

Observations on Exercise Heron 4 recovery day, 5 November 2009

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Introductory briefing

The DVD news reel was engaging and informative. It provided a real flavour of the consequences and concerns following exercise events at Springfields on 4 November.

The introduction highlighted the flexibility available to all players to move around the subgroups, to form new groups and reorganise as they thought fit. I was not aware that this happened. In reality, any changes would be led by the Strategic Recovery Co-ordinating Group.

Comprehensive technical briefing was provided by Gareth Roberts and Kevin Gilchrist. This was pitched exactly right.

Players left the introductory session well briefed on what had happened and its impact on health and environment. However, one element missing from the brief was reference to the Lancashire County Council Recovery Plan for Springfields. Although this might have been mentioned in pre-briefing packs and copies may have been made available – I didn't see any. People did not seem to be aware that they were implementing the plan. It would have been helpful if people were aware of the content and tools available to manage the return to recovery.

Players moved straight into subgroups. With hindsight it may have been better to allow the SRCG to convene to galvanise and steer the efforts of the subgroups in line with their recovery strategy. This meant that the first sub group sessions lacked direction and struggled to develop their own focus.

Strategic leadership

This event felt more like a workshop than an exercise. It was driven by injects to a fairly tight timetable. As a result, the Strategic Recovery Co-ordinating Group was unable to drive and steer the response as they would in a real event. They were reactive rather than proactive. Playing in exercise mode rather than as a workshop hones the role of the CEO, allows the SRCG to flex its muscles and provide leadership, focusing minds whilst players can respond dynamically to their lead.

When I observed this group at around 1100, it was not clear to me who was leading. They did not seem to be working to an agenda or focus points. (I believe there's an agenda in the plan). The discussion ranged over a number of topics in quick succession.

At one point the members of SRCG questioned who had the authority to sign off decisions and make things happen on the ground. This was strange because this authority lies with the CEO supported by the SRCG. The group appeared not to understand governance arrangements – accountability, authority and responsibility.

Whilst the event may have provided a good test of Lancashire County Council's offsite recovery plan it did not provide a test of the UK Nuclear Recovery Plan Template. The LCC plan differs from the template as follows:

- title and role of some of the subgroups are different
- continuation of STAC into recovery
- elected members were not distributed across the subgroups

Lesson: Exercises which allow the players to respond in real time as directed by the strategic lead will provide a good test of the template.

1135 SRCG reconvened after a plenary session. The group leads contributed to this. The discussion seemed to repeat what had been said in the plenary. There was a lack of leadership and strategic thinking. Players focussed too much on detail. For example, the group spent about five minutes discussing where monitoring should be undertaken. SRCG should have been aware that the Monitoring Subgroup were dealing with this and to expect a report from them.

Players

Some players including subgroup chairs, were not familiar with the issues, the plans and the tools available to help them. A member of the Environment and Infrastructure group asked whether I had a copy of the Lancashire Offsite Recovery Plan or the National Recovery Plan Template so they could photocopy it for the subgroup members.

Lesson: Players need to be familiar with plans and their role.

Lesson: It would be useful to hold nuclear recovery training for all players in advance of a major recovery exercise. (HPA are looking into this). This would bring all players up to the same level. Participating organisations will still need to ensure that their staff understand their roles, have the necessary capabilities and are briefed.

Subgroup chairs need capability to lead, facilitate and organise people. They need to make the best use available expertise, people and resources available and keep the group focussed. They need to understand the issues which need to be addressed.

The subgroups were very large and needed strong leadership to deliver timely advice to SRCG. I wonder if too many people were involved. The focus of the strategic response should be with strong influential members of SRCG lead by CEO of local authority. They should be supported by well focussed subgroups which are of a manageable size. I don't think we could sustain a long term response with the level of representation we had on the exercise Heron recovery day.

Lesson: We need to consider carefully who should take part and why. Is the event a training workshop to get people up to speed with issues or to test plans?

Plenary sessions were very effective in communicating issues of concern. However, the content of the plenary was repeated in SRCG. It may have been better to get the subgroup chairs to report back to a formal session of SRCG for decision-making.

STAC

This event provided a helpful rehearsal of STAC in the Recovery Phase. STAC is excluded from recovery phase in the UK Nuclear Recovery Plan template because it was felt it wouldn't add value. Heron demonstrated this.

- Issues were debated twice – in the three subgroups reporting to STAC and again in the STAC. This wastes time.
- The breadth and depth of issues covered by Health and Welfare, Environment and Infrastructure and Monitoring are far too wide for the STAC Chair to effectively assimilate and deliver to SRCG. Advice would be more effectively delivered to SRCG by the respective subgroup chairs.
- Discussion at the SRCG was less dynamic. For example, on some issues the STAC chair had to go back to subgroups to ask for a view. Had the chairs attended the SRCG meeting in their own right, concerns or queries could have been dealt with immediately.

Early on in proceedings (1045) the STAC questioned the configuration of groups – in particular the interfaces and communications between subgroups. This delayed progress on recovery issues and hindered the flow of information.

Organisations not playing

Consequences for the food chain had to be second-guessed because Food Standards Agency were not playing in this event. The absence of FSA delayed decision making and diminished the realism of the workshop. It also affected the ability of the multi-agency group to function efficiently and effectively. This is a real and genuine concern which has been taken up through the NEPLG Lessons Learned Subgroup.

It would have been helpful if Government Decontamination Service had been involved. They are an important player in remediation and cleanup and their advice is key to the development of an effective recovery strategy strategy.

The **Emergency Services and Government Advisory Group** brought together operational and policy level folk in the same group. The purpose of this group was not clear. This may be the place for discussion about insurance and compensation in which case the alignment with emergency services is misplaced.

It took time for groups to clarify their role. Access to terms of reference would have helped. There was a tendency to range across many subjects beyond the scope and remit of the group. Chairs struggled to keep discussion on track.

Environment and infrastructure

Thirty minutes were allowed for the first task. The group spent about 15 mins on introductions instead of getting down to identifying what had been affected (risk register) and priorities. The chair allowed the group to delve into detail instead of keeping the main discussion at a higher level to address the question posed in the inject. It may have been better to form smaller syndicates within subgroups to discuss detail.

At around 1150 there was good discussion about options for dealing with contaminated milk – considered taking for disposal via long sea outfall using bulk tankers. However, absence of FSA meant that agreeing what to advise SRCG (via STAC) was difficult. We need to bring relevant organisations together to plan and agree in advance how contaminated milk will be dealt with.

At 1155 a representative from Communities and Business Group arrived to gather information on what to do with milk. The representative listened to discussion and was happy with information she received.

At about 1200 the Chair person left to meet with the STAC chair. The group chatted for a while until someone took the lead. At this point the group could have split into smaller subgroups to address waste from clean up operations and contaminated milk.

Members of this group commented later that they would like to have had a better understanding of the issues. They had information available but did not use it. They highlighted the need for a stronger steer on priorities to address. Some found the workshop format a bit constraining.

Business and community subgroup

I believe this group was made up of predominantly elected members. They discussed a wide range of topics. They would have benefited from having a few specialists around to assist their understanding of technical issues. Had they been dispersed across the subgroups they could have provided a valuable measure of how local people might respond to the developing recovery strategy and detailed proposals.

The group chair provided well structured feedback to the plenary session

Press Conference

This presented a good opportunity to set out firmly and clearly the commitment of the SRCG to look after the interests of people and their livelihoods. Overall I thought the press conference lacked punch. The opportunity for delivering a powerful, reassuring message about getting the small area affected back to normal was missed. The strategy in the Lancashire County Council Recovery Plan (and template) provides the script for this. Whilst the content was there – the presentation lacked guts.

The questions posed were not focussed on recovery but kept pointing back to events of the previous day. This is entirely realistic – that's what journalists will do. However, media spokespeople need to comment briefly on the question then 'bridge' to what matters now i.e. getting back to normal. The press conference could have made better use of visual aids. For example, to display key messages.

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6 November 2009