

THE ROLE OF LEAD GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS IN PLANNING FOR AND MANAGING CRISES

THE FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

1. Most incidents are handled at a local level by the emergency services and by the appropriate local authority or authorities with no direct involvement by central government (though government departments with a potential interest would keep themselves informed on developing events and the handling of the media).
2. Where the UK central government does become involved, the initial response should come from a lead government department. The lead department would be responsible for alerting the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) as soon as it considered that any incident (or potential incident) was likely to require collective consideration by a range of departments. The CCS would then be in a position to assess the broad picture, consulting others as necessary, and discuss with the lead department whether the incident was of a scale or complexity to require central coordination or support.
3. It is important for all levels of Government to be clear in advance which department will be in the lead for as many potential challenges as possible. The list of pre-nominated leads produced as a schedule to this document is designed to ensure clarity in times of crisis.
4. The new lists update those found in the Home Office publication, *Dealing with Disaster*, the Scottish Executive document, *Dealing with Disasters Together* and the Northern Ireland Executive Document, *A Guide to Emergency planning in Northern Ireland*. The nominations reflect the devolution settlement; the changes to the machinery of government made by the Prime Minister since the general election; and incidents which were not covered in the earlier documents.
5. Where the lead is not clear the Civil Contingencies Secretariat is responsible for taking the immediate lead until it has the Prime Minister's endorsement of its advice on which department should take the lead. Moreover, the CCS will be available to lend its support at the earliest opportunity to a lead department and then work in close partnership with it until the resolution of the emergency.

THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

6. Since 11 September, the main focus of the CCC and the CCS has been to check and confirm the country's preparedness for handling the consequences of an exceptionally serious or widespread disaster that could lead to massive devastation and widespread casualties. In the meantime, the Government has continued to handle "ordinary" emergencies. For example, DEFRA has continued to lead on the response to foot and mouth and flooding. And an illustration of the handling of a specific incident is the way in which the DTLR with the Maritime & Coastguard Agency and the local authority concerned handled the response to the recent grounding of a the tanker *MV Willy*.

7. All departments have a responsibility to plan, prepare, train and exercise for handling incidents and emergencies that might occur within their field of responsibility. They must be ready to take on the leading role on behalf of central government in managing the initial response to a crisis, mitigating its immediate effects, and organising the development of a recovery plan.
8. But, what is the lead department expected to do? Much will depend on circumstances. But while flexibility is a virtue, there are certain basic functions that a lead department will need to perform.

PREPARATION AND PLANNING

9. All government departments must maintain a state of readiness. This entails:
 - i. building up its resilience to shocks and its capacity to lead the response to the emergencies for which it is nominated. This means planning, training and exercising (alongside those likely to have a stake in potential crises) so that it is able to pick up the reins quickly and effectively. This preparatory work should ensure that the department is clear of its local, regional and devolved administration contacts and the working relationships it wants to have with them in the event of an emergency. It should also identify the other departments, devolved administrations and agencies whose interests will be affected and whose assistance will be needed. On the immediate, practical level, it must also maintain and equip a facility for use as an emergency centre.
 - ii. identifying the capabilities that the local responders and those at each level of crisis management must be able to call upon (for example to evacuate large numbers, to treat large numbers of casualties, to access specialist supplies and technical and scientific expertise, to provide accurate and reassuring information, and so on) and then building them up so that the Department is in a position to deal with a number of potential scenarios, looking to the CCS for advice, guidance and support;
 - iii. leading negotiations with the Treasury for any necessary additional funds;
 - iv. keeping aware of the changing set of risks, threats and vulnerabilities which bear upon its fields of responsibility, co-operating with the Assessment Directorate of the CCS
 - v. reporting to Parliament and the public in timely fashion.

HANDLING AN EVENT

10. Departments must move into action immediately an emergency arises where they are designated as having the lead. Normally this will be contained within the Department's own contingency management arrangements. But where the

Department identifies a potential or actual civil emergency that poses a major disruptive challenge to the UK, then it will need to:

- vi. act as the focal point for communications between central government and the multi-agency strategic co-ordinating group on the ground (usually called Gold Command or Police Gold);
- vii. produce a brief, accurate situation report on the nature and scale of the emergency and submit this – along with the first briefing for media purposes - promptly to No 10, the Chairman of the CCC and the head of the CCS;
- viii. produce as soon as possible a handling plan – this should offer a clear assessment of whether the emergency is within the scope of the lead government department or whether central co-ordination arrangements need to be invoked. The decision on this will be for the Head of the CCS in close consultation with the lead department;
- ix. draw upon and apply the relevant capabilities applicable to the emergency in hand and co-ordinate the support needed from other government departments and agencies;
- x. use its authority decisively to take whatever executive decisions and actions are needed from the centre to handle the emergency or to help the local responders to deal with it;
- xi. co-ordinate and disseminate information for the public and the media at the national level, collaborating with the CCS;
- xii. account to Parliament and lead in the submission of evidence to any subsequent public inquiry;
- xiii. learn and share the lessons from the emergency, again in collaboration with the CCS's Learning and Communication Directorate.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL CONTINGENCIES SECRETARIAT

11. The Civil Contingencies Secretariat was not set up, and nor is it resourced or designed, to manage all crises. The CCS's role, under the leadership of the CCC, is to provide the central focus for the cross-departmental and cross-agency commitment, co-ordination and co-operation necessary if the UK is to deal effectively with disruptive challenges and crises. This focus goes beyond first response and consequence management and applies to our systems for identifying new challenges, for assessing risks, for anticipating, planning, preparing and exercising for crises, for building up our resilience to them, and for systematically applying the lessons learned from particular incidents.
12. In the event of an emergency of a scale, or of a kind notified by the lead government as requiring central involvement, CCS will engage in a way

designed to enable the department's Ministers and senior officials to concentrate on strategic decisions. Key objectives will be smooth working between organisations and seamless transition to central co-ordination if required. Working very closely with the department concerned, the CCS will:

- i. provide an assessment of immediate needs, and support their provision; establish possible scenarios up to worst case and plan for scaling-up, logistical management and exit;
 - ii. ensure that the centre and other interested departments are kept informed and are prepared to engage;
 - iii. help establish structures, rhythms, routines and data flows for managing the response – in particular facilitating augmentation of the department's resources and public information systems;
 - iv. connect the department with agencies able to provide specialist advice and information;
 - v. decide whether and when to approach the Chairman to convene a meeting of CCC, thereafter providing ongoing support from the centre.
13. In all its work, the CCS starts from the premise that the ability of central government to manage effectively our national capacity and capability to deal with disruptive challenges is a vital component of enhancing the country's resilience. The Secretariat therefore will seek to work in close partnership with lead departments, helping them to:
- vi. enable and protect their own decision takers;
 - vii. develop their own early warning systems;
 - viii. prepare plans against various eventualities and make sure those plans are properly integrated with those of other departments and agencies;
 - ix. identify the training and exercises needed to test the plans and enable continuous improvements;
 - x. build up the necessary management and professional expertise to maintain and activate the plans and to know where to turn for reinforcement and augmentation;
 - xi. learn, and share their learning, with other departments.

THE DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS

14. Certain events may occur which relate to non-devolved matters where, regardless of location, the lead UK government Department or organisation

would have responsibility for immediate containment – for example, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency leads on marine safety across the UK and has a presence in all four countries. In all such instances, the UK lead would liaise closely with its contacts in the DAs.

15. Each DA has its own emergency planning and lead organisation arrangements, which vary according to the terms of devolution settlements and local administrative arrangements. Each DA has systems for co-ordinating the multi-agency response to major incidents happening within its borders, or the local response to incidents happening elsewhere. Where the response falls within devolved responsibilities, co-ordination would normally fall to a DA lead department.
16. For incidents contained entirely within a devolved region, and where the response falls within their devolved responsibilities, the DA concerned would normally take full responsibility for planning and for all response and consequence management activities within its authority. It would also liaise, as appropriate with the Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland Offices, with any UK-wide departments or agencies involved in the response, and ensure that CCS was briefed as necessary.
17. For incidents affecting more than one DA, each would implement its own response, lead department, decision-making and co-ordination arrangements in relation to devolved matters. Additionally they would liaise with local lead organisations in other parts of the UK, departments and agencies with a wider geographical remit and the CCS to share information, discuss policy and ensure a co-ordinated response across the UK.
18. Ministers in the DAs are fully engaged in civil contingencies planning. They are members of the CCC. This reflects the wider principle that resilience is an issue that bears on all parts of the UK, the fact that the effects of wide-scale incidents may be felt across the borders of the UK, and the fact that those nearest to the area most affected may be the best placed to co-ordinate the response required.

FUTURE UPDATES

19. *Dealing with Disaster*, *Dealing with Disaster Together* and *A Guide to Emergency Planning in Northern Ireland* all need to be revised to reflect changed circumstances and developments in our thinking on the best way of handling civil contingencies as part of a wider effort to enhance the resilience of the government and of the country as a whole. The CCS and the DAs intend to scrutinise these documents and the CCS, after consultation with relevant departments and major stakeholders, will publish revised guidance later this year. However, the revised nomination of lead government departments, set out in the schedule to this document, is a useful and practical starting point. It creates a shared understanding of where lead responsibility for various categories of emergency rests in the UK Government and in the Devolved Administrations.