

EMERGENCY Management

Helping You To Help Yourselves
Newsletter of the Emergency Planning Service

March 2011

exercise
Watermark

Supporting community action, testing professional response

As we complete this newsletter Exercise Watermark is in progress and Devon County Council has been exercised.

Government departments, agencies, emergency responders, local authorities and communities have been involved in one of the biggest national exercises to take place in England and Wales. It tested the country's response when dealing with groundwater surface water, reservoir, river and coastal flooding.

The Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Resilience Forum were exercised on Mon 7 March and faced threats from surface water flooding and rapid response catchment flooding.

The likelihood of flooding is very real, especially for people and families who live in areas of high risk.

Following the floods in 2007, Sir Michael Pitt was asked by the Government to conduct an independent review into the emergency. His report made 92 recommendations, one of which was to hold a national exercise to test the arrangements put into place by emergency responders to respond to severe flooding, this is Exercise Watermark. Led by Defra and the Welsh Assembly Government and delivered by the Environment Agency, the exercise will take place across the country from 7 - 11 March.

Responding to a flood involves a number of different agencies and organisations. Exercise Watermark looked to make sure everyone is able to work together quickly and effectively in case of a real flooding emergency. The exercise put all our existing emergency plans to the test.

Government agencies, emergency services and other local responders such as Local Authorities and the NHS already work very closely together through Regional and Local Resilience Forums (LRFs). Nearly all LRFs across the country took part in the exercise.

The exercise, managed by a National Project Team, took place nationally, regionally and locally. Fourteen LRFs along with key government departments took part in the national level of the exercise. All other LRFs taking part ran locally tailored exercises, testing a number of their own objectives against the national flooding scenario or one of their own.

Devon County Council is one of the key players in this LRF and activated the DCC Emergency Centre to test our response to the demands of the exercise.



Devon County Council Emergency Centre in operation during Exercise Watermark

Flooding in Cornwall - De-Brief lessons learned

On Thursday 17 November 2010 mid-Cornwall experienced heavy and prolonged rainfall. After warnings the previous afternoon and evening, over 40 mm fell in the early hours of the morning, leading to significant flooding in a number of communities either on or inland from the south coast, in and around Lostwithiel, Par / St Blazey and the coastal town of Mevagissey. Well over 250 homes and businesses were affected by the flooding.



Around 0500hrs first reports of flooding were received by the Fire Service, who quickly became overwhelmed with the volume of calls. The initial flooding in those communities happened without warning, caused by surface water accumulation and local brooks and main watercourse tributaries being unable to cope with the volume of water and run-off. Flood watches and warnings on main watercourses, such as the river Fowey, were not in place for a number of hours.

At 0615hrs the Police declared a major incident with Cornwall Silver, located in the basement of County Hall, Truro, opening by 0700hrs. During the morning and early afternoon the response was in full swing, with people being evacuated from their homes and businesses unable to open because of flooded premises. A rest centre was opened at Polkyth, although it was barely used, people preferring to stay in their homes and live upstairs, whilst undertaking the clear up of flooding in the lower parts of their properties.

Cornwall Council, which since 2009 has been a Unitary

Council covering the whole of the County of Cornwall, quickly formed a Recovery Coordination Group (RCG), identifying personnel and resources required to address the quickly moving situation. In fact, by 1700hrs that evening, the floods had receded sufficiently for the Police to declare that the life threatening phase of the flooding was over and handed lead responsibility over to the Council to coordinate the Recovery effort. The RCG met daily to start with and meetings continued until stood down on 8th December, with the group put into 'passive' mode, ready to start again if required.

The RCG was able to identify a requirement for 6 sub-groups to cover the aspects of Recovery required by the incident, each group led by an officer from Cornwall Council

- Community Engagement
- Environment & Infrastructure
- Business & Economic Recovery
- Health and Welfare (led by PCT)
- Finance
- Communications.

Key to establishing stability was the early community meetings that were held in the most affected communities on the evening of the 17th. This gave reassurance to the communities affected and quickly identified issues to be addressed by the Recovery groups. Generally, people volunteering to help flood victims was handled informally and locally – an example was given of a Parish Councillor directing volunteers on the day of the floods – which raised wider concerns about the management of spontaneous volunteers, and considerations of insurance, either to the volunteer or to others as a result of mis-directed help.

The flooding happened so quickly that little use was made of the strategic (ie LRF) level flood plans. There was in existence a detailed draft plan for the Par-St Blazey high risk (of flooding) community, which was partially implemented (this is the 3rd incidence of flooding in that community over the past two years!). However, many parishes and affected communities are now considering, or

in the process of writing, their own community flood plan or community emergency plan.



The floods themselves, unsurprisingly, saw high levels of interest from the media, being the main item on the national news for a couple of days, with interest intensified by the visits of the Prime Minister, Prince Charles and Secretary of State for Environment. Cornwall Council were quickly able to compile information packs which were handed out at the community meetings and later to residents affected by the floods, covering health issues, insurance, building repairs, finance and other sources of support. Interest from the national media waned almost as the floods themselves receded, indicative of effective response on the ground by the various agencies.



Most people are now back in their houses, however there are still reports of businesses not re-opening, emphasising the need for robust business continuity planning, even for the smallest business. However, aided by swift action by the Council, things are returning to normal as quickly as possible.

National Framework on Community Resilience

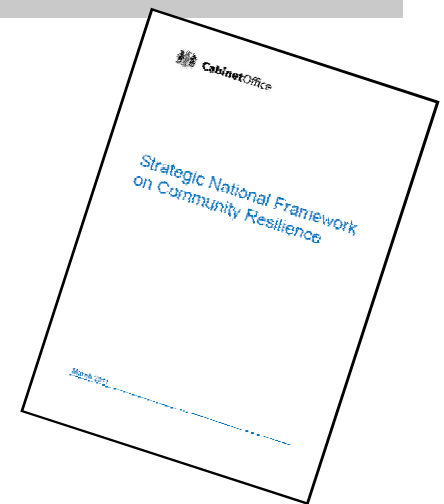
The beginning of March sees the launch of the National Community Resilience Programme, which encourages individuals and communities to become better prepared to deal with the impacts of emergencies. This coincides with the start of Exercise Watermark – which itself sees communities up and down the country working with responders to prepare themselves to deal with the impacts of flooding.

The launch includes the publication of a series of online resources:

- **Community Resilience** – This sets out the principles of community resilience and outlines what the Government's contribution will be to building community resilience. It is aimed at anyone who is interested in the strategic overview of community resilience policy.
- **Preparing for Emergencies - Guide for Communities** – This is an introductory guide for those who might want to help their community to prepare for an

emergency. It is intended to invite, inspire and motivate community leaders/champions to take steps to prepare their communities to cope in an emergency.

- **Community Emergency Plan Toolkit and Template** – are intended for the community leaders and champions who are interested in creating an emergency plan for their community. The toolkit and template provide a step by step guide of how to do this. It emphasises that this is one way of preparing your community and invites community leaders to consider how they might adapt this to their local area. It includes good practice examples to show communities what can be achieved.
- **Preparing for Emergencies – revised web material** - the updated web pages on Directgov aim to encourage members of the public to take steps to prepare for an emergency and to think about the risks they face. The pages set



out how people can prepare at an individual and community level and provide links to key resources and further information.

The final versions of the documents are now available from the Cabinet Office website (www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/communityresilience) and via the Preparing for Emergencies pages on Directgov (www.direct.gov.uk/preparingforemergencies).



What does St John Ambulance do in an Emergency?

The underlying ethos of St John Ambulance is the belief that it's absolutely unacceptable that so many people die needlessly – because no one could give them first aid when they needed it.

St John Ambulance teaches people first aid - about 800,000 last year alone – so that they can be the difference between a life lost and a life saved.

They teach first aid to people ranging from the young to those in the workplace and in the community. Additionally, they teach people who become our volunteers, who offer their skills and time to be the difference right in the heart of their community – at public events, first responders or back up to local ambulance services.

Emergency response - St John Ambulance responds to hundreds of local incidents and

major accidents each year. They play a crucial role in supporting the emergency services when help is needed.

Their volunteers are fully-trained and always on hand to offer assistance and support to those in need. They respond quickly, providing vital help when major emergencies, road accidents, weather incidents and fires occur. Whatever happens, from setting up an evacuation centre to attending a major accident, they will be ready to respond.

Floodings 2007

Throughout June and July 2007 their volunteers worked tirelessly to help support communities hit by heavy flood waters. They provided a 24-hour support with volunteers and vehicles in a bid to help people struck by the disaster and set up

many rest centres for those evacuated from their homes.

London bombings 2005

- In July 2005 at the time of the London bombings, they responded within hours. They were able to provide more than 120 volunteers and staff, 37 ambulances, 20 mobile treatment centres and numerous specialist vehicles, to support the London Ambulance Service. They remained at the three underground stations affected by the bombings, for five days, 24-hours-a day, to provide care, treatment and support to all the underground rescue teams and other workers.



Be prepared for flooding.

Call **0845 988 1188** or visit

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/floodline

Business Continuity Awareness Week 2011: March 21st to 25th

Business Continuity Awareness Week (BCAW) is the global educational event designed to help people understand more about business continuity management, its applications and benefits.

BCAW is facilitated by the Business Continuity Institute (BCI), the prestigious international membership body for

business continuity management with over 5,000 members in 90 countries.




To see what's happening and learn more - visit the website www.bcaw2011.com

First Point of Contact

Did you know your City, District or Borough Emergency Planning Officer is your first point of contact for assistance?

You will find them listed below for reference. Remember they are all there to help you!

Also, the Devon County Council website has lots of useful information for both individuals and communities:






-  www.devon.gov.uk
-  Safety and Emergencies
-  Emergencies

Another Goodbye...

We now say goodbye to Richard Horne who leaves Devon County Council in April. Richard has been Emergency Planning Manager for the past few years having come from the Audit Commission and he has made a huge contribution to the resilience of Devon. As part of the re-structuring of the council he now moves on and we wish him well.

Richard has added value in many ways. During his tenure he has been at the forefront in the Local Authority response and recovery to events such as the Napoli, the floods in East Devon and the snow on Haldon Hill to name but a few.



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