

5. THE RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS

National Risk Assessment

- 5.1. Since 2005, the Government has carried out a classified assessment of the risks facing the UK: this is the National Risk Assessment (NRA), and it is the basis for the public National Risk Register.
- 5.2. The NRA process uses historical and scientific data and the professional judgements of experts to analyse the risks to the UK. There are three stages to this analysis: identification of risks; assessment of the likelihood of the risks occurring and their impact if they do; and comparison of the risks.

Regional and Local Risk Assessment

- 5.3. The risks we face depend upon where we live and work. For example, risks such as coastal flooding will be limited to specific parts of the country while the likelihood and impact of major industrial accidents will depend upon the type of industry in an area. In England and Wales, Government Offices for the Regions, through their Regional Resilience Teams, produce annually a classified regional risk assessment. Similarly, Category 1 responders²² at the local level in England and Wales are required to carry out a risk assessment under the Civil Contingencies

Act 2004. Both these regional and local risks assessments are informed by the national-level view of risks but produce a specific risk assessment that reflects, as far as possible, the unique characteristics of each region and local area. It is worth noting that there is a two way flow of information: local and regional risk assessments are reviewed and feed back into the National Risk Assessment.

Community Risk Registers

- 5.4. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 also requires emergency responders in England and Wales to co-operate in maintaining a public Community Risk Register. These are approved and published by Local Resilience Forums which include representatives from local emergency responders as well as public, private and voluntary organisations. You should familiarise yourself with both this National Risk Register, which outlines broadly the risks faced by the UK as a whole, and your local Community Risk Register (which can be accessed via www.direct.gov.uk), which will capture how these risks relate to your local area.

What about events outside the UK?

- 5.5. The National Risk Assessment, and therefore the National Risk Register, only look at risks of emergencies in the UK, not throughout the world. Many of the risks

²² Category 1 responders are listed in the Civil Contingencies Act; they are the main organisations involved in most emergencies at the local level, for example, the emergency services.

outlined in this document, such as those arising from terrorism and major human or animal disease outbreaks, may have origins outside the UK. As the National Security Strategy Update 2009 makes clear, working on a multilateral basis is one of the principles underlying the UK's approach to security challenges overseas. The UK works with international partners and institutions – for example UN agencies like the World Health Organisation, EU members, the G8 and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – to mitigate the risks and to share best practice on how to respond. Further details of international cooperation in these areas can be found in the National Security Strategy Update 2009, or on the websites of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other relevant government departments.

Identifying risks

5.6. The first stage in the National Risk Assessment process is to identify the risks. This is done by consulting a wide range of experts across government, so as to ensure a comprehensive picture of the potential accidents, natural events (hazards) and malicious attacks (threats) that could cause significant harm and disruption to the UK.

Assessing risks

5.7. The next stage is to assess the likelihood and impact of each risk. To assess the likelihood of hazards, historical, statistical and scientific data are used. Where possible, the assessment looks forward to take account of known or probable

developments over the next five years that would affect the likelihood.

- 5.8. The likelihood of terrorist or other malicious attacks is assessed more subjectively. The willingness of individuals or groups to carry out attacks is balanced against an objective assessment of their capacity – now and, as far as possible, over the next five years – and the vulnerability of their intended targets.
- 5.9. In each case, the question being asked is: how likely is it that this type of emergency will happen, somewhere in the country, sometime over the next five years? The NRA does not calculate the chances of these events happening in one particular place, or to one particular community or individual.
- 5.10. In terms of impact, the National Risk Assessment takes account of the following effects:
- **The number of fatalities** that are directly attributable to the emergency
 - **Human illness or injury** over a period following the onset of an emergency
 - **Social disruption** – the disruption to people's daily lives. Ten different types of disruption are taken into account, from an inability to gain access to healthcare or schools to interruptions in supplies of essential services like electricity or water and to the need for evacuation of individuals from an area.
 - **Economic damage** – the effect on the economy overall, rather than the cost of repairs.

5.11. In addition, the National Risk Assessment (but not, at present, Community Risk Registers) also attempts to estimate the psychological impact emergencies may have. This includes widespread changes to patterns of behaviour or anxiety, loss of confidence or outrage that may be felt by communities throughout the country as a result of an emergency.

Comparison of the risks

5.12. In planning for emergencies, local responders have to decide what types of risk, and what levels of consequence, to plan for. Putting a great deal of effort into preparing for risks that are either very unlikely to happen or are likely to cause relatively minor damage is unlikely to be the best use of the time and resources available to prepare. Priority is instead given to high risks: risks that are both relatively likely and could have a serious impact.

5.13. Apart from identifying the highest risks, the Government also provides guidance in the form of planning assumptions, at a national level and to the Devolved Administrations and LRFs, on the range and type of damage and disruption that might result from a selection of the higher risks. This ensures that planning is mostly non-specific and can be adapted to different scenarios when necessary.

5.14. Different types of planning assumptions are needed by different groups:

- Emergency responders, and regional and local government planning for and carrying out their duties in an emergency. Planning assumptions are issued to provide

information, for example on the numbers of casualties that might need treating, or how many people might need to be evacuated or found shelter. These are on a restricted distribution because some of the information they contain is classified for national security reasons.

- Government departments and agencies and the Devolved Administrations who lead on improving the resilience of the country to particular types of emergency. They receive classified planning assumptions designed to provide the basis for assessing whether existing plans, infrastructure, equipment, supplies and training are adequate; and, if not, for introducing capability enhancements in the areas for which they have national responsibility.
- Chapters 3 and 4 of this document now provide similar information for organisations, individuals, families and communities on an unclassified basis.

5.15. At the national level the planning assumptions are used to set the parameters for the UK Resilience Capabilities Programme which co-ordinates planning and capability building for resilience across the UK (more information on this programme can be found on the UK Resilience website²³).

²³ www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience.aspx

What the National Risk Assessment does not cover

5.16. The National Risk Assessment and hence the National Risk Register do not cover:

- Longer term or broader global risks – like climate change or competition for energy – that might affect the safety and security of citizens of the UK in the period beyond the five years of the National Risk Assessment. These are the subject of separate programmes of work.
- Risks of major emergencies occurring overseas unless they have impacts that directly and seriously damage human welfare or the environment in the UK, in accordance with the definition of emergency in the Civil Contingencies Act²⁴.
- Everyday occurrences – like street crime – that can cause extended misery and damage over a long period of time, but are not emergencies that require central government to be directly involved in the response.

Risk assessment in other countries

5.17. An increasing number of countries are undertaking national risk assessments of various types, but as yet few, if any, are as well established and wide in scope as the UK approach.

5.18. The UK will continue to work with other countries and organisations to share expertise and learn from others' experiences in developing risk assessments.

²⁴ www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/132428/15mayshortguide.pdf