 Some Comms Awards for their efforts in keeping residents up to date on the council website and via Facebook and Twitter.



The judges said the team were "worthy winners" in their category, having used social networking sites to notify homeowners about water distribution points, and answer questions about everything from burst pipes to household insurance claims.

The awards celebrate the best in social media work across the UK, and the Web Editors were also nominated in the 'Best In-House Team' category.

The team have recently had their efforts recognised once again, this time at the How-Do UK Public Services Communications Awards 2011 where they were nominated in the 'Best Use of Social Media' category.

Article contributed by Belfast City Council.

Belfast Resilience Forum develops H.E.L.P emergency guidance

One of the key aims of Belfast Resilience this year was to support the public to improve their preparedness to help themselves in emergencies. Drawing on a similar design from Dumfries & Galloway, the Household Emergency Life-saving Plan (H.E.L.P.) was developed to encourage individuals and households to consider their own emergency arrangements.

Various organisations across Belfast Resilience provided input to the content and agreed the key messages. Approximately 7,000 HELP have been given out to date and 200 posters have been put up across Belfast through many of the organisations involved in Belfast Resilience including Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS), Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS), Belfast Health & Social Care Trust (BHSCT), Belfast City Council (BCC), Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and also via the Belfast City Councillors and local community organisations. Individuals can also download the HELP from the Council website and a contact number is on the poster for people to request a copy to be posted to them.

An editable soft copy of the HELP and poster has been provided to each of the Council Emergency Planning Co-ordinators (EPCOs) to assist everyone to use the resource with only minimal changes needed e.g. local phone numbers, radio stations etc. A number of Council areas have expressed an intention to produce a localised version and are working on this presently.

A link to the HELP document is provided below for those wanting to take a closer look:
<http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/belfastresilience/preparing.asp>

Article contributed by Belfast Resilience Forum

Changes at Local Government Emergency Management Group (LGEMG)

New Chair of LGEMG – Suzanne Wylie

Suzanne took up post as the Director of Health and Environmental Services for Belfast City Council in May 2010. In this role she is responsible for managing a wide range of front line services such as environmental health, community safety, emergency planning, waste management, cleansing services and building control. Her Department also leads a number of partnerships (for example the Community Safety Partnership / District Policing Partnerships) in the city to drive multi-agency approaches to making the City healthy, safe and clean. In this role she is committed to working with communities on some of the difficult issues which affect peoples every day lives, whether it be antisocial behaviour, access to good services or a good local environment.



In recent years, Suzanne has had first hand experience in co-ordinating emergency response and recovery during severe weather and other incidents. As the new Chair of the Local Government Emergency Management Group she sees her primary role as ensuring a collective approach to further building the capacity of local government so that it can, along with others, meet the expectations placed on it when emergencies occur. Suzanne sees good relationships across all sectors involved as a key element of ensuring progress.

Suzanne has worked in a variety of different roles for Belfast City Council since 1988. Apart from enjoying spending time with her three children, she also loves cycling, water sports and travelling.

New Secretary of LGEMG – Barny Heywood

Barny Heywood has been the Group Chief Environmental Health Officer for the Western Group of Councils since early 2002. In this role he has a statutory responsibility for the standards of environmental health across the five council areas from Limavady in the North to Fermanagh in the West. In 2007 he took the post of Chief Environmental Health Officer for Omagh District Council as an additional function.



Barny is now in his third year as Chair of the Chief Environmental Health Officers Group (CEHOG). CEHOG brings the Chief EHOs of the 26 councils, the 4 Group Chief Officers, the CEHO for DHSSPS and the Director of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) for Northern Ireland into one forum that can act as a single point of communication between central government departments, national regulators and other agencies and the environmental health service.

Barny's interest in emergency planning comes from a period early in his professional life during which he had varied responsibilities for assisting in the provision of basic health needs such as accommodation, sanitation, water supplies, pest and mosquito control in displaced communities and for communities lacking these facilities in locations in Africa and Central America.

In recent years, Barny has played an active part in several flooding incidents in Omagh and Fermanagh District Council areas and, (as were many others), in the response to the severe weather incident in December 2010.

New Face in CCPB – Gavin King



In January 2012 Gavin King took over from Judith Brown in Civil Contingencies Policy Branch. Judith moved on promotion to another post within the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. All the team would like to thank Judith for the huge contribution she made to the branch both personally and professionally in her time in CCPB, and wish her all the best in her new role.

Gavin joined the Northern Ireland Civil Service in 2001 as an Assistant Statistician in the Department for Employment and Learning. He transferred to the Department of Education in 2004 and worked there until his promotion and move to CCPB. Among other duties, Gavin will be working in the areas of Pandemic Influenza guidance and Risk Assessment.

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Website watch

CCPB Website

The CCPB website at <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/making-government-work/civil-contingencies.htm> is kept up-to-date with background information on the Branch and its activities, items of interest, and NI publications.

Contributions

We would welcome any contribution in relation to regional or local level civil contingencies news for inclusion in future newsletters. You can contact the team using the details below:

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