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**Media Emergency Forum & RMEFs Annual
Report: July 2004 - July 2005**

Introduction

The first part of this report reviews the achievements of the national Media Emergency Forum from July 2004 through to July 2005. It outlines the progress on implementing previous recommendations on areas such as media accreditation, and the valuable role it played following the introduction of two new pieces of key government legislation.

The second part contains individual reports from each of the Regional MEFs, which have seen significant development over the past year, and are now consolidated in all English regions.

BELOW: the media at Exercise Horizon, July 2004



Foreword

By Howell James CBE,
Permanent Secretary, Government
Communications & Chair, national Media
Emergency Forum



IT WAS my pleasure to assume the chair of the national Media Emergency Forum (MEF) last year from Lucian Hudson, the Director of Communications at the Department for Constitutional Affairs. Chairing the MEF is one of my key priorities as Permanent Secretary, Government Communication and it demonstrates the Government's commitment to continuing a productive relationship between the media and authorities on emergency matters.

This year's MEF Annual Report comes in the aftermath of the Boxing Day Tsunami and the terrorist attacks in London on 7 July and the failed attacks of 21 July. I know all members of the MEF and the Regional Media Emergency Forums (RMEFs) send their heartfelt condolences to the victims and to all those affected by these terrible events.

The media has commented on the swift and professional response of the emergency services and key responders on 7 July. I would wish to commend the role played by the UK media - the responsible, balanced and mature nature of their coverage did much to reassure the public and played a great part in ensuring the safety of all communities.

The work of the national MEF will continue to provide a solid framework for developing trust and confidence between the media, government and first responders. Indeed, recent events only serve to underline the value and importance of this forum. The lessons the MEF identified through a table top exercise following the Madrid bombings sadly had to be put into practice on July 7.

This report covers the activities of the national MEF during the period July 2004 - July 2005, a review of progress on the recommendations from previous MEF reports and individual reports from each of the RMEFs.

A new secretariat for the national MEF has been established during the year, staffed by members of the Security, Intelligence and Resilience Team within the Cabinet Office Communications Group.

The lessons learnt from projects undertaken last year were disseminated to the media and emergency planning community nationally, while the MEF played a key role in the consultation on two major pieces of new legislation, the Civil Contingencies Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

The main area of progress however was on media accreditation. The UK Press Card Authority (UKPCA) has now been established and the profile of the press card scheme is being raised across police forces through an Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) poster campaign.

For the RMEFs, this has been a year of consolidation, following their establishment in 2003. The level of engagement they have achieved with the local and regional media is developing, as evidenced by major events such as the Boscastle and Carlisle floods and Exercise Horizon. The RMEFs, although less than two years old, are already part of the fabric of the regional resilience structure.

The work of the MEF both nationally and in the regions clearly continues to provide an important role and I am grateful to everyone involved for their significant contribution.

Media Emergency Forum Achievements



ABOVE: the Emergency Services in action on the 7 July bombings of London's transport system.

Media Accreditation

A KEY area of progress over the past year was on media accreditation. This has been a complicated question for the media and authorities, since the problems experienced in New York which were highlighted in the MEF's report *9/11: Implications for Communications* published in July 2002.

Following the MEF's '9/11' report, the UK Press Card Scheme agreed a more secure press card was needed for journalists. The aim of the voluntary scheme is to issue press/media credentials to professional newsgatherers in the UK. Its chairman is Mike Granatt, the former Director General of the Government Information and Communication Service (GICS). Earlier this year the name of the organisation changed to the UK Press Card Authority (UKPCA).

The scheme comprises sixteen "gatekeepers" representing media employers' associations, trade unions and professional associations, covering all UK media and those foreign media representatives based in this country. The gatekeepers issue cards to their members or to those they represent, and are responsible for ensuring that conditions are adhered to.

The scheme was originally launched by the Metropolitan Police in 1992, with the co-operation of major industry bodies and the aim of ending the proliferation of press cards through agreement on a universally-recognised card (bearing the word PRESS). The card is recognised by all police forces in the UK, and de facto by other public bodies.

The UKPCA has now introduced various new functions to the card and processes, which will contribute to an improved

‘ The work of the MEF both nationally and in the regions clearly continues to provide an important role and I am grateful to everyone for their significant contribution. ’

Howell James CBE,
Permanent Secretary,
Government
Communications,
Cabinet Office

working environment for the media. The card itself has been updated with two new security features: one, a code in the background printing; the other, a mark detectable by ultra-violet equipment. The verification system for card holders has been moved from the Metropolitan Police to the Press Association Call Centre and the gatekeepers ensure that the contract with the Press Association guarantees the security of the data. Foreign journalists already based in the UK have the press card, but further work is being carried out in order to facilitate media accreditation for extra visiting foreign journalists should the situation demand.

RMEFs

The other major project during the past 12 months has been to consolidate the newly formed RMEFs, and ensure their integration with the workings of the national MEF.

One initiative was to facilitate a national meeting of all the RMEF chairs, which took place at the Cabinet Office and had presentations on the major media lessons identified from Boscastle and Morecambe Bay. One of the key points of the meeting was the commonality of the issues being examined individually by each RMEF, and the benefits that will be made by sharing rather than duplicating their experiences. All participants agreed that a similar joint forum should be held in the future.

Support also continues to be given to the 'MEF' initiatives in Scotland, Wales

and Northern Ireland.

Legislation

The MEF played its role in two pieces of major Government legislation introduced during the past 12 months; the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Civil Contingencies Act.

The MEF has proved a valuable conduit to the national media in the discussions and explanations of the workings of the FOIA in the run up to its introduction. Equally, there has been much 'behind the scenes' work carried out by the MEF secretariat in the drawing up of the Guidance to the Civil Contingencies Act and the new 'Emergency Preparedness' document. This activity has ensured that all emergency planning practitioners throughout the country understand the importance of the MEF and RMEFs, and the support they can give in contingency planning.

BELOW: 7 July in London



The RMEFs

By Bob Wade,
Government News Network,
Lead Senior Information Officer for Civil
Contingencies & Emergency Planning



ALTHOUGH only established just over two years ago, Regional Media Emergency Forums (RMEFs) are now consolidated in all of the English regions. More importantly, they are considered an integral part of the regional resilience structure. They are seen as an important platform that can influence attitudes of both the emergency planning community and the media.

We are all appalled by the 7 July London bombings. Rightly, all eyes now look to the capital. In the regions we are following in its wake and learning the lessons to ensure the safety of our own communities.

In the regions, our challenges over the past 12 months have been natural ones, with the floods in Boscastle and Carlisle. These two events demonstrated the importance of getting it right in the regions, and this resolve will only be strengthened after the horror of the London bombs.

While the RMEFs had no direct 'operational' involvement in these major events, the reports overleaf demonstrate how all partners involved believed relationships were helped between responders and the media because of RMEF activities.

I'm particularly pleased to report on the increased level of real media involvement in Exercises - including Exercise Horizon in Birmingham, the largest civilian exercise ever held in the UK. In the past, some emergency planning practitioners were very hesitant about involving the media. Now it is the norm. The RMEFs have played a major role in breaking down these barriers.

The RMEFs' public face has been greatly enhanced by the prominent role ascribed to them in the Guidance to the Civil Contingencies Act, published during the year. This, alongside the new tranche of Category One responders empowered by the Act, has generated a new wave of organisations wanting to get involved with the RMEFs.

The challenge in the coming twelve months will be to find organisational forms that can accommodate the increased interest, without diluting the role of the RMEFs or diverting them from their original intentions.

However, the 'over subscription' to the RMEFs in some areas is a testimony to the success of the RMEF venture. The RMEFs clearly have a continued major role to play.

Everyone knows deep down that agencies need the media and the media needs the agencies that respond to emergencies. We might not always see eye to eye but current joint initiatives are bringing us closer together. The RMEF does a good job in bringing us together - something we are building on for the good of people in Greater Manchester.

David Haworth,
Secretary, Greater Manchester Resilience Forum



By Philip Welsh
Chair, North West RMEF & Managing Director, *Blackpool Evening Gazette*

North West

THIS year saw the long awaited Civil Contingencies Act making significant headway in changing the emergency planning landscape. In the North West we have tried to stay focussed on the over-riding need to build the best possible relations between the media and responding agencies.

This has shaped our discussions throughout this period. The aim has been to help two groups of people who normally get along pretty well understand each other better on a day when circumstances may make bridge building difficult.

As with the Morecambe Bay debrief last year, so again we met to learn the lessons of the Carlisle floods (see next page).

During RMEF meetings our net was cast wide to enable the media and responders to look for the lessons to be from a variety of incidents:

- BT shared its experiences in working with the media after the cable fire that left phone and other services in an around Manchester out of action for many days.
- the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister outlined the role of mass decontamination kit in the region
- Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service flagged up the real but unseen dangers facing the media covering a CBRN incident.
- the State Veterinary Service on how arrangements for engaging with the media and stakeholders had been completely revamped since the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001.

Meanwhile, Lancashire police has shared research with the Forum which shows that the public is eager for more information about CBRN attacks.

Beyond the confines of the meeting room the Forum has worked with colleagues all over the region to encourage greater contacts between the media and agencies, particularly brokering meetings in Greater Manchester and Lancashire as well as supporting a new agency/media group in Cumbria. We continue to support the work pioneered by Merseyside police to involve the media in planning for a catastrophic disaster.

BELOW: dramatic scenes during the Carlisle flood (photo: Cumbrian Newspapers)



BELOW: the waters rise in Carlisle (photo: Cumbrian Newspapers)



Carlisle floods: media and responders faced same challenges

ONCE again in the North West it was a tragedy that saw the RMEF at its best. With interest in the Morecambe Bay debrief still strong, we found ourselves inviting media and agencies to another to discuss the Carlisle floods. The events of 8 January onwards have been graphically illustrated but their effects raised some key issues that affect the media and responding agencies everywhere.

- Media resilience: with electricity knocked out transmitters went down, the local paper was unable to print for a short time, television went off air, raising the issue of what, if any, priority should they be given when power is restored.
- Responding agencies faced unprecedented demands for information, but found mutual support of press officers could be more robust
- Everyone suffered from failed phones, landlines and mobiles.
- Internet: in the early hours of the floods it was the only way to get information. A password protected website for the media would have eased demand on press officers.

The debrief undoubtedly raised some interesting issues and showed that, for once, the media and responding agencies suffered much the same problems but still worked together to get out the information so badly needed by local people.

“ The North West forum has been more than just another networking opportunity.

Getting all of the region's major media players into one room on a regular basis is an achievement which has already paid dividends for all involved.

I think we've all come away with a better understanding of how we each operate, and that in turn has given us all a better insight into each other's needs.

Like all good ideas, you wonder why it's never been done before.

”

John Carberry,
Media Manager, United Utilities

*The North
East RMEF
in session*



By Andrew Smith
Chair, North East
RMEF & Editor in
Chief, North East
Press (Weeklies)

North East

NORTH East RMEF has begun to build on the foundations laid in 2003-04 by initiating some practical work which I believe could make a real difference in the event of a major incident in the region.

A notable initiative was the establishment of a sub-group with the specific job of drawing up pre-prepared health and safety messages, and a protocol for releasing them through the media, so that essential information and advice can be issued to the public without delay if an emergency occurs.

RMEF representatives from the Health Protection Agency and other NHS sectors were particularly keen to ensure that when a major emergency occurs they should have appropriate advice ready to issue immediately and arrangements in place for releasing it through the media.

The RMEF sub-group, including health, emergency planning, police and media representatives, drew up two basic messages - one for a CBRN incident and one for a large-scale accident such as an aircraft or rail crash. Local Resilience Forums in the region are being asked to request their members to adopt the messages and the protocol for publicising them.

Opportunities were taken during the year to learn the lessons of a number of both exercises and real incidents.

Exercise Magpie was one of the largest Emergency Planning exercises ever conducted in the North East and one of the biggest of its type in the country, based on a scenario in which a large number of people attending a conference in Newcastle Civic Centre were subjected to a sarin gas attack. The exercise attracted the attention of real media, both regional and national, and was attended by John Hutton, the then Health minister and now Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster at the Cabinet Office. Deirdre Good, of the Health Protection Agency, which was in the lead for this exercise, talked the RMEF through the lessons.

Other discussions have included:

- Nigel Ellis of GNN North West on the Morecambe Bay cockle pickers' incident.

- Yvonne Hewett, of the UK Resilience Web Team in the Cabinet Office, on the uses of the internet in preparing for and dealing with emergencies
- Helen Hinds of the Regional Resilience Team at Government Office for the North East, on the work of that body.

The RMEF has established close working relations with Cleveland MEF, which is carrying out similar work in its own sub-region while continuing to maintain Cleveland representation on the RMEF. Cleveland has long experience of close co-operation between emergency planners, emergency services, the media and industry because of the need to prepare for possible incidents involving the area's large and numerous chemicals plants.

We are conscious that the Civil Contingencies Act has become law and are concerned that all members should be aware of its implications. Relevant sections of the guidance to the Act have been circulated to all RMEF members.

The year saw a continuing high level of support for the RMEF from its member organisations and I am confident that now we are getting down to practical work which can make a difference. Members will be confirmed in their view of the RMEF as an extremely worthwhile organisation and will continue to give it their active support.

Support for NEIL initiative

The RMEF was also able to support Northumbria Police in an initiative it is leading to ensure information gets through to the public in the event of a major incident. The North East Information Line (NEIL) is a telephone facility capable of issuing public information and advice about a major incident or community crisis and will be available to issue messages from members of the Local Resilience Forums. They will be able to place recorded information and advice on the line and members of the public will be invited to call in to access it. Media will be informed whenever NEIL is activated so they can publicise its availability and call it themselves for information.



ABOVE: Warning and informing the public has been a key issue for the RMEFs



By Will Venters
Chair, Yorks and the
Humber RMEF &
Editor, Calendar
News, Yorkshire ITV

Yorkshire & the Humber

It has been a year of solid progress. Several of the key issues raised by members at early meetings have been addressed and resolved. For example, the issue of trust - and, in particular, how people have approached discussions during meetings when media representatives have been present - has been cleared up and, as a result, we now have a full and frank exchange of views on all topics.

This, in turn, has led to a greater understanding among all of us of our respective roles and responsibilities - and the potential pressures we would face - should an emergency situation develop in the region.

The implications of the Civil Contingencies Act have featured frequently in discussions throughout the year and I am particularly grateful to Nick Best, Director of Resilience and Corporate Services at the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber, for his clarity in explaining the detail to us.

It has become apparent from our discussions that different organisations are taking different approaches to tackling how they discharge their responsibilities under the Act and we are keen to facilitate a seminar, workshop or conference - whichever we feel will work best - to explore ways of sharing best practice and moving forward.

The general theme of working together is one which has underpinned much of our discussion throughout the year. It is a message that has been reinforced by the excellent speakers we have listened to at several of our meetings.

Speakers have included Carol McCall, Head of Security, Intelligence and Resilience at the Cabinet Office Communication Group, who outlined to members some of the problems encountered and lessons learned from discussions so far undertaken about the setting up of media centres, Yvonne Hewett, Head of the UK Resilience Web Team at the Cabinet Office, who spoke about the role of

websites in communicating during an emergency, and Iain Ure, Director of Warning and Informing at the Cabinet Office, who spoke about the *Preparing for Emergencies* booklet produced by the Government last year.

We were also fortunate enough to have presentations by:

- Dr Ruth Gelletlie, Director of the Health Protection Agency for Yorkshire and the Humber, on the work of the HPA
- Eileen Jones, Director of GNN North West, who told members about the Cackle Pickers Tragedy in Morecambe Bay and the role of the RMEF in setting up a "no holds barred" media de-brief,
- Nigel Ellis, also of GNN North West, who spoke about the recent flooding in Carlisle.
- RMEF member Nigel Swift, Media and Public Relations Manager at the West Yorkshire Police, also gave an explanation of the terms "gold", "silver" and "bronze" when they are related to a command structure used by the police and other emergency services for dealing with planned and spontaneous events.

We have made a conscious decision to hold meetings at different venues around the region and I am grateful to various people for hosting them. These have included the Imphal Barracks Headquarters of 15 (North East) Brigade in York, the Press Association Operations Centre in Howden and the West Yorkshire Police Headquarters in Wakefield as well as Yorkshire Television in Leeds.

I believe there is a genuine commitment to the RMEF from media across the region, but I am still keen to encourage more representatives from newspapers to attend. One of the biggest challenges we face is, I think, to engage editors of the region's newspapers in resilience and emergency planning.

I am grateful to the forum for their support and contribution to the resilience agenda, the work of the Regional Resilience Forum and all our regional stakeholders. The Civil Contingency Act sets a challenging agenda for the wide range of partners engaged in resilience and the support and unique experience contained within the RMEF remains critically important in ensuring delivery.

Nick Best

Director of Regional Resilience, Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber



By Liz Cave
Chair, West Midlands
RMEF & Editor, News
Gathering, BBC
Midlands



ABOVE: the media had wide access to Exercise Horizon

West Midlands

THE ISSUE that dominated, not just the RMEF but all organisations in the emergency planning domain in the West Midlands for most of the year, was Exercise Horizon.

The exercising and training from Exercise Horizon paid off. Following the London bomb attacks, a full scale evacuation of Birmingham city centre took place on a Saturday night, including the evacuation of all the city centre-based broadcasting organisations. It was executed efficiently, and - despite the usual strains and difficulties - good relationships between the responders and the media were maintained. A 'wash up' on the evacuation was held at our July 2005 meeting, and there were important lessons identified for both the media and responders.

Another recent test of emergency planning was Exercise Hercules, held in June 2005. This was a Health-led multi-agency exercise on the mass distribution of medicines following a biological or chemical terrorist attack. Real media provided the 'simulated press' element of the exercise, plus the media were allowed to cover the event as a story in and of itself. That this was accepted without any concerns of sensationalism by the organisers, which might have been the case in the past, and shows we are getting there.

On other issues, the RMEF has continued its primary role of fostering improved relations between responders and the media.

A presentation that went down particularly well was by a BBC TV engineer on the requirements for successfully locating Satellite trucks and transmitting from sites. It is not just on the great philosophical issues but on such nuts and bolts discussions that mutual respect and understanding is being built.

A major challenge for the West Midlands RMEF in the coming year, is to achieve a more formal

structure. As the value of the RMEF became clearer to all parties, plus the prominence given to the role of the RMEFs in the Guidance published for the new Civil Contingencies Act, so more people have wanted to become involved.

We need to find a way of ensuring a workable forum for the future but also adapt to complement the work of the Local Resilience Forums and their media sub groups.

Exercise Horizon: engaging the media

Held in July 2004, Exercise Horizon was the largest civilian live exercise ever held in the UK, involving all the emergency services on a huge scale, as well as all Government agencies, public utilities and health organisations. In all, nearly 3,000 people were involved, and the event attracted the media from throughout the world, including the Middle East, USA, Japan and Europe. TV reports on the exercise went global.

The RMEF was involved with the project from the early planning stages, with a presentation on the planned event six months before it was held.

This was invaluable. It enabled the media representatives on the forum to explain past frustration with such exercises, and for the emergency services to outline their suspicions about what problems the media could cause.

Through discussion it was understood how media engagement would benefit all parties:

- the media, in getting a better understanding of the problems the emergency services face in dealing with such major incidents;
- the emergency services in familiarising themselves with likely media demands;
- the public who, through both the emergency services and media working together, being reassured by seeing the region's state of preparation for such eventualities.

The whole process of the exercise, from planning through to the final debriefs, did much to allay the traditional suspicion and ignorance on both sides that had sometimes existed in the past.

Exercise Horizon itself demonstrated that many holes in the co-operation between media and responders still exist. One of the key lessons highlighted was much work still needs to be done explaining to senior emergency service personnel the BBC's specific Public Service Broadcast role and the PSB role of other media organisations. We need to keep reiterating how the media are key to getting safety messages out to the public promptly.

It is through tackling all these issues and previously perceived areas of conflict, that there is now a much more mature relationship between responders and the media when it comes to Exercises.



ABOVE: The Government's 'Preparing for Emergencies' pamphlet was an additional regional story as the printers of the Government's largest print run in 2004 were in Nottinghamshire



By Peter Smith
Chair, East Midlands RMEF
& Regional Director, GNN
East Midlands

East Midlands

THE East Midlands RMEF is now consolidated. Its arrival has been signified by increasing involvement of the RMEF representatives in key emergency planning issues throughout the region. The main activities have included:

- Members of RMEF were joined by Jane Todd, regional director, GOEM and by other members of the media for the press launch of the Government's new booklet, *Preparing for Emergencies - What You Need to Know*. There was an additional regional story because the printers of this, the largest Government print run of 2004, were in Nottinghamshire.
- Members of the RMEF attended a workshop for those organisations affected by Civil Contingencies Act at the Council House in Nottingham on 11 January.
- RMEF representation on the Mass Fatalities Group - anticipating media interest in this multi-agency group chaired by the Notts Coroner, and the sensitive issues of body recovery and storage during a major emergency, there have been discussions with the Regional Resilience Team, Home Office and Cabinet Office to develop lines to take on its existence that avoid heightened public fears.

Nottinghamshire's Emergency Media Plan

RMEF members were among the media professionals in Nottinghamshire that produced a local 'Emergency Media Plan'. A draft of this plan was presented to the RMEF in July and warmly welcomed by the group, with Leicestershire members particularly keen to replicate the plan in their area. The emergency media was then successfully 'roadtested' in November during Exercise Blowback at Gedling, Nottingham. Based around a gas explosion scenario in a Transco pipeline, the exercise tested how Notts Police coped with setting up and running a media centre and how many of the RMEF

partners - including local authorities, the Environment Agency and GNN - worked in conjunction with them in handling journalists. Testing the plan also allowed us to work with Nottingham Trent University students doing a MA/Postgraduate Diploma in Broadcast Journalism for the first time as they played the role of media, while their numbers were boosted by real media - including MEF members the *Nottingham Evening Post* and Saga FM - who reported positively on the exercise.

Indeed, media participation through the RMEF on exercises has been a pleasing development, with, for example, the *Leicester Mercury* and other media joining Defra for a Foot and Mouth exercise in Leicester.

It is an indication of the levels of trust now being built between former 'adversaries'.

Setting up a Media Centre sub-group

LIKE many other RMEFs, the East Midlands group has set up a Working Group on Media Centres: This multi-agency sub group is looking at the protocols and requirements of a large scale media centre being set up in response to major disaster. The group agreed to identify possible locations but it was becoming increasingly apparent that only major conference venues and some sports stadia would be equipped to operate regional media centres.

Considerable debate ensued in the sub-group and the full RMEF as to whether it would be practicable to commandeer facilities on this scale in time to be of real value in an emergency and that local solutions on a more manageable scale - most of which have been identified in existing plans - might be a more realistic option.

RIGHT: a CBRN exercise in Cambridge - the RMEF has helped the region develop a communications protocol



By Mark Baker
Chair, East RMEF &
Head of Civil
Protection, Cambridge
County Council

East

THIS RMEF has started to move forward after a challenging year, but also a positive and very constructive one.

We have seen the membership rise to the developing challenges, as legislation and responsibilities became more clearly defined, to put the RMEF in a position to carry out a comprehensive action plan to ensure delivery across the region over the coming year.

Our key development has been the appointment of a new Joint Chair, representing the regional media, which is a role I have gladly undertaken. This move has sent a strong message to media across the region, which we have followed up with extensive outreach efforts to get more representation from all media outlets, and this is now bearing fruit in our growing membership.

A lot of work has gone in to defining the Forum's membership and role, to ensure that we are equipped to add very real value to regional resilience planning, with extensive liaison and consultation with media representatives and other stakeholders from Police and Fire Press offices, to Local Authority and utility press teams, and into the regional health structures.

This work has enabled us to develop a regional communications response protocol, and also to carry out an audit of structures and plans already in place.

The forum has also been working closely with the Regional Resilience Forum to identify and work to agreed priorities drawn from the regional risk assessment.

These two strands of work together, have put the RMEF in a strong position now to focus on delivering guidance and action plans in the agreed work streams. Key areas of focus include the communications challenges of response to infectious disease, mass evacuation, mass casualties and fatalities, CBRN and flooding. And cutting across all of these, is the scoping exercises we are currently undertaking on Warning and Informing, alongside the operational work on this issue by the Regional Resilience Forum.

Involvement of RMEF members in exercises around these issues, including a major desktop exercise on mass evacuation at the start of this year, and future planned exercises on infectious diseases and hostile weather, are

playing a vital role in informing all members - media and communications professionals - about the issues and challenges that lie ahead. We have also drawn from other region's experience sharing lessons with colleagues involved in the Boscastle floods and Exercise Horizon in Birmingham.

The year ahead looks likely to have as many challenges, but I feel confident that RMEF East is now in a strong position to work alongside operational resilience staff, as well as established county based emergency fora and bring its own expertise to bear in developing the vital means and plans of communicating in whatever crises may lie ahead.

“ The work of the RMEF both focuses our minds on resilience issues and supports us in dealing with key areas of our resilience planning. The supportive relationships that are an aspect of the Forum's work are proving invaluable in really driving forward some key areas of our work.”

Hywel Jarman,
Director of Communications,
Cambridgeshire Police



ABOVE: the radio sub-group was a key development for the LMEF



By Pete Turner
Chair, London RMEF & Head of Social Action,
GCap Media (formerly the Capital Radio Group
and GWR Group)

London

IN taking over the chair of London Media Emergency Forum (LMEF) in December 2004, I was keen to keep it moving forward and to ensure its continued effectiveness and relevance to emergency planning in the capital.

My predecessor as Chair (Hannah Walker the editor-in-chief at South London Press), had already steered the forum through its first eighteen months and it was now confident in its role, bringing together London media and public services emergency planning personnel to plan, discuss issues openly and learn lessons.

In the past year we have had two meetings, as agreed, and examined issues including Operation Sassoan (London's emergency evacuation plans); media involvement in exercises; accreditation; and the Civil Contingencies Act. Members attending included Magic FM, ITV London, the Association of London Government, the Mayor's Office, London Resilience Team (LRT), the Metropolitan Police Authority and the London boroughs representative.

The first Regional MEFs radio sub-group has particular energised the London MEF in the past year and moved us into a stronger position for responding to emergencies in a unified way.

There's more work still to do and we're keen to bring more London newspapers onboard. But the radio sub-group's work is a great example of the sort of pertinent action and liaison that is key to the forum's success. We'll continue to pursue actions that cement our role in enhancing London's resilience and the RMEFs' role in the Civil Contingencies Act.

Radio group key development in London

A KEY development for the LMEF was the formation of the the radio sub-group. It was an idea that emerged from the LMEF meeting in July 2004. It quickly found support from all members, especially radio, and held its first meeting on 26 January 2005, two weeks after a regular LMEF meeting, and a month after the new chairs were confirmed. The new deputy chair is Simon Watts from LRT.

Enthusiastically chaired by Chrysalis news editor Tom Bateman, with support from BBC London's radio news editor Fergus Sheppard (before his departure to Scotland in March), the radio group has a clear steer and a salient agenda. Tom reached out to radio bosses across London, beyond those already members of the LMEF, and attracted additional key allies like Sky News Radio, Jazz (now Smooth) FM London, Radio Jackie and ClubAsia Radio to the first meeting. LMEF Members that also attended include Virgin Radio, Capital Group (now part of GCap Media) and LBC 97.3fm.

Considering the LMEF and the radio group, Tom said: "We've discussed issues in a robust way - getting to the centre of what is and what isn't realistic in the event of a major disaster in London. As chair of the radio sub-group, I've been able to talk to news editors from radio stations across London, which has been a positive way of bringing together (usually competing!) radio journalists and thinking collectively about disaster and contingency handling."

The first meeting resulted in a compilation of emergency contingency plans from each radio station and a comprehensive contacts list.

Tom Bateman,
Chair of Radio Sub-group &
News Editor, Chrysalis





By Andy Bocking
Chair, South East RMEF
& BBC TV South East



ABOVE: more media involvement in South East exercises

South East

THE RMEF for the South East will celebrate its second anniversary in July 2005. It now has twenty six members, drawn from a wide geographical and organisational spread across our region and this network of key contacts is increasingly seen as an invaluable resource to have in the event of a major incident. The RMEF has also been instrumental in helping to share good practice amongst its members and has brought in a range of speakers to share information about their experiences in major incidents.

This has not been an easy task. The introduction of a regional tier to the emergency planning and response structure was not without its doubters and the RMEF has had to work hard to establish itself as a body that adds value to the work that is already being done in local areas by communications and emergency planning teams.

I believe that we are now doing that. The members of the RMEF are drawn from a wide geographical and organisational spread across our region and this network of key contacts is increasingly seen as an invaluable resource to have in the event of a major incident. The RMEF has also been instrumental in helping to share good practice amongst its members and has brought in a range of speakers to share information about their experiences in major incidents.

The RMEF met four times during 2004 and has already held another meeting in March 2005. The meetings are well attended, bearing in mind the huge geographical distance that many members have to cover.

I took on the Chairmanship of the group during 2004 and Claire Martin of Southern FM is now Deputy Chair of the group. The media members of the RMEF have been involved in, or invited to take part in, various emergency planning exercises during the year, including Exercise Triton and Exercise Unicorn.

Some of the key activities during 2004 for RMEFSE included:

- Extensive liaison with London Resilience Team and GNNs in London and East over Operation Sassoon - the plan for the partial evacuation of London.
- Establishment of full regional communications contact list for out of hours use
- Discussions with independent regional radio stations to establish a protocol for responding to major incidents outside normal office hours
- Reviews and analyses of major incidents including: Newbury rail crash, Boscastle Floods, Morecambe Bay cockle picker deaths and the Toulouse chemical explosion
- Input, involvement in and review of emergency exercises in the region including: Exercise Triton, Exercise White Pegasus, Exercise Goldtop, Exercise Unicorn, Aldermarston exercise
- Presentation and discussions about BBC guidelines on taste and decency in the reporting of fatalities or distressing events
- Sharing of emergency communications plans from different member bodies

Challenges for 2005

The RMEF has drafted a regional media protocol that sets out the expectations of the role the media could play in warning and informing the public in the event of a major incident.

It is generally accepted that the BBC, as part of its *Connecting in a Crisis*

initiative, is already well prepared for handling major incidents, but there is concern that some of the independent radio stations are

not aware of the arrangements that are being planned. Nor do many of them have cover or contacts outside of office hours, or on weekends, which could create problems for relaying key messages quickly. For these reasons, the RMEF will continue to raise awareness among independent radio stations of the emergency planning work that is going on and will press them to sign up to the protocol.

The RMEF will also continue to play a vital role as a network for key emergency planning contacts in the event of a major incident. It is therefore essential that all members are able to contact each other quickly if the need arises and that they understand the role and response that other parties will carry out. We will therefore consider widening the membership of the RMEF and ensure that meetings are relevant, interesting and well attended.

Our members are also aware of the massive implications for the region of any major national emergency occurring in the London area. There is still considerable work to be done on the planning and information flows relating to Operation Sassoon, including rest centres, escape routes etc. Therefore the RMEF's other key priority this year will be to work closely with the RMEFs in London and East on this issue and to play a role in the Sassoon strategy process.

“ The RMEF is a useful network for the media and those involved in emergency planning, enabling us to share information and good practice. The South East is a huge region, but it's reassuring to know that, in the event of a major incident, members of the RMEF would immediately know who to contact for information or support.

”
Claire Martin,
Group News Editor,
Southern FM and Capital Radio Group

Invites to BBC exercises

Some members of the RMEF have also been invited to participate in BBC emergency planning briefings in Southampton and Tunbridge Wells. Participants gained a lot from attending and enjoyed the exercise. These invites will now become a regular part of the BBC South and South East exercises in the future.



By Chris Cowley,
Deputy Editor, Joint Chair of
the South West RMEF &
Western Daily Press

South West

THE South West Media Emergency Forum met twice during the year, after an agreement was made by the members to change to this format.

I was appointed as new joint chair following the former media side joint chair Steve Egginton leaving ITV West. We would all like to place on record the role Steve played in getting the South West RMEF underway. I join the other established joint chair John Wood, Media Services Manager, Devon and Cornwall Constabulary

As joint chairs, we have been invited to give presentations to the Regional Resilience Forum. This will help to encourage emergency planners and officials to think further about media involvement in both real emergencies and during exercises. It is hoped that this will expand and other RMEF members will present to Local Resilience Forums in their own local areas.

In the past year, there have been a number of major incidents around the country which have highlighted the need for RMEFs.

One such event was the flooding of Boscastle, where emergency services and media worked extremely well together. Though the SWRMEF did not have any direct involvement, Boscastle members agreed that the understandings fostered by the SWRMEF did help with media relations during the emergency. One member commented that local radio and TV were invaluable in the early part of the incident. BBC Radio Cornwall and both TV stations were excellent in response

and offers of help.

As a result, it turned into one of the major news events of the year and will be remembered for many years to come. We need to keep up the strong links that have emerged to ensure everyone moves in the same direction.

Trust is a vital part of relations between emergency services and media organisations, and it is through this networking we can build on what has so far been achieved. I look forward to forging further relationships in the year to come. Together we can move forward. The alternative is to go back to the 'bad old days' from which no-one will benefit.

"I am very pleased with the progress we are making. The value of our RMEF is acknowledged by all those involved. The media are now seen as another valuable 'agency', who play a crucial part in any major incident. Through the RMEF the media has realised that despite being in competition with each other they all have so much to offer when we all work together.

John Wood

Media Services Manager,
Devon & Cornwall Police & Joint
Chair, South West RMEF

*BELOW: the devastation at
Boscastle*

