

Topic

Dealing with waste

Incident / Exercise

Incident: Cumbria Floods November 2009

Background and Context

Between Wednesday 18 November and Friday 20 November 2009, up to 372mm of rain fell on Cumbria. In the 24 hours ending 00:45 on Friday the 20th, 314mm of rain fell on Seathwaite. This is a record daily rainfall for the UK. The rainfall earlier in the week ensured that the ground was saturated in many areas. Flooding occurred in five out of the six Boroughs, the only one escaping being Barrow. The effect on properties was concentrated in Allerdale and South Lakeland with the most significant infrastructure damage occurring in Allerdale.

- One person lost their life
- 2,239 properties affected.
- 250 farms affected
- 25 bridges closed (for over 6 weeks)
- Significant highway road infrastructure damage
- Port of Workington closed (entrance to port obstructed by debris washed downstream)
- 40 out of 300 waste water treatment works affected Economic impact on surrounding areas caused by infrastructure issues
- 3,057 businesses affected
- 80% of businesses in Cockermouth affected by flooding
- Estimated costs of £2m per week to public and private sectors and the Communities caused by increased travel time
- 461 additional pupils requiring school transport
- Lake District National Park had 319 separate reports of damage to the rights of way network.

How the Topic was Handled

Recovery planning began early whilst the response was still on going. This allowed key partners to get together and set up sub working groups on Welfare, Business, Environment, Communications, Finance and Infrastructure, in line with the Recovery Plan, to prepare for the recovery phase and quickly respond once the emergency was over. Community recovery groups were also established. The following case study relates to one year on after the floods to place in context the size; scale and duration of the recovery work.

The initial problem of how to handle the huge amounts of waste produced in the floods was initially alleviated by setting up a temporary Household Waste Recycling Centre in Cockermouth and taking a more flexible approach to handling and storing commercial waste skips, but the larger, longer term and more unique waste management problem was how to deal with the huge quantities of displaced stone and gravel that had been washed out of rivers and river banks and deposited onto agricultural land.

During the floods a significant amount of gravel was deposited on the floodplain, including on local farmland. Environment Agency officers, together with Natural England, visited the worst affected farms shortly afterwards to advise farmers of their options for removing the gravel from their land. Work has also commenced or been completed in many other communities, including Ulverston, Low Crosby and Longtown.

The Environment Agency funded a detailed survey based on aerial photography to identify the quantity and location of gravel deposition and erosion along the Rivers Derwent and Cocker. The agency produced fact sheets to assist those landowners/occupiers who were left with excess stone and gravel, highlighting the options available to them. The Environment Agency formed the view that where clean stone or gravel could be used without treatment within the catchment from which it had originated, then despite it being discarded by the holder, the EA would not view that stone as waste. This approach meant that large quantities of stone could be used at other locations within the catchment without the need for waste exemptions to be registered or permits for deposit or re-use required. Where crushing or screening of stone was needed prior to it being used, then the EA viewed this as a waste product. The EA produced a list of secondary aggregate producers who held the appropriate authorisations to crush/screen stone and who were interested in receiving such material. Where waste stone /gravel was removed from the catchment the EA was able to provide details of exempt locations where the material could be legitimately utilised.

Co-ordinating this mammoth task was helped by the temporary appointment of a farm recovery co-ordinator. The current situation, as at January 2011, on gravel removal is as follows:

- All debris cases where grant payments were involved (grants of £6,800 were made available through the Rural Development Programme for England) have been resolved.
- Arrangements to remove 2,000 tonnes of gravel from two sites in Loweswater and St Johns in the Vale have been agreed by United Utilities and Balfour Beatty and consent has been given by the Environment Agency and Natural England.
- Thomas Armstrong is to remove gravel from three sites: Croft House Farm, Bulling Field in Little Broughton, and Broomlands in Cockermouth.
- 5,000 tones will be removed from Croft House to repair Papcastle Bridge and the Cockermouth Memorial Gardens.
- Few sites are now unaccounted for, as many farmers have simply piled up gravel and are slowly using it for aggregate on their land.

Lessons Identified

Key lessons were the need to resource the recovery group with project management and administration support. The first Recovery Coordination meeting was held on the 21 November and it was clear more time in recovery training is required. The transition from day to day business mode into immediate action and response was challenging for some of the Senior Managers. This could have been made easier by more focus on training and exercising in recovery.

Landscape Management remains a challenge. Public agencies (Natural England, Environment Agency, Lake District National Park) work well together but a common approach needs to be agreed with those that farm the land and other landowners. There are long term issues such as changing river courses and better landscape management. However, much work has gone into establishing protocols over gravel removal and other recovery work that will be made available. The appointment of a Farms Recovery Officer (albeit belatedly) has been a significant feature of the rural work of the Environment Recovery sub group and will be incorporated into future local Recovery Guidance.

Contacts for Further Information

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