

Case Study – Community Exercising and Planning Day

Background

The Thames Valley Community event was part of Exercise Watermark which tested the nation's resilience to a major flood over three days and was the culmination of a year's planning across many different agencies in Thames Valley.

Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF) wanted to hold an event for local communities which was more than just a simple flood fair. In particular Oxfordshire County Council wanted to promote community emergency plans recognising that flooding is just one of the risks that communities could face. Whilst the Environment Agency (EA) had worked extensively with flood-affected communities to promote community flood plans, the LRF recognised the need to promote generic community emergency plans to encourage communities to plan for a range of challenges they might face.

TVLRF were also keen to provide a forum in which communities were able to test and validate their own plans as responders recognised that it was most appropriate for validation and testing to be done by the authors and for responders to pose questions and challenges against which plans could be measured.

Summary

On the 12th March 2011 Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF) held a free community day as part of Exercise Watermark at the Kings Centre in Oxford. The event was hugely successful with attendance from over 150 people from 65 different community groups, flood groups, parish and town councils.

The day offered participants the opportunity to validate their flood and community plans through flooding scenarios, attend stalls and exhibitions, watch flooding response displays, talk to emergency response experts and swap flooding experiences with other communities. TVLRF organisations worked together to develop and deliver an event with multi agency input so that participants would be able to explore the way in which agencies work together during an incident.

The success of the event was demonstrated through the excellent attendance figures and the positive feedback from participants. Thames Valley LRF was very pleased to receive an award from the national Exercise Watermark planning team for "best community event".

Who was involved?

One of the most successful features of the community day was the multi-agency approach taken in planning and delivery. Agencies involved included:

- local authorities;
- Thames Valley Police;
- NHS Oxfordshire;
- Environment Agency;
- Fire and Rescue Services;
- St John Ambulance; and
- The National Flood Forum

The event was also lucky enough to have the Rt Hon Richard Beynon (MP) appear as a key note speaker who was very well received.

Planning the community day was challenging as Exercise Watermark itself was taking a large proportion of staff resource to arrange. In order to focus on the community day a separate planning group was set up to concentrate on the delivery and coordination of the day – a number of specialised meetings were held over 3-4 months. Within Oxfordshire County Council one member of staff sat on this group and devoted a considerable amount of time to the event

What were the Outcomes?

Since the event we have had a great deal of positive feedback from participants especially around the practical displays run by the environment agency and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue service. By bringing communities together agencies have been able to build new relationships with local communities and a number of parish councils are as a result of the day developing community emergency plans

Key Learning Points

The event highlighted the fact that participants were particularly keen to learn more about their role during an emergency response and to draw attention to the resources at their disposal. There was also a lot of enthusiasm for further community events delivered similarly in a multi-

agency format whilst continuing to provide the opportunity to share ideas and best practice between communities.

One specific message that came back from participants was the need for input from insurance companies specifically in terms of recovering from flooding.

Next Steps

After the event TVLRF produced a newsletter to follow up on some of the issues raised by participants. Local Authorities are continuing their individual community engagement initiatives; Oxfordshire County Council will be holding a series of community events for parish and town councils this year. Learning from the event is being look at as part of the overall Exercise Watermark feedback.

Further information

The community planning workstream will continue to be a priority for local responders but this type of event was an opportunity to build on work already undertaken, to raise the profile of planning in the media and support local communities.

Contact details

Bethan Morgan

Emergency Planning Officer

Bethan.morgan@oxfordshire.gov.uk