



National Operational Guidance



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

Developed and maintained by the NFCC



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Hazard - Public awareness

Hazard Knowledge

During major incidents it is important to deliver accurate, clear and timely information and advice to the public to:

- Reassure those who may or may not be affected
- Provide public safety information
- Avoid mass panic
- Reduce the burden of requests for information
- Preserve the reputation of the organisation

Good public communication is vital to the successful handling of any emergency and will ensure public confidence is increased and ensure they feel well informed.

Co-ordination of information flow among stakeholders is a key issue during any emergency and will improve the consistency of the information provided by the different agencies involved. In the confusion that often follows a major incident, it can be a difficult and lengthy process to establish clear, concise and accurate facts and figures about what has happened. However, the media will constantly request this information and may seek to obtain it from any official or unofficial source they can.

Providing an inconsistent message to the media and the public may demonstrate the lack of joint working and shared situational awareness across emergency responders. Great care should be taken to avoid this as inconsistency may also lead to a loss of confidence in the responding agencies handling the incident.

Good public communication may include production and distribution of a core media brief for distribution among key stakeholders, central co-ordination of interviews, or even a centralised press office. It could also mean providing additional press officers by one agency to support the efforts of another agency that may be coming under particular pressure.



Control measure - Warn, inform, instruct and update people: Major incidents

Control measure knowledge

For generic guidance on warning and informing the public that are directly affected by an incident see National Operational Guidance: Operations – [Warn, inform and advise people](#).

Electronic media is generally the fastest way to broadcast a message and it is a useful way to get out very detailed information, in particular for those at work or who have no immediate access to television or radio during the day. It will need to be regularly updated during an incident or emergency. In addition, fire and rescue services' own websites and social media can also be used to stream press conferences. The information is constantly available and it serves as an audit log to show that information was provided at certain times.

The release of sensitive information (such as the number and details of those involved) must be strictly controlled and should follow the established multi-agency process between the relevant organisations such as the police, disaster victim identification (DVI) and the coroner.

The UK Resilience section on the Cabinet Office website and other sites can be a central source of information for the media inside and outside the United Kingdom, including press releases, briefings, statistics, response figures, maps, graphics and instructions. It can also be used to distribute emergency plans and transmit alerts and warnings.

The scale and nature of any emergency will dictate the level of national involvement in its handling, particularly in communications. If ministerial involvement becomes necessary, then the News Co-ordination Centre (NCC) will be set up by staff in the Cabinet Office. The NCC will function alongside the government department leading the response and liaise closely with staff from the Central Office of Information News and Public Relations at the scene of the emergency, if outside London.

Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Have established protocols with other category 1 and 2 responders to:
 - Agree the process to be used to identify the lead responder to warn, inform and advise the public on any other type of emergency
 - Agree the identity of lead responders to warn, inform and advise the public on those scenarios which can reasonably be anticipated
 - Agree joint working procedures and allocation of responsibilities in support of the lead responder for warning, informing and advising
 - Agree the trigger points for the handover of the lead responsibility for warning, informing and advising from one responder body to another and the procedures to



achieve this

- Agree how services or products for warning, informing and advising (e.g. equipment for media centres) will be sourced
- As appropriate, agree with local companies and organisations the circumstances in which their facilities or resources (e.g. premises, call centres), may be made available to the responder bodies, to help deliver advice and information to the public

Tactical actions

At the strategic co-ordinating group, commanders should:

- Agree protocols for sharing information and brief relevant personnel



Control measure - Media Liaison Officer (MLO)

Control measure knowledge

Attendance of an experienced media liaison officer (MLO), at the scene should help to ease pressure from the media. It is vital that this person is able to quickly establish a procedure for working with media requests and for regularly briefing them on developments. Rumour and conjecture will flourish in a vacuum, and it is far better that the MLO gains the trust and confidence of the media by providing regular updates on events, even if there is little new to say.

Demonstrating awareness of the media's need to meet deadlines or broadcasting live reports will assist the MLO in establishing credibility with the media at the scene. This is important as they may need to seek the media's co-operation in, for example, organising pooled access to the incident site for filming or broadcasting urgent appeals for blood donors or details of evacuation arrangements.

It may be appropriate to nominate senior officers from responding agencies who are outside the main command structure to act as the primary lead for media interviews. This will remove some pressure from the incident commander and ensure the consistency of the message.



Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Have arrangements for an experienced media liaison officer (MLO) to be able to attend incidents
- Have trained staff available to co-ordinate media interaction

Tactical actions

Tactical incident commanders should:

- Liaise with media liaison officers (MLO) and strategic commanders on co-ordinating ongoing media interaction