

Chapter 7

Communicating with the public

Summary

- Category 1 responders' duties to communicate with the public under the Act are based on the belief that a well-informed public is better able to respond to an emergency and to minimise the impact of the emergency on the community (paragraph 7.4).
- The Act includes public awareness and warning and informing as two distinct legal duties for Category 1 responders – advising the public of risks before an emergency and warning and keeping it informed in the event of an emergency (paragraph 7.1).
- Arrangements for warning and informing the public must have regard to emergency planning arrangements (paragraph 7.21)
- In the same way that Category 1 responders must ensure that their emergency plans are appropriate to the scale and type of risks involved, communications arrangements should be appropriate to the message and the kind of audience (paragraph 7.82).
- Category 1 responders need both to plan their communications and to test that their communications arrangements are effective (paragraph 7.87).

What the Act and the Regulations require

7.1 There are two aspects of the duty in relation to communicating with the public. The first is that the public be made aware of the risks of emergencies and how Category 1 responders are prepared to deal with them if they occur. The second is that the public be warned and provided with information and advice as necessary at the time of an emergency.

Arrange for the publication of assessments and plans

7.2 The duties to assess risks and to prepare plans are followed by a further duty on Category 1 responders to arrange for the publication of all or part of risk assessments and plans they have made, where publication is necessary or desirable to prevent, reduce, control, mitigate or take other action in connection with an emergency.¹

7.3 Arranging for publication means that the Category 1 responders do not necessarily have to publish these documents themselves but that they must arrange for them to be published.

7.4 The duty is not necessarily to arrange to publish the whole of a risk assessment or a complete plan but only those parts which it is necessary or desirable to publish. What it is necessary or desirable to publish is determined by whether publication will assist in dealing with an emergency. Research suggests that if the public is better informed about the risks and the actions to be taken in the event of an emergency, the emergency response will be improved.

Avoid alarming the public unnecessarily

7.5 At the same time, when publishing assessments and plans, the Regulations require Category 1 responders to have regard to the need not to alarm the public unnecessarily.²

Sensitive information

7.6 Where risk assessments or plans contain sensitive information,³ then only edited or summary versions of all or part of the document should be published.

Joint discharge of functions and other forms of collaborative working

7.7 The duty to arrange for the publication of all or part of assessments and plans falls on all Category 1 responders. But the Regulations permit them to collaborate with others in delivering the duty.

7.8 There are several options for Category 1 responders in deciding how best to discharge their responsibility. They may decide to undertake the task:

- on their own;
- collaboratively, by agreeing with partners to act under the leadership of a lead responder;⁴
- jointly, by making arrangements with another Category 1 responder;⁵ and
- by delegating the task to another Category 1 responder.⁶

7.9 They may also support collaborative arrangements with the use of protocols.⁷

Maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public

7.10 Category 1 responders are required to maintain arrangements to warn the public if an emergency is likely to occur or has occurred. In addition to warning, they must also have arrangements to provide information and advice to the public if an emergency is likely to occur or has occurred.⁸

7.11 The Act does not place a duty on Category 1 responders to warn, but to maintain arrangements to warn. This reserves the decision about when to issue warnings to the local Category 1 responders themselves. At the same time, there is an implied expectation that the arrangements to warn will be utilised where an emergency has occurred, making it necessary or desirable for the responder to take action.

¹s. 2(1)(f)

²regulation 27

³See regulation 45 and the discussion in Chapter 3

⁴regulations 9–11

⁵regulation 8(a)

⁶regulation 8(b)

⁷regulation 7

⁸s.2(1)(g)

Identification of Category 1 responder with lead responsibility

7.12 The duty to maintain arrangements to warn applies to all Category 1 responders whose functions are likely seriously to be obstructed by an emergency or who consider it necessary or desirable to take action in relation to that emergency and would require a redeployment of resources or additional resources to do so.⁹

7.13 Confusion would be caused, however, if more than one Category 1 responder were to plan to warn the public about the same risk at the same time to the same extent. To avoid duplication, the Regulations effectively give Category 1 responders the ability to cut back the duty by requiring those Category 1 responders whose functions are affected by an emergency to co-operate for the purpose of identifying which organisation will take lead responsibility for maintaining arrangements to warn in regard to that particular emergency.¹⁰

7.14 If agreement cannot be reached, each of them must maintain these arrangements separately.

7.15 The Regulations envisage two ways in which a lead responder for warning, informing and advising the public may be chosen:

- by identification before an emergency;¹¹ or
- by adopting a procedure to be followed at the time of emergency.¹²

In addition, a procedure may be adopted by which the role of lead responder may be changed from one Category 1 responder to another during the course of an emergency, including the recovery period.¹³ Co-operation to identify the lead responder for warning, informing and advising the public must identify which of these procedures has been chosen in relation to the particular emergency.

7.16 Arrangements must ensure that at the time of an emergency the Category 1 responder which has

accepted the lead responsibility for warning, informing and advising the public:

- is able to contact the other Category 1 responders whose functions are exercisable in relation to that emergency;¹⁴
- informs those Category 1 responders of the actions it is taking;¹⁵ and
- is able to collaborate with those Category 1 responders in warning, informing and advising the public.¹⁶

7.17 The Regulations clearly envisage that the Category 1 responder with lead responsibility for warning, informing and advising the public will collaborate with its partners in fulfilling its role. There is no question of the lead responder assuming sole responsibility for carrying out the task. The Regulations place a reciprocal responsibility on those Category 1 responders which are not the lead responder, but which also have a duty to warn, inform and advise the public in relation to a particular emergency. They must maintain arrangements to:

- consult with the lead responder in relation to that emergency on a regular basis;¹⁷ and
- inform the lead responder of the actions which they are taking and proposing to take in relation to warning, informing and advising the public.¹⁸

The critical element in the effective delivery of information to the public will be the partnership established between the responder bodies involved.

Joint discharge of functions

7.18 Category 1 responders may also decide to deliver their responsibility to maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public by:

- making arrangements to operate jointly with another Category 1 responder;¹⁹
- delegating the task to another Category 1 responder.²⁰

⁹ s. 2(2)

¹⁰ regulations 32–34

¹¹ regulation 32(3)(a)

¹² regulation 32(3)(b)

¹³ regulation 32(3)(c)

¹⁴ regulation 33(2)(a)

¹⁵ regulation 33(2)(b)

¹⁶ regulation 33(2)(c)

¹⁷ regulation 34(a)

¹⁸ regulation 34(b)

¹⁹ regulation 8(a)

²⁰ regulation 8(b)

7.19 These collaborative arrangements, including the identification of a lead Category 1 responder for warning and informing, may be supported with the use of protocols.²¹

Category 2 responders and other bodies

7.20 Category 1 responders are not the sole responder bodies likely to be involved in arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public. The Regulations recognise that some Category 2 responders, such as utilities, have a duty under their own regulatory frameworks to provide warning, information and advice in certain circumstances when their services are interrupted. Similarly, the Meteorological Office, the Food Standards Agency and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which are not covered by the Act, also provide a warning service for severe weather emergencies. Accordingly, the Regulations require that Category 1 responders in performing their duty to warn, inform and advise:

- should have regard to these arrangements;²² and
- need not duplicate them unnecessarily.²³

Have regard to emergency plans

7.21 Warning, informing and advising the public is not a stand-alone duty. The Regulations require that a Category 1 responder in carrying out its duties in this respect must have regard to its emergency plans.²⁴ As with any other part of planning for response to an emergency, the communications strategy – either direct with the public, or via the media – should be fully integrated into the responder’s emergency plans. Equally, in maintaining its emergency plans, it must have regard to its warning and informing duties.

Generic and specific arrangements

7.22 In regard to emergency planning, the Regulations distinguish between generic and specific plans. Similarly, in relation to the duty to have arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public, the Regulations recognise that these may be generic or specific.²⁵ Which arrangements are chosen will depend on the type of emergency being planned for and the particular circumstances in a locality.

Avoid alarming the public

7.23 As with regulation 28 which requires Category 1 responders when publishing assessments and plans to avoid alarming the public unnecessarily, there is a similar duty to avoid alarming the public unnecessarily when making arrangements to warn, inform and advise them.²⁶

Training and exercises

7.24 Emergency plans are required to include arrangements for provision of training and carrying out of exercises.²⁷ Similarly, the Regulations in regard to warning and informing the public also require arrangements to include provision for training and exercises.²⁸

How the requirements of the Act and the Regulations may be carried out

7.25 The previous section has described the nature of the legislation and what it permits and requires

Box 7.1: Further advice and information

Also included in this chapter is further advice about communicating with the public and useful information which is not supported directly by the Act. There is therefore no direct obligation under the Act for responders to have regard to it. These sections of text are distinguished by inclusion in a text box like this one.

²¹ regulation 7

²² regulation 35(1)(a)

²³ regulation 35(1)(b)

²⁴ regulation 28

²⁵ regulation 29

²⁶ regulation 30

²⁷ regulation 25

²⁸ regulation 31

Public communications timeline: what responders' plans need to achieve

PUBLIC AWARENESS (*pre-event*):

Informing and educating the public about risks and preparedness



PUBLIC WARNING (*at the time of an event or when one is likely*):

alerting by all appropriate means the members of a community whose immediate safety is at risk



INFORMING AND ADVISING THE PUBLIC (*immediate and long-term post-event*):

providing relevant and timely information about the nature of the unfolding event –

- immediate actions being taken by responders to minimise the risk to human or animal health and welfare, the environment or property;
- actions being taken by responders to assist the recovery phase;
- actions the public themselves can take to minimise the impact of the emergency;
- how further information can be obtained; and
- end of emergency and return to normal arrangements.

Category 1 responders to do. This section outlines how the Government believes the duties described may best be carried out. It describes good practice. Category 1 responders must have regard to this guidance.²⁹

7.26 The timely provision of relevant information and appropriate warnings and advice is a crucial part of the effort to promote and foster resilient communities.

Public awareness – developing understanding and preparedness before an emergency

What the public needs to know

7.27 Once Category 1 responders have identified the emergencies that will trigger their public communication duties, they should consider what information is already in the public domain. This will help them determine what additional information from the risk assessments and plans they have made it will be “necessary or desirable”³⁰ to publish to meet the requirements of their duties.

7.28 The generic material is likely to be supported by the Community Risk Register (CRR) and Category 1 responders’ generic planning arrangements. Specific plans, prepared in relation to specific risks and also supported by the CRR, are likely to include a

requirement for much more detailed advice to the public on what may happen.

7.29 Many local authorities and other bodies have websites and literature which provide either generic advice on emergencies, or detailed advice specific to their own areas of responsibility (see Boxes 7.3 and 7.4).

7.30 Each decision will clearly have to be based on a balance of assessment. Two types of publication may be found to be necessary:

- generic advice referring to the risks of emergencies in the locality; and
- specific advice linked to particular risks and plans.

How much to publish

7.31 The objective of this duty under the Act needs to be kept in mind. At all stages of the decision-making process, Category 1 responders should ask themselves whether the material published will enhance the public’s response in an emergency. In this regard, the mere fact of publication may have a beneficial effect on public confidence. Research suggests that people look to the authorities to ‘do something’, and that they will be relieved and reassured to see that plans are in place.

²⁹ s. 3(3)(b)

³⁰ s. 2(1)(f)

7.32 Any inclination towards full disclosure may be tempered by the requirement to “have regard to the need to avoid alarming the public unnecessarily”.³¹ However, there is comprehensive guidance available on how best to communicate about risks to the public without causing disproportionate concern, and Category 1 responders should be familiar with this.³²

How to publish

7.33 The simplest and most cost-effective solution may be to make all or part of the relevant documents available in downloadable web format. But for those who do not have internet access, paper copies can also be made available on request and in the reference sections of public libraries.

Box 7.2: Awareness-raising: what the public should do in an emergency

The Act requires information to be published about the risks and plans. Under the Act, plans describe the actions the Category 1 responders themselves will take in the event of an emergency.

However, in practice, Category 1 responders may also want to attach to their plans details of possible prudent actions that the public are expected to take. These may include obtaining in advance useful protective or preventive materials or other items to ensure community resilience in an emergency.

It makes sense for public awareness messages to include what the public should do in the face of the risk of emergency, so as to complement the actions that the Category 1 responders themselves propose to take.

Box 7.3: Public information produced by central government and national bodies

The Government has published general advice in the form of a booklet delivered to all households. The booklet has been promoted through TV and press advertising. It covers a number of types of emergency, including terrorist-related emergencies. Other sources of information include:

- <http://www.preparingforemergencies.gov.uk>
- <http://www.ukresilience.info>
- <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/terrorism/protect/index.html>
- <http://www.mi5.gov.uk>
- travel advice on <http://www.fco.gov.uk>
- business continuity advice on <http://www.londonprepared.gov.uk>
- severe weather warnings from the Meteorological Office on <http://www.meto.gov.uk>
- flood warnings and advice from the Environment Agency on <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk>

Box 7.4: Examples of locally produced or topical information

Environment Agency local flood material: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subjects/flood/afterflood>

National Steering Committee Warning and Informing the Public: <http://www.nscwip.info>

Local authority material, for example Surrey Alert information: <http://www.surreyalert.info>

Emergency Planning Unit websites

Control of Major Accident Hazards: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/comahind.htm>

Nuclear calendars: public information calendars provided by the nuclear industry: <http://www.niauk.org>

Maritime and Coastguard Agency, ‘Safety on the Sea’ series: <http://www.mcga.gov.uk>

Emergency services outreach work in schools and youth groups

Crucial Crew scheme aimed at children to warn them of risks: <http://www.crucial-crew.org>

First aid material from: British Red Cross – <http://www.redcross.org.uk>

St John Ambulance – <http://www.sja.org.uk>

St Andrew’s Ambulance Association – <http://www.firstaid.org.uk>

³¹ regulations 27, 30

³² *Communicating Risk*, HM Treasury/Government Information and Communication Service, 2003 (<http://www.ukresilience.info/risk/index.htm>)

7.34 Available information should be identified clearly in the responder body's Freedom of Information Publication Scheme.³³

Design and distribution

7.35 All material produced should look interesting and attractive enough for people to want to read it – otherwise it will be a waste of resources.

7.36 It is a good idea to seek professional design and editing assistance. If professional support is not available, advice on good practice is available online and in published manuals.³⁴

7.37 Once a product is available, the public will need to know about it. Unless it is going to be mailed directly to householders, people will need to be told how to get copies. This may be achieved by the conventional range of publicity methods.

7.38 Avoiding duplication of effort is important. Good communication between responder bodies should include development of joint programmes for the production of general information material.

7.39 It is good professional practice to evaluate the effectiveness of every information campaign. If this is done, evaluation should include research which shows how well any specialist versions have met the needs of vulnerable members of the community.

Reaching vulnerable persons and those who have difficulty understanding the message

7.40 The needs will be evident in some areas, which have, for example, a high proportion of elderly residents who may welcome the option of a large print version of a document, or where there may be significant numbers who speak a minority ethnic language. Where vulnerable members of the community are in the care of an institution such as a school or old people's home, the most effective delivery of information will be through the management.

7.41 It may be that the most effective communications route is a single leaflet expressed in very simple language (or more than one language) backed up with pictures and symbols, which includes a request that the reader should share the information with family, friends and neighbours who are not able to read the information themselves. Research shows that it can be particularly effective to communicate with children, who then act as a conduit for the message to reach other family members.

Review and renewal

7.42 The provision of public information should be an ongoing process. Any information that is produced should be in a reasonably durable format, whether paper or electronic, and available over time.

Box 7.5: Working with the Freedom of Information Act

- There may well be significant public interest in plans when information first becomes available, and some may want to see the detail. Where only summary or edited versions have been published, this may lead to requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to have access to all the information in the document. Those preparing published versions should be familiar with the terms of the legislation so that they can handle subsequent freedom of information requests quickly and accurately.
- In particular, the publication of generic plans may well encourage people to ask for further information to be made available under the Freedom of Information Act about plans for particular institutions in the area (schools, hospitals, old people's homes, prisons, animal shelters, zoos, museums, airports, ferry terminals, etc). Responder bodies may find that they will need to address these specific aspects in the planning process.

³³The Freedom of Information Act requires each public authority to adopt and maintain a publication scheme setting out details of information it will routinely make available, how the information can be obtained and whether there is any charge for it. A publication scheme is therefore both a public commitment to make certain information available and a guide to how that information can be obtained. All publication schemes have to be approved by the Information Commissioner and should be reviewed by authorities periodically to ensure they are accurate and up to date. More information can be found at <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>

³⁴For example, advice on publications, design and new media in the 'PR in Practice' series of textbooks published by Kogan Page in partnership with the Institute of Public Relations (see <http://www.ipr.org.uk>)

It should be regularly reviewed and renewed whenever necessary in the light of changing circumstances.

7.43 This will mean that published material will need to be looked at afresh every time the CRR or an individual risk assessment or plan changes. Only new information which is “necessary or desirable” for prevention or mitigation of an emergency will require a new version to be produced.

Warning, informing and advising the public – communications during and after an emergency

Co-ordinating activity

7.44 The second part of the communications duty relates to arrangements for warning, informing and advising the public at the time of an emergency. Arrangements for complementary and co-ordinated public warnings, advice and media facilities should be carefully managed between the various bodies. This will enhance public safety and information will be delivered more effectively.

Identifying a lead responder

7.45 It is preferable, in relation to a particular type of emergency, if a lead responder for warning, informing and advising the public is identified and agreed beforehand by the Category 1 responders. Annex 7B provides an indicative list of which Category 1 responders are likely to lead in a range of examples. (The list is advisory only.)

7.46 In many instances, the lead Category 1 responder for warning and informing the public will be the organisation which leads on the response to an emergency. In a number of instances, this role is likely to be filled by the police, but it should not be assumed that this will always be the case.

7.47 The box on the next page provides a case example of a wide-area emergency, caused by flooding, where it is clear that the role of lead Category 1 responder for warning, informing and advising, which is likely to fall to the Environment Agency, does not absolve non-lead responders from

playing their part. In similar wide-area examples, such as health emergencies, the lead Category 1 responder with responsibility for warning and informing will be a health organisation, such as the Health Protection Agency (HPA), but it will also require assistance from other Category 1 responders.

7.48 Where identification of the Category 1 organisation taking the lead responder role for warning, informing and advising cannot be done in advance, the Regulations permit a procedure to be established for identifying at the time who should be the lead responder. However, choosing this option may cause unwanted delay and confusion. A possible example where Category 1 responders might want to delay identifying a lead responder could be a severe weather emergency. Even so, in Annex 7B, it is suggested that the police should be identified in advance for the lead role in this type of wide-area emergency, where the likely impact is on road traffic. They, of course, would expect to be supported by a range of other Category 1 responders.

7.49 Procedures may also be adopted for changing the lead responder with the warning, informing and advising responsibility during the course of an emergency. On land, the police, and in maritime emergencies, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, are likely to co-ordinate warning and information strategies in the early stages of many emergencies. But in the later stages, the lead in distributing information and advice about longer-term issues, to do with, say, health or the environment, may be handed over to the relevant expert organisation.

Use of protocols

7.50 Options for collaborative arrangements, including the identification of a lead responder for warning and informing, were discussed earlier (see paragraphs 7.12–7.17). Category 1 responders are likely to want to support these arrangements with protocols.³⁵ (A checklist of possible protocols appears at Annex 7C.) These may be negotiated directly or through the Local Resilience Forum. Some work in this area has already been done by the Regional Media Emergency Forums (RMEFs) and agreements have already been reached (see Box 7.8).

³⁵ regulation 7

7.51 Any protocols should be recorded formally and in some detail, so that they can be implemented immediately an emergency happens. They should also describe the process which they will use to identify stages in the emergency when lead communicator responsibility ought to be changed and the point at which normal operating practices should be resumed.

Role of the lead responder

7.52 The planning arrangements of the lead responder for warning, informing and advising the public are likely to include:

- Procedures and a capability for:
 - contacting other relevant responder organisations and informing them of action being undertaken or proposed;
 - delivering urgent emergency warnings, or ensuring they are delivered;
 - co-ordinating all communications activity at the time of an emergency, so that public information is consistent, timely and without unnecessary duplication;
 - delivering information and advice in relation to its functional areas of responsibility;
 - assisting other participating responder organisations to deliver information and provide advice in relation to their functional responsibilities.
- Provision of:
 - a media facility;

- a lead spokesperson to work with the media;
- facilities for staff from different responder organisations to work together on a public information service.
- Procedures for:
 - handing over the role to another lead Category 1 responder as determined by the course of events.

Warning arrangements

7.53 The methods available to deliver urgent information to members of the public are extremely varied (see table 'Possible public warning methods'). Some depend on the availability of power supplies or phone lines. Some may require careful consideration of the risks to human life and health, in case at the time of an emergency staff or members of the public are exposed to hazardous substances while they are warning or being warned.

7.54 The process of reaching agreement on the warning process is shown schematically in Figure 7.1.

Generic and specific warnings

7.55 Some systems are defined as 'generic' arrangements,³⁶ in that they can be called into play in a range of scenarios. Others have only limited use, or are capable of delivering only a closely targeted message.

Responder with lead responsibility for warning, informing and advising the public: an example

- The Environment Agency's (EA) powers are mainly permissive. They maintain a flood warning system, but the Agency has not previously had a statutory duty to warn the public. The Act places a general duty on the EA to maintain arrangements to warn the public and provide advice and information about flooding.
- However that duty to warn does not apply solely to the Environment Agency. When a potential flood impinges on the functions of another Category 1 body then it too has a duty to warn. The Agency provides warnings as much to other responders, who must make decisions on, for example, evacuation, as it does to the public.
- Not every local authority or police force will have a duty to warn and advise in relation to every flood. But where it is likely that the flood will require a response from the local authority or the police (eg because the flood will impact on the delivery of education or the welfare of clients on a social services care list – or, in the case of the police, because lives and property will be at risk), the authority and police will have a duty to warn, inform and advise.
- In this example, it is likely to be appropriate for the Category 1 responders to identify the Environment Agency and agree that it should be the lead responder for warning, informing and advising the public.

³⁶ regulation 29

Existing publication and warning regimes

- Some organisations, excluded from the Act because they have existing statutorily defined emergency procedures, also have an important role in generating public awareness about emergencies and issuing warnings when necessary.
- The management of emergencies on nuclear and major industrial sites, including communicating with the public, is already regulated. Site operators have well-established procedures for communicating with the public in the vicinity of their sites. The new legal framework does not override existing ones.
- It will be important to ensure that plans made by Category 1 responders do not duplicate existing arrangements. Category 1 responders may choose to cover in their communications planning the potential for an emergency to spread beyond the scope of individual site plans produced under the Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations, Radiation (Emergency Preparation and Public Information) Regulations or pipeline regimes, but this is not an explicit requirement of the Act.

7.56 Category 1 responders should consider the options available in detail as part of the planning process to ensure that they have an adequate range of methods at their disposal. The need for back-up staff and equipment, and the risk of warning arrangements being disrupted by the emergency itself, should all be considered in business continuity management plans.

Warning vulnerable persons and those who have difficulty understanding the message

7.57 Vulnerable persons who live in residential homes or sheltered accommodation or attend day centres are relatively easy to warn during an emergency because the establishment will be known to local authorities and other responders.

7.58 Vulnerable persons living in the community are more difficult to contact. General advice to the public to adopt a 'good neighbour' approach to help those less able to help themselves is always advisable; but specific efforts will sometimes be needed by the public authorities to deliver alerts to those vulnerable persons who are known to them.

7.59 The Category 1 responder with lead responsibility for communicating with the public will need to be assured that these vulnerable people can be contacted. Arrangements will need to address how information and assistance can be managed by local authorities and health authorities who are in regular contact with the vulnerable individuals.

7.60 People who have difficulty understanding the message because they use a different language may require pre-prepared print or broadcast messages in their own language.

Who is 'the public'?

7.61 Category 1 responders are, of course, required in the Act to make local arrangements for delivering information and advice about an emergency to the public with the purpose of mitigating the effects and aiding recovery. They should plan to be able to meet the needs of many different audiences (see box on next page).

Survivors (Group A) and other possible victims (Group B)

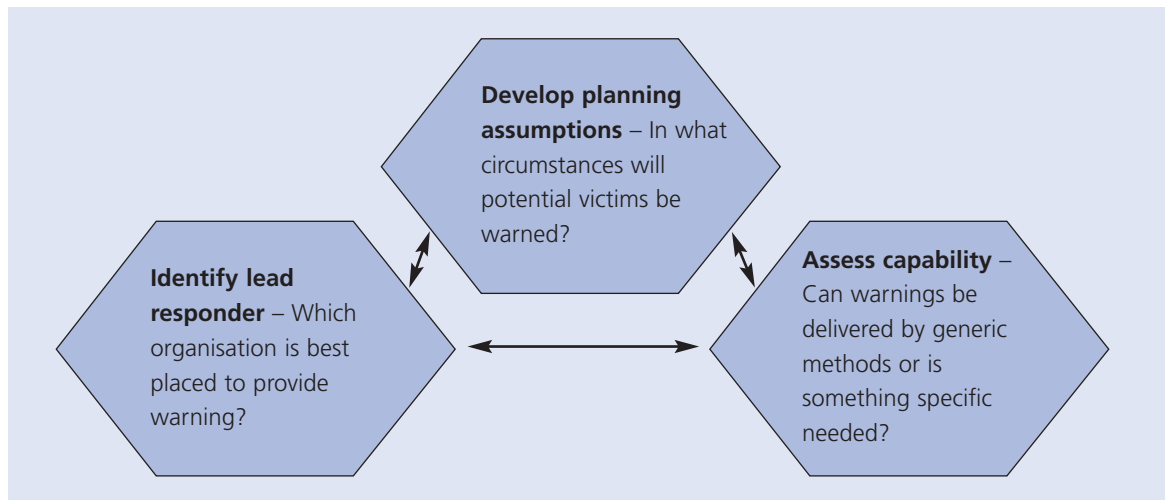
7.62 The needs of these two groups are the main focus of attention in the first hour of an incident and beyond.

7.63 Providing information to Group A is, in effect, an extension of the warning phase. Those at the scene are under direct instruction from the emergency services. Those in charge of operations are best placed to decide what advice or instructions are required, by whom and how quickly.

7.64 Similarly, Group B urgently need to know what they need to do immediately – this may be a message to stay indoors and shut windows, to evacuate, to follow decontamination instructions, or to report somewhere for medical checks. Planning should address these issues. Group B may also need (and certainly will want) to know why the advice is being given.

7.65 In the earliest moments following an incident, vital operational decisions are often made by the first police officers, emergency workers or even members of the public at the scene. Pre-planning should ensure that decisions about the nature and timing of advice to the public have a prominent place among the urgent matters to be dealt with.

Figure 7.1: Process for developing effective warning procedures



7.66 Responders are unlikely to be able to rely solely on the media to reach the Group B audience. Planning should recognise that targeting will need to be more precise than can be achieved by broadcasters. Procedures should include some form of audit trail of who has or has not been contacted. The media may be used to provide reinforcement of the basic safety messages.

Local people (Group C), friends and relatives (Group D)

7.67 The media quickly swings into full news-gathering mode. But local media can be particularly helpful in addressing Group C, providing general information about the emergency, information on how the public can help and advice on disruption in the area, eg traffic bulletins.³⁷ It is important for

communications planning to ensure that Group C in particular can get access to regular updates of how management of the emergency is progressing.

7.68 Category 1 responders should work closely with the media, especially local radio, ahead of time to prepare useful standard material. The text of announcements should, where possible, be agreed with broadcasters in advance, to avoid unnecessary questions of editorial control under pressure.

7.69 Group D will usually be alerted to an emergency through the national media. The most likely first response is to phone the people they know in the area, either to find out if they are safe or to get more information.

7.70 There is evidence from past disasters that the emotional impact of watching events unfold which

Warning the public in emergencies: audience types

Casualties and other possible victims

Group A: Survivors – those in the immediate vicinity and directly affected, possibly as wounded casualties.

Group B: Those close by who may need to take action to avoid further harm.

Local people, friends and relatives

Group C: Those in the area who may be disrupted by the consequences of the emergency and the clear-up process.

Group D: Those who are not affected directly but know or are related to those who might be.

The wider audience

Group E: Those who are not affected but are concerned, or alarmed about wider implications, or simply interested.

Group F: The news media.

³⁷ There are good studies of how this has worked in real emergencies provided on the BBC's 'Connecting in a Crisis' website, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/connectinacrisis>

Types of warning method

Possible public warning methods	Capability
• Mobilising officers to go round on foot and knock on doors	generic
• From car or helicopter, by loudhailer or other amplified means	generic
• Media announcements	generic or specific
• Electronic/variable message boards, eg at the roadside or on motorways	generic or specific
• Direct radio broadcasts to shipping (in maritime incidents)	generic or specific
• PA announcements in public buildings, shopping centres, sports venues, transport systems, etc	generic or specific
• Automated telephone/fax/e-mail/text messages to subscribers	specific
• Site sirens	specific

may be affecting a close relative or friend can be very significant. Where people at a distance can be reasonably sure that a relative or friend is caught up in the incident they will be desperate for information. Communications planning must address this reality.

Helplines and public inquiry points

7.71 The information delivery methods discussed so far have been based upon the Category 1 responders' decision about what information needs to be provided. However the public, particularly Groups B, C and D, are likely to have all sorts of queries or offers to direct towards the responder bodies. Responders should plan how to make best use of helplines and public inquiry points (which may be telephone, e-mail or SMS based, or multimedia) in any emergency. These can either provide a limited amount of recorded information, or connect with a call centre where people answer individual questions.

7.72 Helplines may already be in place for other purposes. Plans can be developed to take them over and provide their staff with relevant briefing or suitable recorded messages. Facilities run by other operators or companies in the area may also be co-opted into the public information effort as a result of protocols put in place in advance.

7.73 Setting up a dedicated call centre from scratch is a significant undertaking, but may be achieved quite quickly if suitable call-off contracts have been put in place as part of the planning process. Category 1 responders who decide to use this form of communication should also take advice from network providers to avoid risk of overloading the telephone system.

7.74 Such inquiry points are not a panacea. There will always be a significant proportion of dissatisfied callers, whatever the method used – callers for whom the

What information is needed when

Immediately when an emergency occurs, and during the first hour . . .

The PUBLIC NEEDS:

- basic details of the incident – what, where, when (and who, why and how, if possible);
- to know the implications for health and welfare;
- advice and guidance (eg stay indoors, symptoms, preparing for evacuation); and
- reassurance (if necessary).

The PUBLIC WANTS to know:

- other practical implications such as the effect on traffic, power supplies, telephones, water supplies, etc;
- a helpline number; and
- what is being done to resolve the situation.

BROADCASTERS will REQUIRE:

- well-thought-out and joined-up arrangements between the emergency services, local authority and other organisations, capable of providing agreed information at speed;
- an immediate telephone contact; and
- a media rendezvous point at the scene.

(adapted from the BBC's 'Connecting in a Crisis')

recorded message is inadequate or unsuitable, or who cannot get answers to their particular questions, or who simply cannot get through because the lines are too busy. Planning should address the expectations of callers to limit irritation and disappointment, by establishing procedures to make it clear what information is available and how busy the lines are.

The wider audience (Groups E and F)

7.75 Group E are effectively ‘the public at large’. Their principal source of information is news broadcasts and whatever they can find on websites. While Category 1 responders have little control over the output on news channels, it is important that they plan to agree what the main public messages will be, provide the media with as much relevant material as possible and ensure it is accurate and consistent.

7.76 The media – Group F – are the sixth audience for the information provided by Category 1 responders. They can influence both the short-term handling and the long-term impact of an emergency.

7.77 At the same time as providing useful advice and information to the public, the media are likely to operate in reporting mode. They may well produce round-the-clock rolling news coverage if the emergency is serious enough. It is important that Category 1 responders should have plans to play their part in

providing authoritative information and spokespeople for interview, to ensure that the public gets a fair picture of how they are handling the situation.

7.78 Planning should recognise that the media will seize upon any inconsistencies in presentation or message, either between responders at the local level, or between local and national responses. For this reason it is vital that Category 1 responders are equipped to liaise effectively with each other and with regional and UK bodies. Otherwise the operation will look chaotic to the outside world.

7.79 If the media do not get what they want from the Category 1 responders, they are likely to simply go elsewhere for footage and commentary. This may take away the initiative from Category 1 responders, and put them in a position of having to defend themselves against unfounded criticism or inaccurate analysis. Category 1 responders should be aware that the handling of the emergency, as well as the emergency itself, will all be part of the story. No matter how positive relations are with the media ahead of an event, responders must expect to be criticised if events seem to be going badly. They should plan accordingly.

Working with the media

7.80 All Category 1 responders should be familiar with the media organisations and outlets in their own

Box 7.6: The role of the casualty bureau

- It is a police function when emergencies occur to consider setting up a casualty bureau. Where one is set up, planning arrangements should ensure that the contact number is publicised as widely as possible, as soon as possible. Information about a casualty bureau should make it clear that this is a way for the police to collect information about people who may have been injured or killed – it does not release information about possible casualties.
- The fact that the casualty bureau does not provide information directly over the phone places an onus on Category 1 responders (for example local authorities), as part of integrated emergency management, to plan to set up a public information line. Such lines do not provide information about casualties, of course, but they may be able to advise relatives and friends who need to come to the area about travel and accommodation. Planning to provide public information lines will help ease the burden on the casualty bureau.
- Planning should also include special arrangements in the local area to provide face-to-face information and support to those bereaved relatives who come to be close to the scene of the emergency. The police are likely to provide Family Liaison Officers who will take on all or part of this role. But special attention needs to be paid to relatives and friends trying to get information at receiving hospitals for the incident; and to those who may be taken to or congregate at the emergency mortuary. Rest and reception centres set up by the local authority with the support of voluntary organisations may also require regularly updated access to information and advice.

area and develop good relations with them. There is a considerable amount of advice on how to achieve this in the BBC's 'Connecting in a Crisis' initiative³⁸ – which also points out that other media can be equally helpful. Category 1 responders should be fully familiar with its recommendations, which were prepared in full consultation with central government, local government and other practitioners.

Deciding on the message

7.81 There are two cardinal errors in communications which should be protected against:

- a) Category 1 responders should not release, without consultation, information or advice which covers the areas of responsibility of partner organisations. The damage done to public confidence by the release of inconsistent or contradictory messages can be hard to repair.
- b) Similarly, great damage can be done by speculation about causes or future developments. It is better to say when something is not known than to guess, particularly if this is going to raise the hopes of the affected public – for example, about when they can return to their homes.

7.82 At every stage of the process, the key to effective communication with the public is getting the message right for the right audience. Co-ordination between Category 1 responders is vital. Even when specific information has to be given by one body in a

very specialist field, the others involved in the response should be aware of what is being issued, when and to whom. Arrangements to ensure that such co-ordination can take place effectively should be included in the planning process.

7.83 For the most part, though, public information will cover the interests of a number of different Category 1 responders involved in handling the emergency. All those with an interest need to contribute to the development of the information. Apparent conflicts of interest need to be resolved quickly. The stages in the decision-making process should be logged to provide a record which can be examined after the event to identify lessons for the future. Suitable systems should be devised as part of the planning process.

Who delivers?

7.84 How information and advice are delivered can greatly affect how they are received. Category 1 responders should give careful thought to this ahead of any emergency, and should identify individuals who may act as official spokespeople and undertake media interviews. These individuals should receive suitable training.

7.85 Obviously, if the figure is already recognised as a trustworthy and authoritative person, the message will be delivered all the more effectively. This might

Box 7.7: Media planning – some essential elements

Pre-event:

- liaising with other Category 1 and 2 responders and other organisations not captured by the Act and media/public relations teams;
- identifying potential sites for media centres in the area;
- providing media training for potential spokespeople;
- providing suitable communications equipment for press office staff to work away from office;
- making arrangements for mutual aid to be provided to neighbouring areas; and
- providing for liaison with the appropriate Government News Network (GNN) regional office (the Assembly Press Office in Wales).

On the day:

- establishing a Media Liaison Point at or near the scene of an emergency;
- establishing a Media Liaison Centre close to the strategic co-ordinating group/overall incident commander; and
- liaising with other responder bodies and GNN regarding VIP and ministerial visits to the scene.

³⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/connectinacrisis>

be because they already have a good public profile in the area or are in uniform (research shows that the public have great confidence in spokespeople from the emergency services).

7.86 In addition to those who will be taking on a frontline media role, it is important that other staff who may come into direct contact with the public – receptionists, security and switchboard staff, for example – are provided with at least a basic level of information and can handle inquiries confidently.

Exercise and review

7.87 It is important to exercise arrangements for communicating with the public. Public communications and media planning can be effectively tested in tabletop or full-scale exercises, which should be conducted regularly.

7.88 It will often be beneficial to involve some media as players in the exercise.

7.89 Category 1 responders have always been sensitive to appearing to be underprepared. But with positive relations with the media established in 'normal' conditions it should be possible to

demonstrate how problems are being identified and remedied ahead of a real event.

7.90 News organisations with a role in reporting emergencies benefit from rehearsing their arrangements too.

7.91 Where the exercise scenario involves security issues, it may not be possible to achieve full media involvement. However, it should in most cases be possible to agree effective rules that allow the media to participate without running news stories about the event.

7.92 In tandem with these arrangements, Category 1 responders should also consider the role of exercises in building public confidence. Research shows that providing the public, through the media, with information about exercises that are taking place and showing pictures of what they may expect to happen can be extremely reassuring.

7.93 When developing exercises, responders should consider inviting local media to cover the story as observers. The ground rules should be agreed in advance, with assistance from the appropriate MEF or RMEF if necessary.

Box 7.8: Regional Media Emergency Forums (RMEFs)

- Category 1 responders should plan to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the Regional Media Emergency Forums. These Forums sit alongside the regional resilience networks, though they are entirely independent.
- RMEFs reflect the function and structure of the national Media Emergency Forum (MEF). This is an ad hoc grouping of senior media editors, government representatives, emergency planners, emergency services and other interested bodies. Wales has its own MEF along the same lines. Arrangements in Scotland and Northern Ireland are currently slightly different. More information and MEF reports can be found at <http://www.ukresilience.info/mef/index.htm>
- Discussion with the media ahead of an event helps ensure that all parties can operate more effectively on the day, by preparing useful standard background material in advance, planning practical arrangements and building trust and confidence on all sides.
- In particular, the RMEFs examine national or high-level protocols (for example those covering public safety announcements).
- In many areas, particularly those where there are long-standing known hazards such as nuclear power stations or extensive industrial complexes, there are also local groupings with members from Category 1 and 2 responders, other organisations not covered by the Act, as well as the media. These are quite often chaired by the local police.
- The RMEFs do not get involved, as a body, in the operational aspects of an emergency. But they can be brought together at short notice if emergency services or other organisations need to brief them on the handling of specific anticipated threats, or to review learning points from 'live' emergencies for future planning purposes.

Box 7.9: The media role in preparing for and responding to emergencies

- As part of a general information strategy, in advance of an emergency, the media can help to raise public awareness of the issues and provide information about what to do if one occurs.
- More importantly, in the wake of an emergency, the media can deliver specific advice and information to large numbers of affected people more quickly and effectively than any other means of delivery. This can take any form, from short, simple messages repeated across all formats, to explanatory interviews and background material on websites. The written press can deliver complex information and advice which people need to retain over a number of days or weeks.
- The media have ways of quickly reaching many different audiences with specific needs – the deaf, the blind, and those who do not speak English, for example. And radio, in particular, is the most resilient form of mass communication, available even if power and phone lines are down, via battery or wind-up portable radios and car radios.