

ENVIRONMENT POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

8 NOVEMBER 2006

EMERGENCY PLANNING: UPDATE

OUTSTANDING ISSUES

The EPDC meeting in February requested the Senior Emergency Planning Officer (EPO) to investigate previous incidents (Geest fire and UXB controlled explosion) with external partners to examine lessons to be learnt.

The report into the Geest Foods fire in February 2004 by the Emergency Planning Manager identified two key points regarding the joint response to this emergency: communications with the public and between services, and adoption of the concept of Integrated Emergency Management.

- Communications with the public is a duty placed on the emergency services and the Council under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The need is to provide information about possible emergencies before they happen, to give warning of an emergency before or when it occurs, and to give advice on measures to help restore normality after an emergency. These activities are currently being developed within MKC and are to be jointly considered by the MK Strategic Co-ordination Group (MKSCG).
- Integrated Emergency Management has been wholeheartedly adopted by MKSCG and was evident during the major incident response to the scaffolding emergency reported overleaf.

The UXB incident in CMK last summer was not declared to be a major incident as such incidents are usually a single emergency service matter with the police tasking Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) support from the Ministry of Defence. Other emergency organisations are not normally involved. Unexploded bombs if considered dangerous are nearly always destroyed in situ. An exclusion area is determined by the bomb disposal operator and the police evacuate the area as necessary. Sandbags are placed around the UXB to trap shrapnel. In the light of the security situation at that time, it is very likely that there was a need to complete the operation quickly so that the EOD team could be deployed to other tasks.

I am unable to establish whether atmospheric or geological conditions exaggerated the noise of the explosion and caused it to be heard over a wider area or whether this was due to insufficient sandbags being used to reduce the noise.

RECENT SERIOUS EMERGENCIES

1. JURYS INN SCAFFOLDING COLLAPSE

On Tuesday 11 April 2006, scaffolding at the Jurys Inn building site collapsed during high winds. Fears of high numbers of casualties led to the emergency services declaring a Major Incident. In the event, only 3 people were injured, one of whom subsequently died on Friday 14 April. MKC involvement included Building Control Surveyors advising Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service about dangerous structures, Highways and Streetcare assisting with traffic issues and Liaison Officers attending the Police Station joint organisation 'Silver Control'. MKC were also requested to secure the site and to open a Reception Centre for an unspecified number of people, who in the event did not arrive at Civic Offices where the staff canteen was prepared to offer refreshments.

Internal and joint responders debriefs have been held and the main lessons to be learned for MKC are:

- to dispatch 2 MKC Liaison Officers to the joint Silver Control to ensure continuous contact,
- to immediately open an MKC Silver Operations Centre and support it with sufficient staff, and
- to send liaison officers to site to observe and collect information for MKC on the current and developing situations to aid forward planning.

2. CHEMICAL / FLY TIPPING AT TINKERS BRIDGE

On Thursday 8 June 2006 a report was received of an abandoned vehicle containing leaking, flammable chemicals at Tinkers Bridge. It was later discovered that the vehicle had not been abandoned but was owned by a nearby resident. Police and Fire requested an Environmental Health Officer to attend site. Dr Steve Moorhouse, Environmental Protection Team attended the incident after some delay in notifying him of the incident. The vehicle with cargo was later recovered via contractors to Bleak Hall.

Lessons to be learned from the incident include:

- Community Alarm Service (Technical Services after 5:15 pm) have a senior officers list for Environmental Health (EH) Division and should contact the relevant team leader if the standby EH pager is unanswered within 10 minutes. The EH out of hours standby service was not in operation as it operates from 5:15 pm on Fridays until 8:30am on Mondays only at present.

3. GREENLEYS WATER SUPPLY FAILURE

The Greenleys area suffered non supply or reduced water pressure on Saturday 1 July 2006. This was reported to Technical Services who passed the calls to Anglian Water (AW) for their attention. The AW duty team attended and resolved the incident during the evening. The on site AW Team Manager is responsible for deciding if and when to provide an alternative supply of potable water. This incident happened on what was the hottest day of the year at that time and it is believed that Anglian Water did not provide an alternative supply to those affected by the incident. Emergency planning were unaware of the incident until an email from Cllr Norman Miles to Cllr Isobel McCall was forwarded to officers for attention on Monday 3 July.

AW must supply 10L of potable water per person per day. They may argue that if someone has not lost supply for a whole day then their commitment was fulfilled during the period that the supply was available. If they decide to provide water from an alternative source they have a number of small water bowsers , and 100,000L of bottled water at Peterborough. Water from the bowser should be boiled before drinking.

The NHS introduced a Heatwave Plan in 2004 and this was enacted for the first time in June this year. The plan has 4 levels of severity. The lower level 1 was applicable on 1 July. (Level 3 was reached on 3 and 4 July - Level 4 is a Major Incident).

Should AW supply water via bowsers, a number of people would probably drink tea or coffee after boiling the water rather than wait for it to cool, contrary to NHS advice in the Heatwave Plan to avoid tea and coffee because of the dehydration effects.

The Senior Emergency Planning Officer has visited AW to discuss this incident with their EPO and is seeking further talks to establish a suitable protocol for use in hot weather conditions.

4. WOBURN SANDS WATER SUPPLY FAILURE

A water main is understood to have burst on Wednesday 9 August 2006. The Emergency Planning Unit were unaware of this problem until the following day, and have no details regarding site, cause or duration of the problem. The Anglian Water Contingency Officer has expressed a willingness to attend an External Scrutiny Committee meeting to discuss these issues and advise on recent reorganisation within Anglian Water during which time liaison with local authority Emergency Planning Units have suffered.

Lessons to be learned from the incident include:

- The duty EPO should be informed by Technical Services in the event of serious water shortages.

Malcolm Boscott
Senior Emergency Planning Officer
16 October 2006