

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 The National Risk Register sets out *'our assessment of the likelihood and potential impact of a range of different risks that may directly affect the UK'* as promised in the National Security Strategy,¹ published earlier this year. The publication of information on these risks, previously held confidentially within government, is intended to encourage public debate on security and help organisations, individuals, families and communities, who want to do so, to prepare for emergencies.

1.2 The Register provides an assessment of the most significant emergencies which the United Kingdom and its citizens could face over the next five years summarised into three categories: accidents, natural events (collectively known as hazards) and malicious attacks (known as threats).

1.3 Much of the information in risk registers is unsurprising, but emergency planners have found them useful because:

- they bring together a great deal of information about potential risks that is relevant and consistent;
- the different risks can be compared on a broadly like for like basis; and
- in an age when there appear to be so many possible kinds of emergency, they help in making decisions about which to plan for and what their consequences are likely to be.

What is the National Risk Register?

1.4 The National Risk Register is intended to capture the range of emergencies that might have a major impact on all, or significant parts of, the UK. It provides a national picture of the risks we face, and is designed to complement Community Risk Registers, already produced and published locally by emergency planners. The driver for this work is the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, which also defines what we mean by emergencies, and what responsibilities are placed on emergency responders in order to prepare for them. Further information about the Act can be found on the UK Resilience website².

1.5 Community Risk Registers (CRRs) currently consider the likelihood and potential impact of a range of hazards occurring in specific areas of England and Wales³. They are approved and published by Local Resilience Forums⁴ (LRFs) which have been established under the Civil Contingencies Act. They include representatives from local emergency services, and public, private and voluntary organisations. In order to produce the Community Risk Registers, LRFs use a combination of their own judgement about each risk, as well as guidance provided by central government drawn from the National Risk Assessment (NRA). Information on equivalent processes in Scotland and Northern Ireland can be found at the links in the Further Information section at the end of this chapter.

¹ www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/reports/national_security_strategy.aspx

² www.ukresilience.gov.uk/preparedness/ccact.aspx

³ Examples can be found via www.preparingforemergencies.gov.uk

⁴ www.ukresilience.gov.uk/preparedness/ukgovernment/lrfs.aspx

1.6 The National Risk Assessment (NRA) is a classified cross-government document which incorporates expertise from a wide range of departments and agencies. It assesses the impact and likelihood of the major risks, both hazards and threats, that the country could face over a five year period, enabling prioritisation of the UK's planning for emergencies. Chapter Five of this document outlines this process in more detail. The National Risk Register is based on the NRA and this is the first time this information has been made public in this way.

1.7 As with the NRA, the National Risk Register only includes risks which are of sufficient severity that they would require central government to be involved in the response.⁵ It also includes information on what the Government and emergency services are doing to prepare for these emergencies across the country. In addition, it provides guidance on some measures of preparedness that organisations, individuals, families and communities might consider taking to prepare for national level emergencies.

1.8 Understanding the risks and determining their relative significance in terms of potential impact is the starting point for emergency planning. The key to turning this into useful planning information is remembering that it is not the risks themselves that people have to deal with when things go wrong, but their consequences. In an increasingly complex and interdependent society, emergencies can have increasingly complex knock-on effects. The Register identifies both direct and indirect consequences, many of which are common to several risks, and provides information on how to prepare for them.

The Nature of the Risks

1.9 True catastrophes, on the scale of the recent earthquake in China, are thankfully rare in the UK. Over the past few years, however, we have seen various emergencies of one sort or another that may not be of that magnitude but still have a significant impact on our ability to go about our daily lives. In setting out the risks – their likelihood and their impact – this Register is not predicting that any particular type of emergency will materialise or that, if it were to do so, it would happen on a specific scale. Events have a habit of confounding predictions; and prudent emergency planning is based on consideration of a wide range of risks rather than on a forecast that any particular risk will occur.

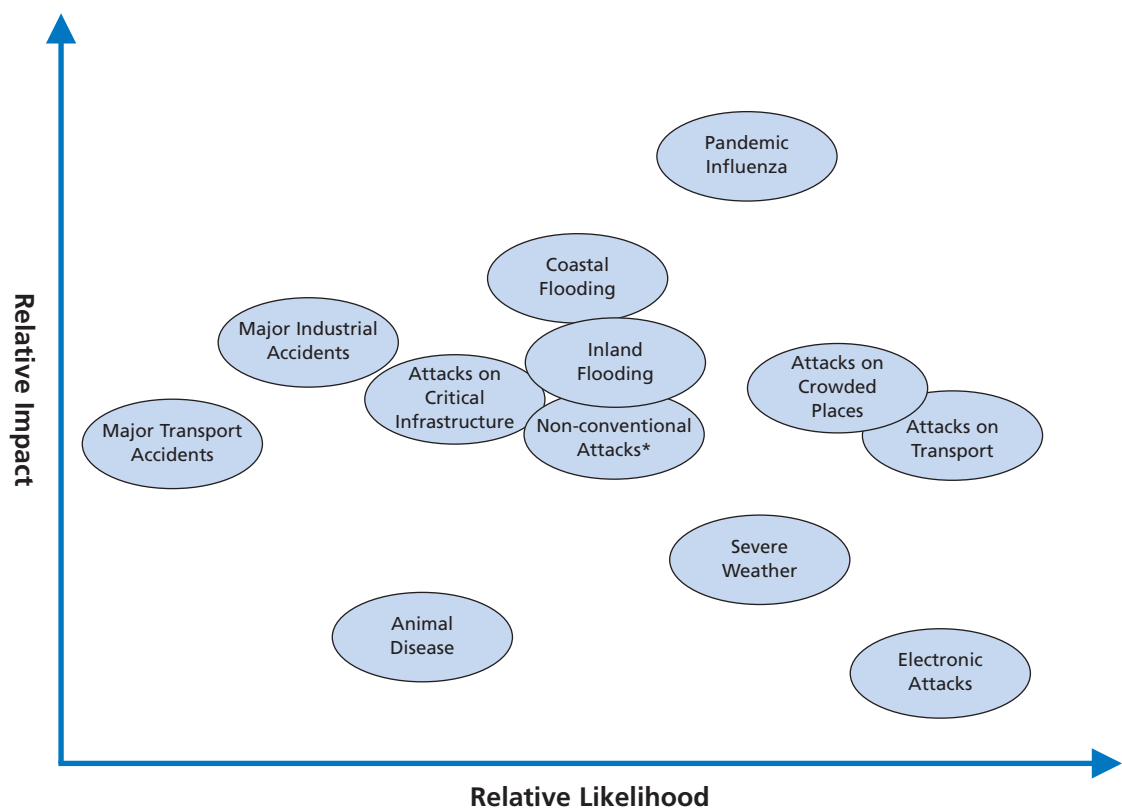
Visualisation of the Risk Register

1.10 Figure 1 gives an indication of the relative likelihood and impact of the high consequence risks that are outlined in the National Risk Register. Due to the nature of the risks contained within each grouping, it is not possible to represent an exact comparison but only to give an idea of the position of each group of risks relative to the others, in terms of likelihood and impact.

1.11 It is also important to highlight that the risks shown in Figure 1 and detailed in Chapter Two are not the full range of possible risks to the UK, from the insignificant to the catastrophic. They are those risks that are deemed significant enough for inclusion due to their likelihood or impact or both.

⁵ Further information on central government response to emergencies can be found at www.ukresilience.gov.uk/response/ukgovernment

Figure 1: An illustration of the high consequence risks facing the United Kingdom



* The use of some chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials has the potential to have very serious and widespread consequences. An example would be the use of a nuclear device. There is no historical precedent for this type of terrorist attack which is excluded from the non-conventional grouping on the diagram.

1.12 The National Risk Register illustrates the kinds of contingency which primarily drive planning by government and the emergency services and for which organisations, individuals, families and communities can reasonably plan if they want to do so. The selection excludes some risks that are classified for reasons of national security and specific illustrative examples of risks where there are cases outstanding in the courts which may be prejudiced.

1.13 The UK has been described as one of the pioneers in coordinated risk management for emergencies, because of the systematic way in which we assess the risks and use these assessments to help planning.

1.14 The assessments:

- are relative – they aim to compare the likelihood and impact of events with each other;
- only look at risks of emergencies in the UK, not throughout the world;
- look at the risks to the country as a whole, and so do not take into account local conditions which may be different to the national picture;
- look at major emergencies – not at everyday occurrences that do not qualify as emergencies under the Civil Contingencies Act.

1.15 Many of the risks outlined in this document, such as those arising from terrorism and major human or animal disease outbreaks, may have origins outside the UK. 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 (OECD) – 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, or on the websites of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other relevant government departments.

How to use the Register

1.16 The Government does not expect individuals or communities to tackle any of the risks described in the Register on their own. In all cases, the Government is working to reduce the risks to the UK from civil emergencies, ranging from a flu pandemic and serious flooding, to international terrorism.

It also aims to provide an effective response where emergencies cannot be prevented from happening.

1.17 The National Risk Register is for those who may want to improve their own preparedness:

- Chapter Two provides a summarised assessment of the groups of risks, based on those contained within the National Risk Assessment. For local assessments of how far these and other risks apply in your area, consult your Community Risk Register or equivalent Devolved Administration website.
- Each risk grouping includes a section on further information sources for anyone who wants to find out more about a particular risk and what you can do to prepare for it.
- For organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors interested in business continuity planning, read Chapter Three. This sets out business continuity planning considerations which are designed to complement business continuity planning under the new British Standard (BS 25999) – choose the ones that suit your circumstances and consult the BS 25999 website⁶.
- For members of the public interested in individual, family or community based emergency preparedness, Chapter Four sets out some suggestions as a starting point – choose the ones that suit your circumstances.
- If you want to find out how the Government carries out risk assessment, and how the National Risk Assessment is created, read Chapter Five.

⁶ www.bsigroup.co.uk/bs25999

- Finally, the Register is a first attempt to inform the public more fully of the types of risks that we face. Use the feedback form on the Cabinet Office website to tell us what you did not and did find useful. We will consider your comments when we update the National Risk Register.

Further Information:

For civil protection practitioners

www.ukresilience.gov.uk

Links to Community Risk Registers

www.preparingforemergencies.gov.uk

National Security Strategy

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/reports/national_security_strategy

Information on the Civil Contingencies Act

www.ukresilience.gov.uk/preparedness/ccact

World Economic Forum Global Risk Report

www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/globalrisk/index.htm

Scottish Executive

www.scotland.gov.uk

Welsh Assembly Government

www.wales.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Executive

www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/emergencies