

Chapter 13: Media and Public Information

13.1 Scope

13.1.1 The guidance set out in this chapter is based on best practice developed and refined by NEPLG since 1991 when the principles relating to the organisation and operation of media briefing centres was agreed. These were developed as a result of lessons learned following the Three Mile Island accident in 1979 which identified the need for media briefing centres in the event of an accident at a civil nuclear site.

13.1.2 The purpose of this chapter is to describe:

- * the principles to be applied and arrangements agreed, for briefing the media in a nuclear emergency.
- * the information that should be set out in the Off-Site Emergency Plan detailing who is responsible for delivering public information.

13.2 General

13.2.1 The Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2002 provide the legal basis for the supply of information to the public about a nuclear emergency. These place a duty on the Operator to supply prior information to members of the public in an area which could be affected, and a duty on the local authority to supply information to the public in the event of an emergency.

13.2.2 The media would be essential in conveying to the public key messages about any emergency at a civil nuclear site. It is vital that there should be established contingency arrangements to ensure the media are quickly and accurately briefed with timely and consistent information.

13.2.3 In the event of a nuclear emergency it is expected that:

The public will:

- * seek direct advice and reassurance from whoever they can contact, particularly from those within the affected area.
- * demand information from the media, websites and through telephone enquiries to response organisations in and beyond the affected areas.

The media:

- * will be present in very large numbers including international news organisations from an early stage of a nuclear emergency, arriving locally within hours, and seeking information probably before the emergency services co-ordinated response is operational.
- * will attempt to get as close to the site as possible, in search of information and images.
- * will be equipped with up-to-date communications technology seeking information for immediate broadcast and to reporting deadlines.

- * is likely to be the most effective and resilient method of quickly reaching large numbers of people.
- * must not hinder the emergency operation.

13.2.3 During the very early stages inquiries are likely to be handled by the police and the operators' press officers only.

13.2 Objectives

13.3.1 The primary aim in formulating media briefing arrangements to deal with a civil nuclear emergency is to inform the public. The principle objectives are to ensure:

- * **Preparedness**

- Local organisations are aware of the media briefing arrangements that would come into effect through consultation at local emergency planning forums.

- Facilities are available to accommodate the demands of the media.

- Prior information supplied to the public forms a foundation for information supplied during an event to enable the actions to protect the public to be implemented effectively.

- Opportunities are taken to rehearse the supply of information to public and media during exercises and training.

- Organisations should keep under review their pre-planned material and arrangements to get such material to the media either in advance of or immediately following an emergency.

- * **Response.**

- Make available to the media a speedy and continuous flow of up to date information about the course of the accident, the resulting off-site situation and actions being taken to ensure public safety.

- Co-ordinate agreed, authoritative statements for the media to aid reassurance and to avoid the circulation of contradictory statements for the public.

- Establish a single briefing facility at or near the Off Site Facility (OSF) as the primary local source of authoritative information for media representatives.

13.4 Response Facilities

13.4.1 The key features of the response facilities to deal with a civil nuclear emergency are:

- * The early establishment of a Media Briefing Centre (MBC) as the main source of information to the media, to be set up near to the OSF for the affected site. If the MBC is not located somewhere which meets the needs of the media, they will not use it. They will select their own site which may not be convenient for other organisations.

- * The MBC would:
 - bring together media representatives of key organisations involved in the response to the emergency to act as an MBC press office.
 - provide facilities for spokespeople to provide regular briefings and interviews to the media and provide the media with a base to work from and office facilities.
- * To make the MBC attractive to the media there should be a steady flow of information between press conferences. Hence the MBC might include a media inquiries desk and less formal briefings with representatives of organisations on specific issues and where possible, visual material. Background information may also be made available.
- * Press releases from various organisations should be displayed at one focal point within the MBC.
- * Civil nuclear emergency response fact sheets have been prepared for use as background briefing by the media in the event of an emergency at a civil nuclear site. These have now been widely distributed to OSFs, MBCs and NEPLG members. (Additional copies are available on the DTI website).

13.4 Response Organisation

13.5.1 The pre-planned local agreement on the organisation and management of the MBC, as the main source of information to the media, needs to embody the following features:

- * How communications between the OSF and MBC would be established and maintained.
- * How information would be agreed between interested parties and provided to the MBC.
- * Who should take the chair at formal press conferences at each stage of the emergency.
- * How press conferences are arranged and which spokespersons and experts would be made available.
- * Management responsibility, including the appointment of the MBC Manager, would normally fall to the police during the accident phase, and the local authority during the recovery phase.

Consideration should be given to:

- * Organisations with executive responsibilities for off-site actions to protect the public can also be expected to play a key role in media briefing on their own areas of responsibility through the MBC.
- * A Government Technical Adviser (GTA) would provide authoritative statements on behalf of Government on the course of the emergency and measures to protect the public.

- * Close liaison will be necessary between the MBC and the OSF, as well as other centres such as the lead department's emergency room, and the emergency rooms of other organisations and their enquiry points.
- * Media organisations visiting the affected site.
 - This might be advantageous in providing public reassurance, and enable the police, the operator and other responding organisations to convey accurate and helpful messages.
 - If such a visit can be safely arranged, then consideration should be given to asking the crew to pool footage with other media organisations, given that the number of such visits would probably need to be strictly limited.
 - Any such visits would be arranged and facilitated by the operators' press officers.
- * Media crews who decided to visit the site of their own volition.
- * Responding organisations, both local and national, might in addition brief the media on their own areas of responsibility from their own headquarters and emergency centres – though the main focus of media attention and resources will be the MBC and co-ordinated through the Police. Responding organisations should identify and train spokespersons who could make authoritative statements on behalf of their organisation.
- * A DTI minister, in the case of an emergency in England or Wales, would be expected to make a statement about the course of the emergency to the Westminster Parliament, or Scottish Executive minister, in the case of Scotland, would make a statement to the Scottish Parliament. These ministers might also be expected to speak directly to the media and visit the site of the emergency when it was safe to do so.
- * As an emergency progresses, each organisation should endeavour to place its own key statements and background information on its own web-site. This should include a description of what it is doing in response to the emergency and why this is the case. They should also provide links to the www.ukresilience web-site, which will act as a portal for all the available information being produced by individual bodies.
- * The mechanisms for handling telephone enquiries and updating web-sites are known and understood by all the organisations involved in the response, and they also appreciate the limitations on what resources are likely to be available for the task.

13.5.2 The lead government department (i.e. DTI or Scottish Executive) would need to ensure its own media briefing arrangements were suitably adapted to meet the circumstances of an emergency at a civil nuclear site. The following points would be relevant:

- * The demand for information would be enormous. It is likely that in these circumstances the media will look to the lead department's ministers and press office as a major sources of information. The department's emergency room (Nuclear Emergency Briefing Room in the case of DTI or Scottish Executive Emergency Room for the Scottish Executive) would need to maintain close liaison with the OSF and MBC to ensure consistency of information.
- * Key statements originating from the lead department or its ministers should be checked with the GTA. This would be responsibility of the Senior Government Liaison Representative (SGLR) and his/her team located at the OSF.
- * The lead department's press office would need to send one of its officers to the MBC to support the GTA at press conferences and on media matters generally.
- * The lead department's press office would need to work in close liaison with the staff in its emergency room to ensure to ensure key statements are produced on time and in good order, and are published on the DTI web-site.

13.5.3 For any major emergency, a News Co-ordination Centre would be established to ensure public information messages, particularly cross cutting messages, were co-ordinated across government and other key stakeholders. The News Co-ordination Centre (NCC) of the Government Information Communications Service (GICS) would ensure that at the national level appropriate steps were being taken to ensure that the media was appropriately and adequately briefed.

The following considerations would be relevant:

- * NCC would work with the lead department's press office and other government press offices to ensure there was adequate management and resourcing of the government's response, and that the delivery arrangements were appropriate and adequate.
- * The NCC would additionally consider the wider, longer term, media issues and what action was necessary in the light of those issues.
- * The ukresilience web-site contains a nuclear section. The NCC would update this ensuring cross government co-ordination of updates and links.
- * It would be essential there was an adequate flow of information to and from the regions. The NCC would work in close liaison with the Government News Network(GNN) and keep them up to date on all policy developments. They would take account of the arrangements and contacts established through the Regional Media Emergency Forums (RMEFs), which have an ongoing planning role bringing together government, the emergency services and the media.

13.6 Telephone Enquiries from the Public

13.6.1 While no integrated telephone service would be feasible, organisations should endeavour to run telephone enquiry points to seek to answer questions in their area of responsibility and the plans of responding organisations should ensure appropriate arrangements are in place for this to be the case.

13.6.2 Relevant organisations should also provide information to those with particular needs including, where appropriate, telephone enquiry points to deal with specific aspects of the emergency.

13.6.3 Organisations may employ call centres to assist them in this task.

13.7 Exercising the Adequacy of the Media Response

13.7.1 There are four elements that need to be tested to give confidence that the aim of providing information to the public and interfacing with the media is achieved:

- * the adequacy and appropriateness of the media response facilities.
- * the accuracy of the information provided to the public and media.
- * the timing of information provided.
- * the organisational process by which public reassurance information is formulated and presented to media.

13.7.2 In testing these various aspects of the media interface, the performance of the media response organisations can be measured against some or all of the following options, to be agreed at exercise planning stage:

- * Use of the media facilities with a simulated mass media interface.
- * The provision of a focused panel of media professionals in the media facility.
- * Co-ordination between the responding organisations press officers.
- * The interface between the responding organisations press officers and the strategic co-ordinating group managing the emergency and protection of the public.

13.8 Conclusion

13.8.1 This chapter has described the pre-agreed arrangements and principles that would apply in the event of an emergency at a civil nuclear site relating to public information and media interface. Because the actual demands of the media will be determined to an extent by the specific circumstances of any emergency, more flexibility may be required in applying guidance in this area than in others. However, organisations should aim to adhere to the basic structure described in this chapter. Whatever the circumstances, it is most important to adhere to the principles in this chapter to ensure clear, consistent and accurate briefing of the media.