

Working together

A guide to multi-agency incident response

Summary



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1. INTRODUCTION

This guide outlines how key agencies responding to any major incident should work effectively together. It describes the roles and responsibilities of most responding agencies. .

In a major incident, a wide range of agencies and organisations are likely to be involved in supporting a response usually led by the emergency services. Each agency responding will have its own plan(s) describing what the agency should do. However, this multi agency guide should be referred to as well.

Co-operation between agencies that plan and respond is a key requirement of The Civil Contingencies Act (2004). The Forum used for planning and encouraging coordination is known as a 'Local Resilience Forum' (LRF) and these are currently based on Police Authority areas. The local LRF covering Birmingham is referred to as the West Midlands Conurbation LRF and is aligned to West Midlands Police boundaries. As well as Birmingham, other local authorities included are Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

This guide applies to co-operative arrangements in Birmingham and is a product of the Birmingham Resilience Group (BRG).

As well as co-ordinating planning, response and recovery within its home organisation, the Birmingham City Council Resilience Team (BRT) services meetings of the multi-agency Resilience Group.

2. DEFINITIONS

Category 1 responder

A Category 1 responder will be at the core of the response to an emergency and is subject to all of the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA 2004): Category 1 responders are drawn from:

- 'Blue Light' Emergency Services
- Government Agencies
- Local Authorities
- Health Bodies

Emergency as defined in the CCA

An event or situation which threatens serious damage to:

- Human welfare in a place in the UK;
- The environment of a place in the UK;
- or, War or terrorism which threatens serious damage to the security of the UK.

To be labelled an emergency, an event or situation must also pose a considerable test for an organisation's ability to perform its functions.

3. WHEN AN EMERGENCY/MAJOR INCIDENT OCCURS

Initiation

Emergencies/Major Incidents are usually declared by incident commanders within the Fire, Police or Ambulance Services (although other agencies operating within the CCA also have authority to do so if required). An initiation will be done by alerting the Operations Control of their Service, prefixing the message 'major incident' and giving information based on:

- | | | |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Survey | - | the scene on approach. |
| Assess | - | the situation on arrival. |
| Disseminate | - | the following information. |
| Casualties | - | numbers, fatalities, injured, condition, at scene or elsewhere. |
| Hazards | - | fire, flood, weather conditions, terrain, chemical and potential etc. |
| Access | - | can access to the scene be gained, best route, where is it etc. |
| Location | - | the exact location of incident. |
| Emergency | - | emergency services and other agencies present or required. |
| Type | - | of incident and brief details of numbers of vehicles, buildings, etc. |
| Safety | - | all aspects of health and safety and risk assessment must be considered by all staff working at or close to the scene. |

It is the responsibility of the initiating operations control to ensure that the other emergency services and agencies are informed. All notification messages to other emergency services, local authorities and other organisations whose assistance is requested **must** be prefixed 'major incident' and will include details of the incident.

Emergency/Major Incident stand-down

When appropriate, each organisation will be responsible for issuing their stand-down message

4. MAIN FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Combined response

The objectives of an effective combined response are to

- To save life and prevent further suffering
- To prevent any situation getting worse
- To liaise with other agencies to maintain coordination
- To protect and preserve any scene
- Joint response to the media
- Contribute to any debriefing process
- Assist in any investigation
- Return to normality

Police Service

The primary areas of Police responsibility are to:

- Coordinate scene of the incident
- Preserve any scene (crime scene)
- Oversee any investigation
- Gather and process casualty information.

Fire Service

The primary areas of operational responsibility are:

- Saving of life from fire or other hazards;
- Rendering humanitarian services;
- Firefighting in order to preserve and protect property;
- Management of hazardous materials and protection of the environment; and
- Salvage and damage control operations.

Ambulance Service

The primary areas of Ambulance Service responsibility are to:

- Save life through effective emergency treatment at the scene (in conjunction with the Medical Incident Officer and teams); and
- Transport the injured in order of priority to receiving hospitals.

Birmingham City Council

In an emergency situation, Birmingham City Council will:

- Support the emergency services
- Provide support and care to the community
- Use resources to mitigate the effects of an emergency
- Lead the recovery phase to return to normality
- Maintain normal services
- Provide an appropriate senior officer for on scene liaison
- Provide short and long term accommodation, personnel, equipment, transport, organise temporary mortuary facilities, provide welfare support and coordinate voluntary organisations.

National Health Service West Midlands (NHSWM)

- Coordinate the Emergency Response and Management Arrangements (ERMA)
- Command and Control of the health services response
- Alert all appropriate NHS agencies and other partner organisations
- Manage the emergency and coordinate regional resilience
- Maintain the care pathway across the health economy

NHS Acute Trusts (hospitals with A&E facilities)

- Receive and treat casualties
- Re – triage patients for treatment to meet clinical timelines.

Primary Care Trusts (PCT)

- Coordinate healthcare resources
- Initiate the public health response.
- Mobilise primary and community health services.

Health Protection Agency (HPA)

- Facilitates the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell to any incident management as required; to,
- provide specialist advice on public health, communicable disease, chemical, hazards and poisons.

The Environment Agency

- Monitor river levels, forecast and warn other emergency responders and the public of potential flooding
- Provide specialist advice on pollution emergencies.

Highways Agency

- Operates and maintains strategic road network such as motorway systems
- Plays a crucial role in facilitating the free movement of people around the network

Department of Communities and Local Government (Resilience and Emergency Directorate)

- Interact with local responders and Central Government and Ministers
- Support the local response
- Monitor the wider impacts of the emergency
- Broker mutual aid across localities and LRF areas

British Transport Police (BTP) (at railway incidents)

- Same as West Midlands Police.

Multi Faith Services

- Offer advice and guidance about religious and ethnic groups and requirements relating to medical issues as well as hygiene, diet and places of prayer
- Offer support, translators and interpreters
- Advise in relation to body storage, handling and funeral arrangements.

Utility Agencies—providing water, gas, electricity, etc.

- Give technical advice relevant to their particular service.

Military Assets (if available)

- Offer advice and guidance about all forms of military assistance
- Provide Liaison Officers at Gold and Silver response levels
- Offer support through translators and interpreters

5. SCENE MANAGEMENT

When a Forward or Incident Control Point is established at the scene, the Incident (or Tactical) Commanders should call an initial briefing with agency leads. This will help determine/agree tactical procedures for the incident, exchange operational information and identify further needs.

Cordons

Cordons will be established by the police:

- **Inner Cordon** to provide security of the hazard area and potential crime scene
- **Outer Cordon** to seal off an extensive working area around the inner cordon
- **Traffic Cordon** to prevent unauthorised vehicle access to the surrounding scene

The initial control of the *inner cordon* is the overall responsibility of the Fire Service however the Police will monitor access through a control point. The Police will control entry and exit points to the *outer cordon*, all non emergency service personnel requiring access should provide official workplace identification. Any responding command/control vehicles should be positioned between the inner

and outer cordons.

Rendezvous point

A rendezvous point (RVP) will be setup and managed by the Police (after consultation with other organisations). All organisations must report to the RVP when attending the incident. The Fire and Ambulance Services may appoint a liaison officer to assist at the RVP.

Marshalling area

The marshalling area is for resources that are not immediately required at the incident. The Police, in liaison with the Fire and Ambulance Services, will control the area.

Site investigation

The cause of the incident may initially be unknown, and may be assumed to be malicious or could be accidental. The Police Incident Commander will appoint a Senior Investigating Officer, who will work with the other legally appointed investigation agencies to collate evidence for:

- the Coroner;
- any inquiry or tribunal; or
- any criminal proceedings.

Site preservation

The incident scene must be treated as a 'scene of crime' and its protection is vital to preserve evidence. When the rescue phase is complete and the scene has been declared safe, an extensive search of the scene will be carried out by the Police to recover items for evidential or identification purposes and to identify the position of wreckage.

It is important that wreckage should not be removed unless it is life threatening.

Safety

Health and Safety legislation imposes duties on both employers and employees to conduct their work in a safe manner. Operations during a major incident inevitably contain an element of risk.

Appropriate PPE, such as high-visibility clothing, headgear, boots and overalls must be used. A safety officer should be appointed by the relevant emergency services to make sure that the necessary control measures identified during the initial dynamic risk assessments are applied and met.

6. COMMAND AND CONTROL

The three levels of command and control that may be brought into play at a multi agency incident are known as Bronze, Silver and Gold. The adoption of this nationally agreed management framework is helping to integrate plans and procedures between agencies.

Operational – is where the management of hands-on work is undertaken at the scene of an incident. The role would not be formally labelled 'Bronze' unless a tactical or Silver level is in place, usually when a multi agency 'Silver' group has been formed.

Tactical – is the level of overall command on the incident ground and ensures that all operational levels are supported. If the incident develops along multi agency lines this role would become 'Silver' Command.

NOTE: an incident may be formally structured with multi-agency Bronze and Silver Commands functioning without a 'Gold' being in place.

Strategic – may be invoked where an event or situation has significant impact on resources, involving a large number of agencies or has long term implications for a community or the environment. Such matters will be addressed through a Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) if it has been deemed necessary to call the group together. The members of the SCG are drawn from all relevant agencies and have authority to make executive decisions appropriate to the circumstances. A Strategic Co-ordination Group will typically:

- be located away from the scene;
- establish a policy within which Silver Commanders will work;
- determine strategic objectives; and
- plan beyond the immediate response phase for recovering from the emergency and return to a state of normality.

7. COMMUNICATIONS

Each emergency service and other organisations have their own facilities to communicate between the incident and their control rooms. However, inter-agency communication and liaison is vital to ensure that all officers at the incident are aware of the operational situation. Multi-Agency communication at scene has been significantly enhanced through the rollout of Airwave Interoperability.

Mobile Telephone Privileged Access Scheme

The Mobile Telephone Privileged Access Scheme (MTPAS) enhances the resilience of telecommunications available to responders to a major incident. It offers line preferences to registered mobile telephone users. The scheme was formerly known as the Access Overload Control Scheme (ACCOLC). It can only be activated by the Police Gold Commander in charge of a major incident response.

The media

Any major incident will attract media attention. Media access to an incident site is a Police responsibility. At no time should the media be allowed to place themselves or any other persons in a dangerous situation, or where they hinder operations.

Any press statements or briefings to the media must be via a nominated Press Officer and should be regularly updated. In the early stages they should focus on what is happening at the scene. The statements should not speculate on the cause or give premature estimates of the numbers of casualties or deceased. Consideration should be given to issuing an early holding statement and the establishment of a Media Co-ordination Centre – should the situation warrant it. .

Incident Information Centre (Casualty Bureau)

The primary role of the Police Incident Information Centre (Casualty Bureau) is to collate data, deal with enquiries from members of the public and other related matters resulting from any major incident, such as collecting information on the deceased, injured and non-injured persons involved.

The Casualty Bureau will normally operate alongside Police Gold Control, as the use of both facilities provides an integrated command and management facility.

The telephone numbers for the Casualty Bureau will be widely circulated during an incident.

Hospital documentation team

The Ambulance Service will designate certain hospitals as receiving hospitals for casualties from major incidents and disasters. Emergency procedures in relation to such hospitals include the provision of facilities for Police documentation teams. These teams are responsible for the collation of casualty data, establishing communications and liaison with the Incident Information Centre and Police Gold Command.

8. ASSISTANCE CENTRES

Survivor Reception Centre

A Survivor Reception Centre (SRC) is a secure area in which survivors not requiring acute hospital treatment can be taken for short-term shelter or first aid. Evidence may also be gathered from this location. A SRC is set up immediately and may be started by the emergency services, until the local authority becomes active in the response and assumes the lead role.

Rest centre

A rest centre is a building selected or taken over by the local authority with facilities for the temporary accommodation of evacuees or homeless survivors. A rest centre is established for overnight use. The lead responsibility sits with the local authority, with contributions from the Police, Primary Care Trusts and the voluntary sector. The City Council can arrange transport to the Rest Centre.

Casualty Bureau

A (police) Casualty Bureau is an initial point of contact for receiving and assessing information about victims, in order to inform the investigation, trace and identify people, reconcile missing persons and collate accurate information for distribution to appropriate organisations.

Family and Friends Reception Centre

A Family and Friends Reception Centre is set up to help reunite family and friends with survivors. It has the capacity to register, interview and provide shelter for family and friends. A Family and Friends Reception Centre is set up within the first 12 hours of an incident, initially being established by the Police in consultation with the local authority and is also staffed by suitably trained voluntary organisation personnel. Representatives from faith communities may also be consulted and interpreters required.

Humanitarian Assistance Centre

A Humanitarian Assistance Centre (HAC) acts as a focal point for information and assistance to bereaved families and friends of those missing, injured or killed, survivors and to all those directly affected by and involved in the emergency.

HACs enable those affected to benefit from information and help in a timely, co-ordinated manner and, where necessary, help with the gathering of forensic samples in order to assist in the identification process.

They also offer access to and guidance on a range of agencies and services, allowing people to make informed decisions according to their needs and ensure a seamless multi agency approach to humanitarian assistance.

A HAC is set up within the first 48 hours of an incident by the local authority.

9. SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS

The services of voluntary, commercial and government organisations should not be underestimated as they can make important contributions to a major incident, depending on their expertise, they include:

- British Red Cross
- St John Ambulance
- WRVS
- Salvation Army

10 RECOVERY

The City Council is likely to be the agency that will lead on the recovery from any given emergency. For further information regarding this please refer to the separate Birmingham Resilience Group RG Recovery Plan, prepared by the City Council. The Plan includes:

- Guidance on the development of a “Recovery Strategy”;
- Guidance on the impact of emergencies to inform the production of an “impact assessment”

11. CONCLUSION

Good inter agency cooperation between all organisations, voluntary and statutory, is crucial to the overall effectiveness in managing a major incident.

With correct planning, preparation, debriefing and regular training, we will all be better equipped to the demands that a disaster may ask of us.