Defra has contingency plans in place to address disruptive events which impact on the Department’s responsibilities, such as animal diseases, water supplies and flooding.
Preparing for emergencies

This chapter of the report looks at the steps Defra takes to prepare for emergencies.

Contingency Planning in Defra

Contingency Planning covers two main areas:

- emergency planning to address disruptive events which impact on the Department’s policy responsibilities, such as animal diseases, water supplies and flooding; and
- business continuity planning to ensure that the Department would be able to carry out its essential business activities in the face of serious disruption to its staff or infrastructure, such as an influenza pandemic, fire or IT failure.

Contingency Planning in Defra is championed by the Minister of State (Climate Change and the Environment) and overseen by a Contingency Planning Board which is chaired by the Director General (Chief Operating Officer). Chapter 9 of Defra’s Five Year Strategy commits the Department to reviewing and testing its emergency planning arrangements by 31 March 2007 and a programme of work is in place to address this.

The main areas of Defra’s responsibilities for emergencies are identified in the Cabinet Office’s Capabilities Programme. In all cases the emergency plans have been reviewed recently and have either been tested in real emergencies or exercises, or have exercises planned. Work on business continuity and disaster recovery planning has continued over the past year. Nearly all areas of the core Department are covered by business continuity plans which have been compiled in a common format. Exercises have been carried out to test some of the plans and more are planned. The Management Board takes part in an annual business continuity and disaster recovery exercise.

Flooding from rivers or the sea

Defra is the lead policy Department for flood risk management (see Chapter 3) and the lead Department for flooding emergencies, holding the Lead Department Plan. This provides for communications and co-ordination of the central Government response to flooding from rivers and the sea, in conjunction with the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) of the Cabinet Office and the Government Offices of the Regions, which act as central Government’s representatives on the ground.

In 2005 a new Flood Emergencies Capabilities Programme (FECP) was set up within the overall CCS Capabilities Programme. The aim of the FECP is to steer work on improving preparedness, response and resilience at all levels of government to tackle flooding from

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179 See the UK Resilience website: www.ukresilience.info/index.shtm
various sources such as pluvial or groundwater as well as rivers or the sea. During the period of this Report, there have been extreme floods in June 2005, in the North York Moors. Extensive damage occurred and the emergency service response quickly mobilised.

**Water supply incidents**

Defra is the lead Department for water incidents and emergencies which have the potential to affect large numbers of people or will last for more than a day. Such incidents are rare. The Department works closely with emergency planning teams in the water companies and elsewhere. During 2005-06, Defra:

- responded to several emergencies including a major water incident in Hexham;
- revised its water emergency response plan; and
- organised and participated in emergency exercises.

**Looking forward to 2006-07**

During 2006-07 Defra will continue to work with the water industry on water security issues and take part in exercises to test and refine emergency plans.

**Food supply**

The Food Chain Emergency Liaison Group, set up by the Department to help improve emergency preparedness in the face of major disruptions to food supplies, met five times during 2005-06. With the help of this group, the Department has continued, for example, to encourage industry to carry out vulnerability assessments of its sites, logistical and supply arrangements and to take steps to improve resilience where necessary. The Department has also helped to make targeted specialist advice available in key areas of the food chain. In addition, Defra has encouraged industry to draw up emergency plans to ensure its preparedness to overcome problems when resilience measures fail.

**Exotic animal disease preparedness**

2006 marks the five year anniversary of the foot-and-mouth (FMD) disease outbreak in the UK, and in light of the evolving global situation and heightened interest of the risk of Avian Influenza, Defra continues to develop policies and operational readiness necessary for controlling and managing an outbreak of exotic animal disease. This work includes:

- putting in place disease control legislation and disease control policies for FMD, Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), rabies and other exotic diseases;
- putting in place the scientific modelling and evidence base to assess risk and support disease control policies;
- the development of a national contingency plan for the main exotic diseases which summarises the policies and the structures that would be introduced, and provides the framework for the national and local operational and veterinary instructions;

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180 www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/fmd/default.htm
181 www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/notifiable/disease/ai/index.htm
Preparing for emergencies

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• the strengthening of links at national and local levels with a wide range of stakeholders and operational partners including other government departments particularly in relation to the human health impact of avian influenza; and

• contingency planning exercises at local and national levels, including operational partners and stakeholders.

On the international stage the UK Presidency played a leading role in supporting the Commission on focussing global effort on preparedness for a human influenza pandemic and controlling avian influenza outbreaks. Defra encouraged its international partners to focus on combating avian influenza at source and to use existing key multilateral organisations which lead on this issue (including the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE), World Health Organisation, World Bank, and UN Food and Agriculture Office). Within the EU Defra also developed a Presidency plan to focus on preparedness for human pandemic and avian influenza, and ensure that EU competent authorities for both human and animal health have a clear steer should the risk materialise.

Plant health – maintaining freedom from plant disease

This programme aims to prevent or control serious plant pest and disease outbreaks which threaten agriculture, horticulture and the environment. It also supports trade through certification services.

Work is underpinned by a research programme (worth £800,000) focussed on the development of pest risk assessments and techniques to detect, identify and eradicate pests.

Highlights for 2005-06 included the publication of Defra’s Plant Health Strategy for England and the introduction of an enhanced EU checking regime for imports. Action also continued against ongoing disease threats, notably Phytophthora ramorum, a pathogen responsible for the death of oak trees in California and a related new pathogen, Phytophthora kernoviae.

UK Presidency highlights included production of a Council EU Impact Assessment (in the absence of a Commission Assessment) for a proposal on Potato Cyst Nematodes that helped to embed Better Regulation in the phytosanitary sector. Progress was also made on initiatives to increase EU scientific capacity and co-operation.

A priority for 2006-07 will be establishing new working arrangements in the light of decisions on the future organisation of the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate following the Hampton Review recommendations on policy and delivery.

Management of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents

Defra is the lead department for co-ordinating the consequence management of Chemical, Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) incidents – events involving the deliberate or accidental release of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear material.

183 www.defra.gov.uk/planth/strategy.htm
During 2005-06, the Department:

- established the Government Decontamination Service on 1 October 2005, more details of which can be found in Chapter 5;

- continued to develop CBRN policy by actively engaging in several cross-Government activities under the Home Office CBRN Programme;

- produced a Defra CBRN Contingency Plan for co-ordinating the Departmental response to a CBRN incident which was tested in exercises and lessons learned incorporated;

- strengthened internal arrangements for sharing information and co-ordination of CBRN policy by expanding membership of the cross-Defra CBRN Network and Defra CBRN Planning Board to ensure all key areas were included;

- produced a Defra CBRN Training and Exercise Strategy to train key Defra personnel;

- participated in cross-Government CBRN exercises such as Exercise Atlantic Blue, where over 70 Defra staff took part;

- continued to develop handbooks to assist with recovery from a CBRN incident; and

- continued to fund and actively contribute to CBRN research programmes.

**Looking forward to 2006-07**

During 2006-07, the Department will articulate and document its Lead Government Department role for co-ordinating CBRN consequence management which will involve agreeing roles and responsibilities with all key departments and agencies.

The Department will continue its work to enhance the resilience to a CBRN incident by actively participating in the Home Office CBRN Programme and the wider Cabinet Office Capabilities Programme. Whilst contributing to several work streams, the Department will take forward work on reviewing environmental sampling, co-ordinating input from several external organisations, and highlighting gaps in capability.

**Nuclear emergency planning and Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network (RIMNET)**

Defra is the lead department for co-ordinating the Government response to a nuclear accident overseas. Defra also supports other lead departments in their response to a nuclear incident or accident at a UK civil or military site or one involving radioactive materials in transit. RIMNET was created following the Chernobyl accident in 1986.
During 2005-06, the main achievements were:

- arrangements which ensure that Defra is able to act effectively and efficiently in the event of a nuclear accident or incident were tested on several occasions, mostly under exercise conditions but also for real, non-radioactive events such as the fire at Buncefield oil storage depot;

- Business Continuity Planning to ensure RIMNET availability and resilience was further developed and tested. The RIMNET system has a backup facility available at the Metrological Office, Exeter should the London facility be compromised or physically inaccessible. The RIMNET Team decanted to Exeter to test arrangements for working from a remote location;

- RIMNET 3 system became operational on 19 January 2005 and has remained in service throughout the year and there has been a programme of training to ensure that colleagues in the nuclear emergency response community are familiar with the new system;

- an in-house policy review team undertook a formal review of the extent to which the functions of the RIMNET team needed to be undertaken in Defra or central Government and whether those functions needed to be undertaken at any particular location. The report was completed during December 2005 and recommendations are being considered; and

- International nuclear emergency preparedness arrangements continue to feature heavily in the RIMNET calendar. There were numerous routine communications tests between the UK, European Commission and International Atomic Energy Agency. In May 2006 a workshop will be held in Paris, hosted by the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) at which Member States are required to discuss their nuclear emergency response arrangements. In preparation for that, Member States were advised to test their procedures for responding to specific issues at a table top exercise. Planning for such an exercise, to be held in April 2006, is now at an advanced stage.

**Looking forward to 2006-07**

During 2006-07, the Department will continue its work to enhance the UK’s nuclear incident and accident response arrangements by actively participating in exercises at the local and national level. With the exception of the NEA-led exercise in April 2006, all other exercises are determined by bodies outside the Department. Further training in the use of the RIMNET system is already scheduled. The RIMNET Business Continuity Plan will be further developed to ensure maximum resilience. Meetings of the Radioactive Incident Monitoring Coordinating Committee (RIMCC) will continue periodically throughout the year to ensure stakeholder awareness and involvement in the in-house policy consultancy review process.