

Chapter 17

Co-operation at the regional level in England

Summary

- Co-operation at the regional level involves the representatives of Category 1 and 2 responders and central government bodies working together to address larger-scale civil protection issues (paragraphs 17.1–17.5).
- The Regional Resilience Forum (RRF) is the main focus for multi-agency co-operation (paragraphs 17.7–17.9).
- Each RRF will have the same kind of core membership. RRFs will include representatives of local public bodies; the emergency services; the Environment Agency; the voluntary sector; the armed forces; and the regional assembly. Good practice examples of the membership of an RRF are available to help Category 1 and 2 responders (paragraphs 17.23–17.27).
- Organisations will be expected to co-operate both within and outside the RRF. Co-operation outside the RRF can follow various models, including direct or bilateral co-operation and mutual aid (paragraphs 17.28–17.30).
- Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) are not subordinate to the RRF. In turn, the RRF is not subordinate to central government. Information, direction and support should flow freely between them (paragraphs 17.10–17.11).

Co-operation at the regional level

17.1 Co-operation at the regional level in England is a relatively new development in civil protection. The regional tier is not a judgement on the local level; rather, it is a mechanism for improving co-ordination and communication into and out from the centre of government.

17.2 The regional tier is a crucial part of England's civil protection framework, but it was not appropriate for the Act to put it on a statutory footing.

17.3 Co-operation at the regional level involves the representatives of Category 1 and 2 responders and central government bodies working together to address larger-scale civil protection issues. Co-operation may take place within a multi-agency setting or directly between two or more responders. Organisations operating on a fully regional basis (for example regional assemblies) are also expected to be fully involved in this co-operation, depending on regional circumstances.

17.4 The operation of the regional civil protection tier is not, for the most part, dealt with by the Act. Activity at the regional level takes place on a permissive basis. As such, this chapter describes the arrangements which the Government has put in place, but does not oblige Category 1 and 2 responders to carry out activity in the manner described.

Role of the regional tier

17.5 The key function of the regional tier is to improve co-ordination and communication between central government and Category 1 and 2 responders and other organisations not covered by the Act and to ensure that regions are prepared to respond to events which would affect most or all of the region or which could overwhelm any locality. The successful delivery of the regional resilience capability rests critically on Category 1 and 2 responders and other organisations not covered by the Act and central government working together in partnership to ensure an effective and co-ordinated response.

Regional Resilience Teams

17.6 Since April 2003, Regional Resilience Teams (RRTs) have been operational in each of the Government Offices in the nine English regions. These teams, led by a senior official, with support from three or four staff drawing heavily on external civil protection experience, will facilitate much of the new regional activity. They take the lead in managing key relationships with Category 1 and 2 responders, communicating between regional partners, and between the regions and central departments. They also provide improved information-gathering and reporting back to the centre. In particular, the teams will provide secretariat support for the Regional Resilience Forums (see paragraph 17.7 below) and for Regional Civil Contingencies Committees (RCCCs), in the event of regional response arrangements being called upon. The teams will also work with the devolved administrations to ensure strong cross-border arrangements are in place.

The Regional Resilience Forum

17.7 The principal mechanism for multi-agency co-operation at the regional level is the Regional Resilience Forum (RRF). The forum is a process by which the organisations with an interest in regional civil protection issues co-operate with each other. It is not a statutory body as such, nor does it have powers to direct its members.

17.8 The purpose of the RRF process is to ensure effective delivery of those elements of regional civil protection that need to be developed in a multi-agency environment. In particular, the RRF process should deliver:

- compilation of agreed regional risk map;
- consideration of policy initiatives in the area of civil protection that emanate from local and central government and all other relevant sources;
- facilitation of information sharing and co-operation between its members, including for example reports on recent incidents and exercises;
- sharing, wherever appropriate, of lessons learned from emergencies and exercises in other parts of the UK and overseas;
- support for the preparation, by all or some of its members, of multi-agency plans and other documents, including Regional Capability Co-ordination Plans; and

- co-ordination of multi-agency exercises and other training events.

17.9 Model terms of reference are attached at Annex 17A.

The relationship between the RRF and the Local Resilience Forum

17.10 Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) are not subordinate to the RRF. In turn, the RRF is not subordinate to central government. Information, direction and support should flow freely between them. The RRF works alongside other elements of the multi-agency planning framework at the local and central government levels. The RRF will link to its LRFs in several ways:

- **Overlapping membership:** A member of the RRT will sit on each LRF (as set out in Chapter 2). In addition, some members of the LRF will also be members of their RRF. For example, the chief executive of a local authority might chair the relevant LRF, and also be the local authority representative on the RRF.
- **Formal communication:** The chairs of each Resilience Forum will be the lead point of contact for formal communications. As such, there is likely to be a dialogue between the chair of the RRF and his or her LRF counterparts.
- **Informal communication:** As established groups with a recognised membership, there will obviously be informal communication between LRF and RRF members. LRF members may raise issues through their RRF representatives.

17.11 Likewise, the RRF will be linked into central government through similar mechanisms.

Process

17.12 Because of its importance, the RRF should attract a senior level of representation. Because the discussions are strategic, the RRFs should meet relatively infrequently and the meetings should be thoroughly prepared so that the time of senior representatives is used well.

17.13 The aim should be to space these meetings evenly, and to develop a regular cycle. In establishing a regular cycle, forums should have regard to the needs of those members who are likely to be participating in more than one forum. For example,

a major utility company is likely to have demands placed on it by the LRF structure, as well as the RRF.

17.14 It is critically important that the co-operation process is well organised and achieves its aims. The meetings should have a clear agenda and papers should be circulated sufficiently well in advance to allow for proper discussion. A clear record of meetings should be kept, and minutes circulated promptly. Minutes should be copied to all Category 1 and 2 responders in the region.

Leadership

17.15 The task of chairing the meetings will fall to the director of the relevant Government Office or, in his or her absence, the Regional Resilience Director. In London, the chair is currently taken by a Minister.

17.16 The chair should be regarded as the lead point of contact for the information cascaded down from the national level, or up from the local level. Information may also pass to the RRT itself.

17.17 The secretariat support role for the RRF is crucial in ensuring that it performs effectively. This role will also fall to the Government Office, in this case to the RRT. It will include:

- fixing the dates of meetings;
- agreeing the agenda and attendance;
- commissioning any discussion papers and presentations;
- briefing the chair;
- taking the minutes of the meeting;
- following up matters arising and action points;
- disseminating papers before and after the meeting; and
- ensuring that meetings of the various RRF subgroups (see paragraphs 17.19–17.21 below):
 - are effectively organised and recorded;
 - are scheduled to fit with the meeting cycle of the main RRF group; and
 - bring relevant matters to the attention of the strategic group.

17.18 The RRTs will meet a number of service standards in delivering the secretariat function. They should:

- be of a level of seniority or competence to support the chair at meetings of the strategic-level forum;

- have the back-up of an administration team within the Government Office, which can produce and circulate documents quickly; and
- be competent to organise, or to support, officers from other organisations, or their own, administering the work of the subgroups.

Subgroups

17.19 The time constraints on the main RRF and the strategic level of their discussions are likely to necessitate the formation of subgroups. These groups will operate at the middle-management level, with organisations represented by individuals usually employed solely or in part to work in the field of civil protection. On the one hand, they will often take forward action points from the main RRF and discuss specialist civil protection topics in the necessary detail. On the other, they will ‘feed up’ matters for information, decision or endorsement by the strategic group.

17.20 Some of these subgroups will operate under every RRF. They are, for example:

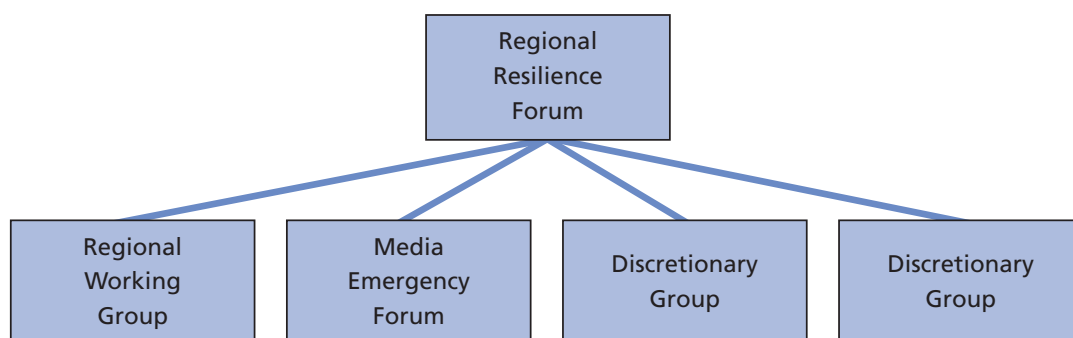
- **The Media Emergency Forum (MEF):** The MEF exists to provide regional media with a forum to engage in civil protection issues. The forum brings together key media representatives. The secretariat to the forum will be provided by the Government News Network.
- **Mass fatalities:** Each RRF will have a subgroup to develop regional plans to deal with mass fatalities and emergency mortuaries.

17.21 Decisions about other subgroups should be made by the RRF. Nevertheless, there are several examples of subgroups that might be useful. It is essential that, in setting up subgroups, RRFs do not

duplicate work that is already being undertaken by LRFs. Subgroups could include:

- **Regional Working Group:** This group would replicate the broad membership of the RRF and discuss in advance and in more detail proposals to be taken to the strategic group for their decision or endorsement. It would provide a process at the ‘working level’ through which multi-agency planning could be delivered. For example, this group would work on regional training and exercise programmes. It could be expected to meet as often as every six weeks.
- **Risk group:** This group would lead the work to develop the multi-agency regional risk assessment, based on the national risk assessment (and distinct from the Community Risk Register).
- **Capabilities groups:** These groups would lead the work to develop generic capabilities within the overall generic planning framework. For example, groups might be created to deal with site clearance, or mass decontamination.
- **Local responder groups by sector:** These groups would bring together all the organisations of a particular type within an RRF area. Examples might include a local authorities group, an NHS group, a utilities or transport group or a voluntary sector group.
- **Specialist groups:** These groups would bring together organisations with an interest in a particular aspect of civil protection. Examples might include exercises, events, welfare support for victims, media relations or CBRN.
- **Project groups:** These groups would be formed on an ad hoc, temporary basis to bring together Category 1 and 2 responders and other organisations not covered by the Act to develop a multi-agency approach to a particular short-term priority. Examples might include a particular multi-

Figure 17.1: The framework for regional planning



agency exercise, a specific large public event, or an urgent and unforeseen new planning requirement, such as a new terrorist threat.

17.22 Figure 17.1 sets out what the regional planning framework might look like.

Membership of the RRF

17.23 The membership of the RRF has an important influence on its operation. The most crucial aspect of this is the way in which individual Category 1 and 2 responders are represented. The optimum number for attendance at the main RRF meeting is likely to be around 20. Larger numbers will make the meetings inefficient.

17.24 A fuller explanation of the role which individual classes of Category 1 and 2 responders have to play is set out in Chapter 2 of this guidance. On the basis of their respective roles, a core membership of the RRF has been established:

- **Local public bodies**
 - Local authorities: A single representative (or a small number of representatives) will represent all local authorities within the region. The representation is likely to be at chief executive level. It will be for local authorities within the region to agree with the Government Office optimum representation at the forum.
 - Police forces: A single representative will represent all police forces within the region. Nomination will be overseen by the Association of Chief Police Officers. The nominee is likely to be at Chief Constable level. In most RRFs, the nominated local force lead will represent the British Transport Police and other specialist police forces. The exceptions to this are likely to be those meetings where particular consideration is given to relevant risk assessments and plans.
 - Fire authorities: A single representative will represent all fire and rescue authorities within the region. Nomination will be overseen by the Chief Fire Officers' Association. The nominee is likely to be at Chief Fire Officer level.
 - Health organisations: The health representation will vary depending upon the regional context and the views of the health community in the region. RRFs can draw upon Regional Directors of Public Health, the Health Protection Agency and

Strategic Health Authorities to cover health interests. Ambulance services will have their own representative at the forum. Nomination will be overseen by the Ambulance Service Association.

- **National public bodies**

- The Environment Agency: The Environment Agency will be represented by the Regional Director and will provide advice and information on all aspects of the environment for which the Agency has a statutory responsibility.
- The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA): The MCA takes part in the RRF process only in those regions where it operates. In those areas, the MCA is directly represented by the relevant Regional Operations Manager.
- The armed forces: As with the local level, the armed forces do not play a permanent role in regional civil protection. Nevertheless, they will be represented at the RRF to ensure that military aid arrangements and planning dovetail with civil planning, particularly in relation to larger-scale incidents. The armed forces will be represented by an appointed representative of the Regional Brigade Commander.
- The Government News Network: GNN will be represented by the relevant Regional Director.

- **Voluntary sector**

The voluntary sector within any region will be large and diverse, and most co-operation will be at the local level with Category 1 and 2 responders. Nevertheless, there are a number of prominent voluntary sector bodies which have an interest in regional-level planning, particularly for larger-scale emergencies. These voluntary sector bodies are all members of the Voluntary Sector Civil Protection Forum (VSCPF). The Working Party of this forum will assist regional forums to identify a lead voluntary sector representative for the RRF.

17.25 In addition, a representative of the regional assembly will also form part of the core membership.

17.26 Over and above the core membership, RRFs may also include additional members to reflect particular regional circumstances. These additional members may take part as full members

Box 17.1: RRF membership – an example

Chaired by:

- Regional Director, Government Office

Core members:

- Chief Executive, local authority
- Chief Constable, local police force
- Chief Fire Officer, local Fire and Rescue Service
- Regional Director of Public Health
- Regional Director, Environment Agency
- Regional Operations Manager, MCA
- Appointed representative of the Regional Brigade Commander
- VSCPF voluntary sector representative
- Government News Network
- Representative of Regional Assembly

Additional members:

- Utilities
- Transport operators

Secretariat:

- Regional Resilience Team, Government Office

or as observers. A (non-exhaustive) list of examples includes:

- more representatives from a particular class of organisation. For example, a region with a diverse local authority arrangement might choose further local authorities to attend;
- representatives of other RRTs, in order to foster effective inter-regional links;
- representatives of high-risk sectors with particular prominence in the region, such as the nuclear or chemical industries;
- representatives of central government departments, including the Civil Contingencies Secretariat;
- representatives of the Highways Agency or the Health and Safety Executive; and
- representatives of utility companies or transport companies.

17.27 The membership and terms of reference of each RRF should be available on the relevant Government Office website. This will help to ensure that all Category 1 and 2 responders within a region understand the route by which they can raise issues directly with the forum through their representative. Each representative is responsible for ensuring that

the full range of views within their sector is properly presented to the forum and that information from the forum is effectively cascaded across the region. In deciding upon representation, forum members will want to consider the benefits of having representatives from each LRF in the region.

Co-operation outside the RRF

Direct and bilateral co-operation

17.28 Co-operation will also be expected between Category 1 and 2 responders outside the framework of the RRF.

17.29 The regional tier may also facilitate co-operation on issues which cross LRF boundaries. For example, they might bring together coastal LRFs to discuss coastal flooding or pollution. This work will be led by the RRT, in response to requests by LRFs or the RRF, or as a result of a need identified by the team itself.

Inter-regional co-operation

17.30 Where appropriate, the RRTs will facilitate co-operation across regional borders and with the devolved administrations.

Mutual aid

17.31 The regional tier may also have a role to play in brokering mutual aid agreements. Local areas have a well-established framework for developing mutual aid agreements, but there are some circumstances in which the regional tier may add value:

- **Brokerage:** The regional tier may need to be built into mutual aid plans. In the event of activation of mutual aid agreements, it may not be possible to achieve what was previously agreed because of the nature of an emergency. The regional tier may have a role to play in brokering between Category 1 and 2 responders and other organisations not covered by the Act and helping to establish where the greatest need lies. For example, a local authority might have arrangements with two neighbouring authorities. The regional tier could help that authority prioritise its assistance, helping it to direct resources towards the areas of greatest need.
- **Consistency and achievability:** With an overview of activity at the local level, the regional tier will be able to spot inconsistencies in terms of mutual aid. For example, some parts of a region may have decided to instigate mutual aid arrangements, but not others. The regional tier can pursue this to ensure that the decision is a conscious one rather than an oversight. Equally, they may be able to identify over-commitment, where local areas have entered into arrangements which are not manageable. For example, local authorities along a river might commit to provide each other with sandbags, and yet all might be affected by the same flooding incident.
- **Arbitration:** In some circumstances, mutual aid arrangements might be desired by one Category 1 or 2 responder but not others, or the terms of the agreement might prove difficult to agree. The regional tier can offer arbitration in such circumstances, not by directing any responder but rather by offering advice about other examples or hosting negotiations.

Liaison with national-level organisations

17.32 In some circumstances it might be more efficient for national-level organisations (eg utilities, transport operators, etc) to share information at a regional level, which would avoid duplication of work. However, sharing information at a regional level cannot substitute for good working relationships between such organisations and LRFs.