

Sellafield Level 3 Off- Site Emergency Exercise OSCAR 8 3rd October 2006



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Introduction

Cumbria County Council is required by the REPPiR Regulations to organise an exercise once every 3 years to demonstrate the effectiveness of off-site emergency arrangements for the Sellafield Site. British Nuclear Group (BNG) are also required to demonstrate adequate off-site arrangements under the terms of their operating licence. Such exercises are scrutinised by the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (NII) and are classified as 'level 2' (local off-site exercise) or 'level 3' (national off-site exercise)

Exercise Oscar 8 was held on Tuesday 3rd October and was the UK's National Nuclear Exercise for 2006. It was based on a simulated incident at Sellafield and was one of the largest exercises ever held in Cumbria. The County Council is required under the REPPiR Regulations to organise off – site exercises every three years and the EPU led on the planning of the exercise. The nature and extent of the simulated release of radiation meant that the default Emergency Control Centre at Whitehaven (Summergrove) could not be used and the reserve centre at Carlisle Civic Centre was activated instead. The Sands Centre was used as a Media Briefing Centre with approx 100 media simulators present. It is estimated that over 1000 people took part at the various control centres around the country together with everyone on site at Sellafield.

This report summarises the responses provided by over 30 agencies involved in the exercise. It is compiled from notes of debrief meetings and written reports submitted by agencies to the Emergency Planning Unit. It is intended to capture the key learning points (both positive and negative) from the multi agency strategic response to the simulated incident and identify those areas within the off- site plan requiring review or remedial action.

The report has been compiled by Cumbria Emergency Planning Unit and the contents have been approved by the OSCAR Exercise Steering Group.

Objectives

The main objectives of the exercise were to test:

1. The Sellafield Off-Site Emergency Plan in accordance with the REPPiR Regulations.
2. Activation of the Off-Site Emergency Plan and alerting procedures.
3. Adequacy of the planning arrangements to deal with a challenging 'beyond reference accident' scenario (extendibility).
4. Arrangements to coordinate the response of agencies in the initial stages of an emergency by use of the Police Command Suite at Penrith.
5. Handover from the Command Suite at Penrith to the Emergency Control Centre at Carlisle.
6. Operation of the Emergency Control and Media Briefing Centres at Carlisle and other centres if established by participating organisations.
7. Liaison arrangements with National Centres such as DTI's Nuclear Emergency Briefing Room (NEBR) and Cabinet Office Briefing Room (COBR).

General Overview of Exercise

There are a number of issues arising out of the exercise as it was expected there would be. However this should not deflect us from the overall view of the exercise as a significant success. This was a very challenging exercise in terms of both the extended scenario, and one of its key implications, the use of alternative off site emergency centres at Carlisle. These major challenges were met and the conclusion is clear that if the event had been real then all the organisations, centres and systems would have coped and successfully met the challenges presented to them. The success of the exercise is in particular a testament to the plan and planning that underlies the exercise and also to the quality and training of the personnel who participated in the exercise

Debrief Comments

The following written comments provided by participating agencies are grouped in accordance with the Department of Trade and Industry's Nuclear Emergency Planning Liaison Group (NEPLG) reporting requirements.

1. Notification – operator, agency receipt/cascade

Positives

- Most agencies were alerted in a timely manner with clear concise information.
- Sellafield Computerised Telephone Public Warning System was activated and notified members of the public effectively. Positive feedback was received from a number of members of the public.
- Good handover from Duty Inspector in Police Communications Centre to Police Command Suite.

Negatives

- There was difficulty contacting some national agencies by Site Emergency Control Centre.
- Alerting of several Central Government agencies was complicated and time consuming.
- Some problems with 'sub-alerting' – i.e. agencies further down the alerting cascade failing to contact partner agencies.
- Clarification required concerning arrangements for requesting agency representatives to attend Police Command Suite.

Actions

- BNGSL to review alerting arrangements at Site Emergency Control Centre.
- Nuclear Emergency Planning Liaison Group (NEPLG) to review Central Government alerting procedures.
- Police to review Command Suite arrangements for inviting representatives to attend.

2. Set up of ECC – handover from Command Suite, time of becoming operational, reception process, travel/parking

Positives

- Command Suite at Police HQ managed the initial stages of the incident effectively with a limited multi agency presence.
- Handover from Command Suite to Emergency Control Centre (ECC) was achieved in an effective and timely manner.
- Although carried out the day before, it was generally felt that Carlisle ECC had been set up quickly and efficiently.
- Reception facilities at the ECC were excellent.

Negatives

- Some agencies found difficulty in getting an accurate update on the current situation upon arrival although three Briefing Officers were available to provide this.
- A number of agencies felt desk space was not sufficient. However it must be recognised that the amount of floor space within the ECC at Carlisle is not as great as at Summergrove.
- Briefing table location was noisy. Under ideal conditions, it should be located in a separate room but space restraints and the requirement to move the Smart Board make this difficult.
- Role of Highways Agency and other road network infrastructure operators in the emergency plan requires clarification

Actions

- Review space allocation at Carlisle ECC including desk space, briefing table location and facilities for Recovery Working and Health Advisory Groups.
- Review role of Highways Agency and other operators in Emergency Plan.

3. Supply of information to ECC – operator – technical, operator – radiological, agencies – technical, agencies – tactical

Positives

- Generally, the supply of technical information was considered to be satisfactory.

Negatives

- Information flow was considered by some agencies to be slow at the start of the exercise – this may be realistic owing to the fact that the exercise was run as much as possible in real time.
- Supply of monitoring information to agencies could have been better. The absence of a Site Perimeter Monitoring Terminal at Carlisle may have been a significant factor. Summergrove ECC is equipped with a direct link to the system.

Actions

- Review provision and coordination of monitoring data including use of the UK's Radiation Monitoring Network (RIMNET) to more effectively disseminate monitoring information

4. **Interpretation of information – timely analysis of technical data, timely analysis of radiological data, application of radiological protection guidelines, countermeasure advice**

Positives

- Countermeasure advice was on the whole good and timely.
- Police responded within the sheltering zone using face masks, despite this being contrary to current Police policy concerning emergency exposure levels.
- A multi-agency response base was established at Whitehaven to deal with emergencies arising within the sheltering zone
- There was good liaison and joint procedure testing between Cumbria Fire Service, Police and Environment Agency.
- A casualty evacuation from a Cumbria County Council Adult Services Home was achieved in a safe and managed way.

Negatives

- Whilst the use of a pre-prepared statement concerning safety of water supplies was appropriate in the early stages of the incident, it's contents were not reviewed and updated in response to the developing situation
- Initial problems with Gemini Information Management System resulted in some difficulties in the issuing of advice to the public in the early stages.
- Countermeasure advice was not always accurately communicated to the Media Briefing Centre.
- BNG Health Physics' misinterpretation of radiological data pre-prepared for the Whitehaven Response Base did not assist the agencies at the base

Actions

- Review arrangements for issue of preprepared guidance on safety of water supplies.
- NEPLG to consider Police and Ambulance national policies on emergency exposure levels.
- Review arrangements for issue of countermeasure advice

5. Information exchanges and teamworking – information sharing between agencies, formation of subgroups eg RWG, HAT

Positives

- Briefing Officers received good support/information from agencies throughout the exercise. Action lists and sitreps were issued in a timely manner throughout the exercise.
- Team working between agencies was excellent.
- Recovery Working Group and Health Advisory Team worked well.
- Information sharing between the ECC, Nuclear Emergency Briefing Room in London and DEFRA Environmental Operations Centre worked well.
- Despite initial problems, Gemini functioned well.
- Government Technical Advisor (GTA) interaction with BNGSL and other players was good.

Negatives

- Liaison with BNGSL Team within the ECC was difficult at times.
- Greater use of Gemini would have been helpful for the circulation of meeting times, agenda, minutes etc.
- Less information was put onto RIMNET (the National Radiation Monitoring System) than expected.
- More information should have been provided on the Briefing Table Map.
- Gemini Sitreps were not easily comprehensible when forwarded by email to external addresses.
- Some agencies at the ECC did not always liaise sufficiently with their control centres outwith the ECC

Actions

- BNGSL to review liaison arrangements with other agencies within the ECC.
- Investigate problems with external distribution of Sitreps.
- Consider how external liaison arrangements can be improved..

6. **Strategic decision making – timely, clear and concise advice to Gold (strategic decision making) Commander, strategic co-ordinated decisions, discussion of non strategic decisions**

Positives

- Briefing Table worked very well with timely meetings and was well chaired even if in a slightly different format.
- Conduct of the Briefing Table was excellent. The meetings stuck to a strategic perspective and did not waste time on needless round table reporting from each attendee.
- Participation by Civil Nuclear Constabulary (CNC) Observer identified the need to include CNC in the list of agencies represented within the ECC.

Negatives

- Some questions about the effectiveness of Sitreps as a means of communicating current status of emergency.
- Noise and mobile phone ringing from observers at the briefing table was at time obtrusive.

Actions

- Review the effectiveness of Sitreps.
- Include Civil Nuclear Constabulary in the agencies represented within the ECC.

7. Communication and Public Information - ECC feedback to technical and tactical centres, ECC information to Government, Development of public information and media strategies, issue of Public Warning Messages, Press Statements, and Situation Reports

Positives

- Information flow was generally good.
- Output from Gemini was frequent and generally useful.
- Good use of media students as media simulators in the Sands Centre.
- Press releases were generally of a higher standard than in previous exercises.
- 'Are you safe?' helpline established by Copeland/ Allerdale District Councils.
- Situation reports were very useful.

Negatives

- Early public warning messages gave incorrect or misleading information. Sector codes were used instead of postcodes.
- First press conference was not managed well although it was generally felt subsequent conferences were much better.
- Pressure on BNGSL by NII to agree an International Nuclear Event Scale (INES) rating for the incident as soon as possible caused the Site to concentrate on this issue possibly to the detriment of other more pressing issues.
- Possibly too many spokespersons were asked to appear in front of the media with the danger of inconsistent messages being sent out.
- Gemini IT problems at the start of the exercise affected the quality of information flow in the early stages.
- Some off-site centres felt they were not kept sufficiently informed as to the course of the emergency.
- Some Press Officers appeared to be issuing press releases from computers not belonging to their own agency. This may be less of a problem at Summergrove where agencies are located in individual rooms rather than 'open plan' as at Carlisle.

- Overlap between roles of Media Coordinator and Public Information Officer.
- Media Coordinator role needs to be reviewed.
- Board within ECC for posting hard copy Sitreps was not used.
- Some conflicting advice concerning safety of private water supplies.

Actions

- Review distribution arrangements for Sitreps.
- Review requirement for an 'Are you safe helpline?'
- Review overlap between Public Information Officer and Media Coordinator.
- Review operation of Media Coordinator.

8. **Facilities and equipment. – deficiencies which impact on performance (exception reporting), operation of Gemini**

Positives

- Facilities at the Civic Centre were on the whole excellent.
- Technical support from Civic Centre staff was good.
- Gemini operation good except at beginning of exercise.
- IT Technician in yellow tabard was excellent.
- Issue of information via email to external agencies good.
- Reception process good.
- Gemini's early problems were fixed efficiently and demonstrated the value of having IT support present.
- Smart Board display at briefing table was most useful.

Negatives

- A number of agencies felt that they would have been able to work more efficiently if they had a second Gemini terminal.
- Gemini suffered a number of problems in the early stages of the exercise.
- Email access was not available at Police Command Suite for agencies.
- Spare telephone sockets for laptop internet access (or wifi provision) would have been helpful within the ECC.
- A number of agencies felt that desk space allocated to their agency was insufficient.
- Health Advisory Team location was not satisfactory.
- Pre-prepared Media Briefing materials concerning Sellafield were not available. (These are available at Whitehaven MBC.)

Actions

- Consider provision of additional Gemini Terminals for key agencies.
- Improve reliability of Gemini.
- Provide email access at Police Command Suite for agencies.
- Provide IT Technical Support in all ECC's
- Provide spare sockets (or wifi) to allow laptops brought by agencies to connect to internet in all ECC's
- BNGSL to consider placing briefing materials at Carlisle ECC.

9. **Participants – personnel trained, participants have relevant authority.**

Positives

- Participation was generally good as was the level of experience and authority which players had.
- Good to have so many press officers playing.
- Training received on Gemini was more than adequate for using the system. Previous training sessions attended were most useful.
- Facilities Manager and IT Staff very helpful.

Negatives

- More use should have been made of the Briefing Officer.
- Some participants unclear of the role of the Radiation Protection Division of the Health Protection Agency.