

Sustainability Committee

SC(3)-14-09 (p1): 15 July 2009

Evidence from The Police regarding their role in flooding events prepared for Wales Sustainability Committee on flooding

Purpose and scope of the paper

To inform the Wales Sustainability Committee on Flooding how the practical issues for flooding impact on policing.

The paper makes reference to the 2007 Summer Floods in England, and the initial findings of the Government's independent review (commonly known as the Pitt Review). It also refers to the Non-statutory guidance Emergency Response and Recovery and ACPO Emergency Planning doctrine.

Any reference to government is in relation to UK Government.

Role of The Police

Non statutory guidance Emergency Response and Recovery

states that normally the police will co-ordinate the activities of those responding at and around the scene of a land-based sudden impact emergency.

The ACPO Emergency Planning Doctrine

states that in a flooding emergency or major incident, the police can assume their normal role of lead coordinating agency. The police also have a role in evacuation deemed necessary, traffic management and general police duties.

In Practice

Command Response

Where a Gold Command is established for severe weather events, the police, unless agreed otherwise locally, will convene and lead the multi-agency response through the Strategic Coordination Group (a multi agency group of strategic leads). Whilst there is no statutory responsibility or direction to do so recommendation 42 of the Pitt report suggests this should be the case. In current practice it is the case.

Operational Response

General police duties do not equip police officers to carry out any search or rescue activities in a flood environment. The EP Doctrine highlights the Health & Safety issues of deploying officers into flooding environments. It states: "Flood water is dangerous. Swift flowing water has more obvious dangers, but static water can hide missing manhole covers, holes and other obstacles, and all flood water carries the risk of infection". However, police underwater units have limited resources which may be suitable for deployment in a search and rescue capacity.

As a general rule, police personnel will avoid driving or walking through flood water.

Multi Agency Command, Control & Coordination (Gold & Silver Facilities)

Through the civil contingencies structure adopted in Wales a review of current gold facilities is underway. As a result there is in development a bid for funding to be submitted to the Strategic Capital Investment Fund. It is recognised that there needs to be significant investment to ensure that multi agency coordination facilities are made available for an effective response. The Gloucestershire flooding event resulted in 28 agencies attending the Gold facilities - this has not gone unnoticed. (Police have traditionally provided Gold facilities from within their estate for their response to major incidents, the majority of which have been developed for the use of a single agency with very limited capacity for other agencies to operate from them).

Likewise it is also recognised that a flexible approach is required when dealing on a tactical and operational level. In 2008 a bid was submitted to the convergence fund to enable the development of a multi agency interoperable facility to enhance the response to such events through mobile command, control and communications facilities. This bid was unsuccessful as it did not meet the lasting legacy criteria of the funding requirements.

Warning Systems

Police Officers and Police Community Support Officers may have a role to

play in warning and informing the public. Community beat management teams could be deployed to support door knocking initiatives.

Evacuation and Shelter

Evacuation of the public from areas of risk occurs for events other than flooding and for this reason contingency plans are generic and organisation specific. Evacuation involves the Emergency services and public service organisations. The police will act as the coordinator in an evacuation event.

Conclusion on Role

Although statutory responsibility is not given there is a steer for the police to act as coordinators; no specific requirement is made of the police role to carry out any form of actual rescue.

Currently all Local Resilience Forums in Wales are chaired by the four Chief Constables, Chief Constable Ian Arundale Dyfed - Powys police represents all Chief Constables at the Wales Resilience Forum.

Supt Bob Wilson: Emergency Services Civil Contingencies Coordinator (Wales).

Committee meeting 15th July 09.