

Chapter 14

The role of the voluntary sector

Summary

- The voluntary sector has an important role to play in supporting the statutory services in response to some emergencies (paragraph 14.1).
- Category 1 responders who include the voluntary sector in their local planning arrangements will make the overall response more effective throughout the community. This is not just good practice: the Regulations require Category 1 responders to work with the voluntary sector. This includes building the voluntary sector into planning, training and exercising to respond to emergencies as appropriate (paragraphs 14.4–14.8).
- There are four models suggested for Category 1 responders to follow when engaging the voluntary sector effectively in order to discharge their duties at the local level (paragraphs 14.11–14.15).
- Responders should be aware of the kinds of services the voluntary sector can offer before making plans to involve them (paragraphs 14.16–14.18).
- It is essential that volunteers from the voluntary sector are trained and volunteers supported by the professionals they are helping (paragraphs 14.24–14.26).
- The way Category 1 and 2 responders work with the voluntary sector at the local level is supported by consistent regional and national arrangements (paragraphs 14.27–14.29).

What the Act and the Regulations require

14.1 In some circumstances, emergencies can overstretch the resources of the emergency services, local authorities and other local responders. The value of additional support from the voluntary sector has been demonstrated on many occasions.

14.2 The voluntary sector in the United Kingdom is very large and diverse. The skills and expertise available from the voluntary sector vary from place to place. Experience shows that advance planning enables voluntary sector activity to be more effective.

14.3 The Regulations require Category 1 responders to have regard to the activities of certain voluntary organisations in the course of carrying out their emergency and BC planning duties.¹ The Regulations provide that Category 1 responders must only have regard to those voluntary sector bodies which carry out activities in the area for which the responder is responsible.

14.4 Voluntary organisations are those bodies whose activities are carried out not for profit and which are not public authorities or local authorities. Under the Regulations, they become relevant voluntary organisations if they carry on any activities for the purpose of preventing emergencies, reducing, controlling or mitigating the effects of emergencies, or taking other action in connection with emergencies.² This is a broad definition that will capture charities and other voluntary organisations.

14.5 This does not mean that Category 1 responders should work only with those voluntary sector organisations established solely for the purpose of working in the field of civil protection. Few voluntary sector bodies are established for the sole purpose of responding to emergencies. Most will have a partial interest tangential to their main business. Nevertheless, these voluntary sector organisations must be factored into local civil protection arrangements where they may have a role to play in dealing with an emergency.

14.6 This obligation is intended to ensure that Category 1 responders actively consider the voluntary sector during the planning process, rather than at the end or not at all. As such, simply sending copies of plans to voluntary organisations is not sufficient, nor is including voluntary organisations in plans without consulting them. Instead, Category 1 responders must consider the capabilities that relevant voluntary organisations within their area have to offer, and whether those capabilities should be built into plans.

14.7 The requirement to have regard to the activities of relevant voluntary sector organisations covers both emergency plans and business continuity plans (BCPs). In the case of the former, voluntary sector capabilities such as search and rescue or humanitarian support may be built into the response arrangements agreed between the statutory services. In the case of the latter, the voluntary sector may, in the course of everyday business, already deliver certain services on behalf of a statutory provider that would need to be maintained (such as 'meals on wheels'). In addition, certain BCPs may use voluntary organisations to backfill functions that would be undermined by the diversion of resources to deal with the direct consequences of a major incident. For example, with ambulances diverted to the scene of a large emergency, an ambulance trust might have an agreement with the local St John Ambulance (cf. paragraph 14.17) for the latter to carry out routine patient collection.

14.8 The Act also requires local authorities to provide business continuity advice to those voluntary sector bodies which it considers to be appropriate.³ Advice on how to discharge this requirement is set out in Chapter 8. Nevertheless, local authorities may find it useful to consider how their engagement of the voluntary sector in the round might dovetail with work to meet that specific requirement.

¹ regulation 23

² regulation 23

³s. 4

How the requirements of the Act and the Regulations may be carried out

Engaging the voluntary sector at the local level

14.9 By establishing the right organisational framework, the voluntary sector can be properly factored into the planning process. Sound co-operation through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) processes and directly with individual Category 1 responders should be based on an agreed framework. This structure needs to suit local circumstances, be understood by all concerned and have clearly identified points of contact. Arrangements must be kept up to date by regular formal and informal contact at local level.

14.10 There are several different models that can be applied at the local level. None are mandatory, but these models, either individually or in combination, can help Category 1 responders to discharge their duties under the Act.

Model 1: engagement through the LRF

14.11 At the local level, each LRF should consider having a voluntary sector representative. The representative should be able to speak on behalf of all the major voluntary organisations operating in the area, as well as any smaller, local voluntary organisations.

Model 2: establishing a voluntary sector subgroup of the LRF

14.12 Setting up a voluntary sector co-ordinating group at local level can help co-operation between the statutory services and local voluntary organisations. A local authority civil protection officer

will normally chair such a group. The group can bring together all of the voluntary bodies with an interest in civil protection that are active in the LRF area. The principal advantage of such a group is that it should ensure all Category 1 responders have a good understanding of the strengths and limitations of local voluntary sector bodies, and can include them in their planning to an extent that is sensible.

Model 3: bilateral links on the basis of functions

14.13 One method of involving voluntary organisations in civil contingency planning is to group them where appropriate on the basis of their functions, and link them with the Category 1 responder responsible for those functions. This functional grouping can clarify the contributions which individual voluntary organisations can make. It can prevent duplicated demands on their services and enable Category 1 responders and voluntary organisations to make the best use of the voluntary contribution.

14.14 In some cases there will be one Category 1 responder and one voluntary organisation linked to a specific function; for example the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). In other cases, where a voluntary organisation performs a range of functions, it would need to be associated with more than one Category 1 responder and represented on all the relevant functional groups. In all cases, local civil protection officers should be fully aware of the level of voluntary service available and the arrangements for its provision in a co-ordinated manner.

Model 4: bilateral links on the basis of capabilities

14.15 A related method is to distinguish between the operational role of voluntary organisations when they directly help in the response to an emergency, and their support role, for example when they provide refreshments for the emergency services. An LRF-level

Box 14.1: Further advice and information

Also included in this chapter is further advice about the voluntary sector and useful information that is not supported directly by the Act. There is therefore no direct obligation under the Act for responders to have regard to it. These sections of text are distinguished by inclusion in a text box like this one.

A case study of best practice in local voluntary sector engagement

In Derbyshire, the voluntary sector is closely involved in local civil protection work. Although there is no voluntary sector representative on the LRF, the LRF does have a voluntary sector subgroup.

The subgroup is chaired by a local authority officer, and its membership includes the British Red Cross, St John Ambulance, WRVS, Samaritans, Salvation Army, RAYNET, the National Voluntary Civil Aid Service, a Derby radio amateur group, Mountain Rescue, RSPCA and representatives of religious groups.

Individual voluntary sector bodies are then brought into the detail of planning through bilateral relationships with Category 1 responders on the basis of both capabilities and functions, ensuring full interconnectedness between the voluntary and statutory sectors. Voluntary sector bodies also take part in some other LRF subgroups, are offered training and take part in exercises.

“By establishing a voluntary sector subgroup of the LRF, we ensure that the statutory responders have access to a clear picture of the voluntary sector’s capabilities in Derbyshire.” Ian Shuttleworth, Chief Emergency Planning Officer, Derbyshire.

“The statutory services in Derbyshire have adopted a flexible but well-organised approach to our involvement. This careful engagement at the planning phase has proven its worth in the response phase, and we have successfully supported the statutory services when emergencies have stretched their resources.” Moya Wood-Heath, British Red Cross.

multi-agency plan can list which services are offered across the range of voluntary organisations. A key principle of the plan is to avoid double-counting by indicating which Category 1 responder has first call on (or priority need for) any particular voluntary contribution and to define a co-ordinated call-out system.

Capabilities of the voluntary sector

14.16 Those preparing emergency plans should be aware of the wide spectrum of operational and support activities provided by the voluntary sector in the United Kingdom.

- There are established organisations that provide a range of services, such as the British Red Cross Society, Women’s Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS), the Salvation Army, St John Ambulance (or St Andrew’s in Scotland).
- Many individual volunteers have particular skills, but are not necessarily in recognised voluntary organisations: for example interpreters or representatives from the faith communities.
- Certain organisations contribute specialist skills in various types of activity:
 - search and rescue organisations, such as the British Cave Rescue Council (BCRC), coastguard

response teams (HM Coastguard’s Auxiliary branch), the Mountain Rescue Council (MRC), the RNLI, the International Rescue Corps (IRC), search and rescue dog teams;

- groups of doctors, such as the British Association for Immediate Care Schemes (BASICS);
- voluntary radio operators, such as the Radio Amateurs’ Emergency Network (RAYNET);
- non-governmental organisations (NGOs); and
- organisations which specialise in providing emotional support and counselling, such as Cruse Bereavement Care and the Samaritans.

14.17 The voluntary sector can provide support in a number of generic areas:

- welfare;
- social and psychological aftercare;
- medical support;
- search and rescue;
- transport;
- communications;
- documentation; and
- training and exercising.

14.18 Annex 14A sets out examples of the wide-ranging support activities volunteers can provide and of the

statutory organisations with which they frequently work.

14.19 It is important to be precise on the accountability of volunteers to a professional agency because of issues of legal liability, including statutory requirements under the Children Act, and because of insurance indemnity issues. Agencies using volunteers may become responsible for the health and safety of volunteers and will need to ensure that they are properly equipped, trained, supervised and supported. Where volunteers could reasonably be expected to work within an inner cordon, they should make arrangements to obtain the necessary skills and personal protective equipment to allow them to operate in safety.

14.20 It is of vital importance that, if an emergency occurs, the voluntary sector should be able to contribute what has been mutually agreed and written into local plans. Voluntary agencies have therefore to be able to demonstrate their capabilities and that their support is reliable, consistent and sustainable to the required standard. A record of available local voluntary resources should be maintained, where appropriate, as part of an LRF-level multi-agency plan.

14.21 The statutory and voluntary sectors should be clear about their respective roles in an emergency. They each have their own structures and constraints. Voluntary organisations must appreciate that the Category 1 responders bear the responsibility for the overall emergency response. Equally, the statutory services must develop an understanding of the voluntary sector as a rich resource for personnel, professional skills and equipment.

14.22 There should be agreement and effective plans on the use of volunteers, the decision-making process leading to their call-out and the method of call-out. Plans should determine who will organise, manage and brief volunteers. Debriefing should be included as part of plan maintenance procedures. Planners also need to establish that volunteers receive refreshment and are appropriately clothed, identified and equipped.

14.23 Plans should include effective procedures for alerting or calling out voluntary organisations. Early alert is desirable because of the lead time needed for

contacting and assembling teams in organisations other than the emergency services. Contingency arrangements should reflect this.

Training and exercising

14.24 When considering the particular contribution that the voluntary sector can make, it should be noted that established voluntary organisations and volunteer groups will usually have their own training arrangements. They should be able to demonstrate their effectiveness to the Category 1 responders.

14.25 Additionally, the Category 1 responders and voluntary agencies should aim for joint training and exercising. It is very important that voluntary organisations understand the management framework of the response and how they fit into the response as a whole. There will be some overlap between the functions and capabilities of different voluntary organisations. Joint exercising will identify any problems, ensure plans and procedures are up to date and foster working relationships.

14.26 Effective communication, planning and training should aim to identify opportunities for sharing heavy workloads and providing mutual support. General issues of training and exercising are further discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

The voluntary sector at the UK and regional levels

14.27 At the UK level, the voluntary sector has developed a co-ordinated approach to planning its contribution to civil protection, and local and regional responders should aim to fit into this framework.

14.28 At the UK level, a Voluntary Sector Civil Protection Working Party and Forum have been convened by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and the British Red Cross. The aim of the Working Party and Forum is to identify and maximise the voluntary sector contribution to UK civil protection arrangements. There are currently 20 voluntary organisations with a national or UK-wide civil protection role that are members of the Forum. The Forum provides links between the voluntary sector, central government and statutory authorities. The Working Party supports the Forum. The National Voluntary Aid Societies' Emergency Committee

(NVASEC) exists to co-ordinate the auxiliary role of the three Voluntary Aid Societies (VASs): the British Red Cross, St John Ambulance and St Andrew's Ambulance. NVASEC ensures that the VASs develop coherent policies which fit with the overarching framework established by central government. It also allows the VASs to engage in an efficient way with the representative bodies of local responder organisations.

14.29 At the regional level, a representative of the voluntary sector forms part of the core membership of the Regional Resilience Forum (as set out in Chapter 17). The representative will form a bridge between the Voluntary Sector Civil Protection Working Party, NVASEC and the local level.