

# Chapter 12

## Northern Ireland

### Summary

- Civil protection in Northern Ireland is largely a devolved matter, with functions being exercised by the Northern Ireland departments. Some functions are not devolved and are delivered in Northern Ireland by bodies that fall within the remit of the UK Government (paragraphs 12.1–12.7).
- The Central Emergency Planning Unit in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister promotes and co-ordinates civil protection arrangements in Northern Ireland (paragraphs 12.13–12.14).
- Sub-regional and local co-ordination is achieved by a variety of arrangements, including those involving the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the district councils (paragraphs 12.24–12.25).
- Some Category 1 and 2 responders in Northern Ireland are subject to Part 1 of the Act and the Regulations and guidance issued by UK Ministers – the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and telecommunications providers (paragraphs 12.1–12.5).
- Arrangements are in place to ensure information exchange and co-ordination in the event of emergencies which cross the border with the Republic of Ireland (paragraph 12.26).

## What the Act and the Regulations require

**12.1** The duties in the Act apply only to a limited number of organisations which deliver functions that are not transferred. These organisations are:

- the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) (included as a Category 1 responder);
- the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) (included as a Category 1 responder); and
- telecommunications operators (included as Category 2 responders).

**12.2** Because these organisations do not represent the full spectrum of response agencies in Northern Ireland, the Regulations treat these organisations in a slightly different way. The following principles apply to those Category 1 and 2 responders which operate in Northern Ireland:

- The Regulations which relate to how individual Category 1 and 2 responders should perform their duties apply to Category 1 and 2 responders in Northern Ireland in the usual way, but with some adjustments for the Northern Ireland situation.
- The provisions which rely on bilateral co-operation, etc between Category 1 and 2 responders apply to Northern Ireland.<sup>1</sup>
- The provisions in the Regulations relating to the Local Resilience Forum and its activities, including the production of a Community Risk Register, do not apply to Northern Ireland.
- Category 1 responders in Northern Ireland should have regard to the activities of other bodies in Northern Ireland that are engaged in civil protection (including Northern Ireland departments, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and relevant utilities) and, where appropriate, may rely on or adopt those activities.<sup>2</sup>
- Category 1 responders in Northern Ireland may delegate their functions to, or exercise their functions jointly with, other bodies in Northern Ireland who are engaged in civil protection.<sup>3</sup>

**12.3** In practice, it is anticipated that the PSNI, MCA and telecommunications operators in Northern Ireland will undertake their individual and co-operative duties

under the Act, but will relate to the other public service bodies listed in the Regulations in line with the arrangements in the Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Framework and by participating in Northern Ireland co-operation, co-ordination and crisis management machinery.<sup>4</sup>

**12.4** The Northern Ireland organisations have a reciprocal requirement under the Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Framework to co-operate with the PSNI, MCA and telecommunications operators in the discharge of their duties under the Act.

**12.5** Chapters 2 to 8 explain in more detail how each duty under the Act is to be performed by Category 1 and 2 responders in Northern Ireland.

## Civil contingencies in Northern Ireland

**12.6** Civil contingencies are largely a devolved matter with responsibilities lying with Northern Ireland government departments. Co-ordination falls to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). The Northern Ireland Assembly would normally have oversight of civil contingencies arrangements for transferred functions. During any period of suspension of the devolved Assembly, Northern Ireland departments discharge their functions subject to the direction and control of the Secretary of State.

**12.7** Some civil protection functions, most significantly policing, are not devolved and are delivered in Northern Ireland by bodies that fall within the remit of the UK Government. The Northern Ireland Office (NIO), which is responsible for, among other things, policing, criminal justice and security in Northern Ireland, maintains a close relationship with the OFMDFM and relevant Northern Ireland departments to ensure activities are co-ordinated.

**12.8** The “lead government department” principle applies to Northern Ireland departments. All Northern Ireland departments and divisions with responsibilities for the provision of a service in normal times remain responsible at times of emergency. The lead Northern Ireland department, as at the UK level, is the

<sup>1</sup> regulation 6

<sup>2</sup> regulation 57

<sup>3</sup> regulation 58

<sup>4</sup> regulation 57

### Box 12.1: Membership of the CEMG

- CEPU
- 11 Northern Ireland departments
- NIO
- Northern Ireland Departmental Information Service (NIDIS)
- Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
- Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)
- Northern Ireland Fire Brigade
- Local Government Emergency Management Group (LGEMG)
- Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)

department with day-to-day policy responsibility for the subject in question. That means that, for example, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety leads in preparing for and responding to infectious diseases in people, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development leads on infectious diseases in animals.

**12.9** In Northern Ireland many functions which are delivered elsewhere in the UK by local authorities are delivered directly by Northern Ireland departments, or by their agencies or non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs). This means that some activities which in Great Britain are covered by duties under the Act are in Northern Ireland carried out under lead department arrangements.

**12.10** Lead departments in Northern Ireland are broadly similar to those at the UK level in terms of roles and responsibilities. Details of lead departments can be found at <http://www.ukresilience.info/lead.htm> Information on Northern Ireland arrangements can be found in *A Guide to Emergency Planning Arrangements in Northern Ireland*.

**12.11** The Northern Ireland devolved administration or NIO, depending on the subject matter, is represented on the key committees and forums within UK central government relating to civil protection at both official and Ministerial levels. They work closely with UK departments to ensure Northern Ireland needs are catered for in UK planning and policy development.

**12.12** In an emergency affecting Northern Ireland, the devolved administration will be involved because of its territorial role, irrespective of the devolution settlement division of responsibilities.

### The Central Emergency Planning Unit

**12.13** The Central Emergency Planning Unit (CEPU) is located within the OFMDFM. It promotes the

development of civil protection within the Northern Ireland public sector. It:

- encourages Northern Ireland departments and agencies and other public bodies to prepare, maintain and test their contingency plans;
- assists Northern Ireland departments and agencies and other public bodies in the preparation and exercise of these plans;
- advises Northern Ireland departments and agencies and other public bodies of appropriate training opportunities;
- encourages good practice in the field of emergency planning; and
- facilitates inter-agency co-ordination at Northern Ireland level.

**12.14** The CEPU provides information and expertise to planners within organisations and facilitates co-ordination of planning between organisations through formal and informal structures and dialogue. Its customers are primarily government departments and agencies but the emergency services and other public service bodies are also engaged. The CEPU also represents Northern Ireland interests in policy discussions at UK and international levels.

### Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Framework

**12.15** The Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Framework sets out the principles of policy and practice which will be adhered to by Northern Ireland public service organisations in their civil contingencies activities. The principles in the Framework are derived from existing Northern Ireland arrangements and structures and from the underlying principles of the Act and other UK policies. The Framework is supported by guidance documents, including *A Guide to Emergency Planning Arrangements in Northern Ireland* and *A Guide to Risk Assessment in Northern Ireland*.

**12.16** The Framework requires Northern Ireland public service organisations to co-operate with those organisations in Northern Ireland which have duties under Part 1 of the Act.

## The Central Emergency Management Group

**12.17** The Central Emergency Management Group (CEMG) is a pan-Northern Ireland multi-agency forum for the development, discussion and agreement of civil protection policy for the Northern Ireland public services. In addition to its policy role, the CEMG supports strategic co-ordination of emergencies, and has a relationship with the Crisis Management Group (CMG), supplementing existing lead department arrangements.

**12.18** The CEMG is broadly analogous to the Regional Resilience Forums in England and Wales and it meets on a regular basis (at least two to three times per year) to review strategic issues. It may also meet at the request of the lead department or others in emergencies where a strategic multi-agency involvement is anticipated or required. The CEMG may also establish subgroups or working groups to deal with development of policy and good practice guidance on particular topics or areas of concern.

**12.19** The specific functions of the CEMG are:

- the review of civil contingencies policy in government departments and public bodies in Northern Ireland, as appropriate, and seeking/gaining agreement on policy principles and standards;
- the maintenance of liaison between government departments, emergency services and other key public service bodies and district councils;
- the dissemination of information to and within member organisations on civil contingencies policy, current issues and risks and the response required to particular emergency situations;
- the collection and collation of information necessary to inform policy development or the response to emergencies and the provision of briefing on particular issues or emergencies;
- the facility to establish standing or ad hoc subgroups or working groups to develop policy for, or report on, particular issues or functions; and
- the discussion and co-ordination of non-emergency service responses to emergencies which require a multi-agency strategic approach

but which do not require the active involvement of Permanent Secretaries or Ministers.

**12.20** The group is chaired by a senior official from the OFMDFM. Its membership includes senior representatives from the bodies listed in Box 12.1.

**12.21** As well as representing their immediate organisations, members also represent the interests of associated sub-regional and local public service organisations.

**12.22** Various other co-ordination arrangements exist for planning and responding to specific situations. These are set up as needed by the key organisations involved. There are, for example, regional groups for flooding, overseas nuclear accidents and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) issues.

## The Infrastructure Emergency Planning Forum

**12.23** The Infrastructure Emergency Planning Forum brings together organisations which contribute to the Northern Ireland infrastructure to promote effective communication and co-ordination between them in the event of an emergency. Membership overlaps with the CEMG to some extent, in that some Northern Ireland departments, the emergency services and the Local Government Emergency Management Group are represented, but the forum also has members drawn from government agencies, NDPBs, utilities and communications providers.

## Sub-regional and local arrangements

**12.24** Co-ordination at local and sub-regional levels may be facilitated by a range of organisations, depending on the nature and outcome of particular emergencies. The police district commanders and the district council chief executives have key roles to play in co-ordination at local level.

**12.25** Northern Ireland has its own unique constitutional and organisational structures. Unlike in Great Britain many services are delivered on a Northern Ireland-wide (regional) basis, either by government departments or by their agencies and NDPBs. Other services are delivered by organisations at sub-regional level.

## Cross-border arrangements

**12.26** Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK which has an international land border. As emergencies do not recognise borders, it is important that arrangements are in place with organisations in the Republic of Ireland to co-ordinate response to emergencies which cross the border or affect the island of Ireland as a whole. At local level, the emergency services have arrangements for co-ordinating the response to incidents at or near the border. Other arrangements are in place for co-ordinating information and efforts in areas such as public health emergencies and the response to nuclear accidents. These arrangements supplement national-level arrangements for co-ordination and co-operation through agencies such as the European Union.

## Further information

**12.27** Further information on civil protection arrangements in Northern Ireland can be found in the CEPU document *A Guide to Emergency Planning Arrangements in Northern Ireland* which was issued in July 2004. This and other information on civil contingencies arrangements in Northern Ireland is available from the CEPU website, <http://cepu.nics.gov.uk>, or by telephoning the CEPU on 028 9052 8862.