

Order out of chaos? A critical review of the role of central, regional, and local Government in emergency planning in London

“Ministers have admitted that the chaos over the fuel crisis, flooding, foot-and-mouth and then the panic over September 11 have shown the United Kingdom’s ability to respond to national emergencies is haphazard.”
(Hall and Palmer, Sunday Express, 17 March 2002)

By Sarah Norman and Eve Coles

The events in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, (9/11) apparently represented a fundamental shift in opinion towards emergency management, presenting a unique opportunity to promote change in England and Wales through heightened awareness of the need for emergency planning. The awareness afforded by 9/11 and the proposed changes in legislation recommended by the most recent review of emergency planning in the United Kingdom (U.K.) presented a unique opportunity for government to put its ‘emergency planning house’ in order. The review, initiated after the flooding and fuel crises of 2000 and given further impetus by the foot-and-mouth crisis, stated that: “The need for effective partnership working across organisational boundaries is a major requirement for emergency planning in the future” (Cabinet Office 2001, p. 8). As the last of a number of reviews over the past eleven years, this review seemed to offer the opportunity of a bright future for emergency planning by providing comprehensive legislation, the restructuring of emergency planning, and the hope of increasing public awareness of the role of emergency managers. Unfortunately, it is our contention that much of the impetus generated by events of the past two years has slowly disappeared as the recommendations of the review have been buried in the bureaucracy of the civil service administration known in the U.K. as ‘Whitehall.’

A distinct lack of research from a British perspective is evident, and yet the organisation of emergency planning in the U.K. is a crucial issue. As yet another review is relegated to the ‘slow waltz’ of Whitehall, the question must be asked whether the role and importance of issues such as legislation, structure, communication, and coordination will continue to be shrouded in secrecy, hampered by the continued mismatch of policies that successive governments have introduced and low public interest, all of which is demonstrated by the last fifty years of the British civil defence system.

This paper will focus on the recent development of emergency planning in the U.K., the current situation following the latest review, and how the structures that exist between the Greater London Boroughs and Central Government have reacted in responding to an event of equal magnitude to 9/11.

It must also be noted at this stage that disasters are complex events, and the definitional debate that surrounds them is equally complex (see, for example, Quarantelli 1998). In the U.K., such events are more commonly referred to by emergency services and response organisations as a ‘major incident’ (Home Office 1997, p. 1). Similarly, the term ‘emergency management’ (Lindell and Perry 1992, p. 2) is not one in regular use in the U.K. More commonly the term ‘Emergency Planning’ is used for this varied and responsibility-laden job, which in our opinion does not always reflect the responsibilities and scope of this ‘profession.’

Another point of clarification needed here is the perceived difference (in the U.K.) between civil defence and peacetime emergency planning. Civil defence is the protection of the civil population in the event of a hostile attack by a foreign power. Peacetime emergency planning is seen as planning for the response to a major accident or emergency that may occur as a result of explosion, train crash, building collapse, or the like. In the U.K., planning for civil defence at the local level is compulsory and has been governed by an act of Parliament since 1948. Yet despite the plethora of disasters since the 1980s, peacetime emergency planning is not yet compulsory, although a new act of Parliament is currently being drawn up.

Emergency planning in the U.K. is carried out at the local government level; there is no government agency that undertakes such activities. Thus, in order to understand how it works it is necessary to understand firstly the structure of local government in England and Wales and secondly the development of the legislation controlling emergency planning.

The structure of local Government in England and Wales

The U.K. is comprised of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. For the purposes of this paper and because Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own devolved assemblies with legislative powers, only arrangements related to England and Wales will be discussed. To further narrow the focus and to help demonstrate the complexity of emergency planning arrangements in England and Wales, London will be highlighted. Also, it is vital to understand here that, unlike the United States, Canada, and Australia that have a federal system of government the U.K. has a unitary system. This means that central government determines all policies and decisions. These are then implemented in acts of Parliament or regulations in turn determining (in emergency planning, for instance) what a local government can and cannot do. Furthermore, the setup of U.K. local government is extremely confusing. This is the result of a complete reorganisation in 1973 and further partial reorganisations in 1986 and the 1990s which have left a very complex situation. In the major urban areas—London, West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, and Tyne and Wear—there is a single tier of councils responsible for all the services. These are called London Borough Councils in London and Metropolitan District Councils in the other areas. Moreover, in order to avoid total chaos in these areas and to fall in line with already existing regional services, functions such as fire, police, and public transport are exercised through joint

boards to which all the local authorities in an area appointed members.

In the 1990s the Conservative government's view was that the two-tier model of service provision provided by the more rural county councils and district councils was inefficient and confusing and that county councils were too remote from those they served. Therefore, it was suggested that county councils should be abolished and their functions transferred to district councils, with some of the smaller districts being merged.

In Scotland and Wales this is exactly what was done. In England there was a process of local consultation which led to the single-tier model being supported, and implemented, in some places and rejected in rather more. Where single-tier councils have been implemented, they are called Unitary Authorities.

At the conclusion of this reorganisation the total count of Principal Authorities in England and Wales is: County Councils 34, District Councils 238, London Boroughs 32, Corporation of London 1, Isles of Scilly Council 1, Metropolitan Districts 36, English Unitary Authorities 46, and Welsh Unitary Authorities 22.

Legislative framework

Secondly, understanding the legislation is important because it will help clarify the situation that exists not only in London but also throughout the U.K. At present there are a number of different acts of Parliament and regulations that govern the way local authorities plan for civil defence and emergencies/disaster. Again it is worth emphasising here that the only compulsion on local authorities to plan is for civil defence; hence the basis for the legislation is a civil defence Act.

The legislative framework that underpins emergency planning in England and Wales is a patchwork of acts that began with the Civil Defence Act (1948) and has developed through a series of ad hoc measures introduced over the last fifty years. However, the 1920 Emergency Powers Act (a piece of legislation designed to give governments the power to declare a 'state of emergency' in the event of industrial unrest) has taken on a new significance since 9/11 (Turney 2002), particularly when considered in conjunction with the increased threat from terrorism and chemical, biological, nuclear, and radiation attack (CBRN).

Although now seen by government as an outdated act (Civil Contingencies Secretariat [CCS] Progress Paper 2002), the 1948 Civil Defence Act was an enabling device that allowed the Home Secretary to introduce regulations affecting the functions of local authorities and their ability to deal with defence of the civil population "against any form of hostile attack by a foreign power" (Tucker 1999). The act also provided for a grant from central government to fund the civil

defence activities only of local authorities. The act still provides the statutory basis for emergency planning in the U.K. and the grant, which will be approximately £18 million [ED.: \$29 million U.S.] for 2003/2004, is still the only funding that local authorities receive from central government for carrying out these activities.

Various statues and regulations have followed the 1948 act including, the Local Government Act (1972) that allowed local authorities to spend money to “. . . avert, alleviate or eradicate” the effects caused by disasters (Turney 1990), the Civil Protection in Peacetime Act (1986) (a direct result of the disasters of the 1980s) that further allowed local authorities to ‘use civil defence resources’ (i.e., the civil defence grant) to respond to a ‘peacetime emergency,’ a recognition of the risks faced by the U.K. that are unconnected with any form of hostile threat (Tucker 1999, p. 10), the Civil Defence (Grant) Regulations (1987) that raised “the level of the grant for salaries and associated expenses of employing local authority emergency planning teams for civil defence purposes from 75 per cent to 100 per cent” (ibid), the Civil Defence (General Local Authority Functions) Regulations (1993), and finally the European-led legislation, the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards (CIMAH) regulations (1984) that required a company undertaking hazardous industrial activities to produce an on-site plan for dealing with a major accident and for local authorities to produce an off-site plan for protection the civil population in the vent of a major accident. The CIMAH regulations were replaced by the Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) regulations in 1999 (ibid., p. 11).

Most of the above legislation (except for the COMAH regulations) is expected to be superseded by the new Civil Contingencies Bill that is currently being prepared by central government. This bill, a result of the latest review, will for the first time place a statutory duty on local authorities to plan for peacetime emergencies. Ironically, the Labour Party itself stated in its policy review in 1989 that it would like “to ensure adequate development of a new statutory emergency planning system,” a proposal strongly supported by the Fennell Inquiry into the Kings Cross Underground Fire (Coles and Smith 1997), the Civil Emergencies Adviser in his first report, and Parker and Handmer (1992a) in their assessment of the U.K. situation in 1992. It is, however, disappointing to note here that, even under a Labour government (that has been in power since 1997), this piece of new legislation will have virtually no new money attached to it and will not be given parliamentary time until at least 2003/2004 (Weatherill 2002).

Development of emergency planning Since the 1980s/1990s

That there is a need for good civil protection and peacetime emergency planning at a local level has been recognised by researchers for a number of years (see Dynes and Quarantelli 1975; Dynes 1994; Drabek 1986; Newkirk 1998; Parker and Handmer 1992a; Quarantelli 1976, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1995). However, it was not until the proliferation of major incidents and crises in the 1980s and early 1990s that disaster recovery and emergency planning in the U.K. was firmly catapulted onto the political and public agenda. Indeed, Parker and Handmer (1992a) suggest that the decade of the 1980s will be remembered as the decade of disaster for the United Kingdom. Disaster events like the ones noted¹ are triggering mechanisms; they have the effect of pushing issues such as local authority emergency planning onto the political and public agenda almost instantaneously. These situations occurred in the U.K. at the end of the 1980s when, as Rocket (1994) noted, the government finally appeared to accept “the need for peacetime disaster preparedness” and resulted in the role of emergency planning being subjected to two government reviews in close succession.

The first review in 1989 concluded that the prime responsibility for handling disasters should remain at a local level and that more needed to be done to encourage and develop coordination of the various services at that level. It also resulted in the appointment of a civil emergencies adviser and in the Civil Defence College changing its name to Emergency Planning College to reflect a new, wider peacetime planning remit (Civil Protection 1989). The review, however, did little to allay the concerns of those involved with emergency planning (Sibson 1991; Parker and Handmer 1992a). Parker and Handmer (1992a) also noted that “the British approach is characterised by a lack of policies, especially explicit national policies providing unambiguous signals.”

The second review in 1991 was carried out after the Civil Emergencies Adviser issued his first report and at a time when there was much debate within the emergency planning community regarding, among other things, the issue of a statutory duty. The Home Secretary (Kenneth Baker) did not, however, implement the recommendations of his adviser to impose a statutory duty on local authorities. Instead, he adopted what he called ‘a broad based approach’ in an effort “to achieve improvements in local authority planning for emergencies in peace and war through a package of measures” (Baker 1991). These measures included the introduction of an integrated emergency planning policy, a more flexible use of the civil defence grant, guidelines

1. For example, the Bradford City Fire, Hungerford, the great storm of 1987, the Kings Cross Underground Fire, Piper Alpha, the Herald of Free Enterprise, Lockerbie, Hillsborough, Kegworth, The Marchioness, Dunblane, and others.

for dealing with disasters, a review of emergency planning in metropolitan areas, and a more efficient use of emergency centres and communications.

Following the second review a circular issued to local authorities by the Home Office in September 1993 stated that “[t]he main role of local authorities should be to develop an integrated approach to emergency management as described in the government’s statement of July 1991” and that “councils would be expected to make contributions to emergency planning from their own resources” (Civil Protection 1993), a worrying development for low-profile activities such as emergency planning in the current climate of restraint when departments in cash-strapped local authorities were and still are having to bid for scarce resources (Coles and Smith 1997).

The change of government in 1997 from Conservative to Labour and the subsequent Comprehensive Spending Review resulted in a further review of local authority civil protection, the third in less than ten years. This review was gotten underway by the issue in November 1997 of a Home Office consultative document on *The Future Role and Funding of Local Civil Protection in England and Wales*. The document, which was sent to all local authorities in England and Wales, asked for views regarding the following of issues: the need for a statutory duty for peacetime emergency planning, the coordination arrangements for emergency planning in terms of boundaries, restructuring of financial arrangements, and national performance standards. It is unfortunate that this review resulted in little visible change.

Both Parker and Handmer (1992b) and Rocket (1994) have discussed the need for a comprehensive reorganisation of local government civil protection. Parker and Handmer (1992b, p. 267) went as far as suggesting an eight point policy² for the improvement of hazard management and emergency planning in the U.K. In the intervening years since the publication of these suggested improvements, the political environment and the “auditing mindset of successive governments” (Hood and Jackson 1992) has conspired to ensure that no progress on any of these issues has been made. Furthermore, each consultation process has taken no account of the call for a separate department to deal with civil protection, or of developing a research agenda, or for regular audits and inspections of local authority emergency preparedness, or indeed for adequate training and education for emergency planners. Any new arrangements for emergency planning currently being considered should provide structures, funds and

legislation that will cope with the range of events that increased dependence on technology, and climate change can bring. Indeed, Coles (1998) noted that the safety and protection of the general public that is afforded by good (or even, as Kreps [1992] points out, reasonable) emergency planning is a moral obligation of government.

The current review of emergency planning in England and Wales

As noted above, the current review of emergency planning was initiated in 2001 by the Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott following the fuel crisis and extensive flooding in the millennium year 2000 and the subsequent foot-and-mouth crisis of 2002. The terrorist acts of 9/11, while not having a direct influence on the review, have served to emphasise the ad hoc nature of arrangements in the U.K. and add impetus to the consultation.

The consultation period following the review was begun with the publication, on the eve of 9/11, of *The Future of Emergency Planning in England and Wales: Discussion Document* in August 2001. The document itself was like ‘a breath of fresh air’ as it contained the first indication that government had finally accepted that the 1948 Civil Defence Act was an outdated piece of legislation, unable to cope with the modern day demands of civil protection. It also outlined proposed changes in policy, guidance, and monitoring and the way emergency planning is funded by central government, a clarification of national and regional roles and responsibilities, the introduction of prevention and mitigation strategies for local authorities in the form of hazard identification and risk assessment, and controversially suggested that local authorities and not the police take the lead role in the coordination of local emergencies. The consultation period that ended in October 2001 was given added impetus by the events of 9/11 and the renewed debate these events generated among the U.K. public.

However, the wheels of Whitehall turn exceedingly slowly, and the results of the consultation were not published until the spring of 2002 (see Cabinet Office 2002a), by which time public interest was already beginning to decline. Respondents to the consultation were generally in favour of the recommendations made in the document CCS 2002, and it was assumed that action to implement the proposed changes would be almost immediate. Again, this was not the case; the consultation document on the proposed new Civil Contingencies Bill has only recently been published (Cabinet Office 2002b), and the bill itself will not be given parliamentary time until 2003/2004.

2. The eight points are: a statutory duty to plan for peacetime emergencies; a separate government department to deal with civil protection; policies for dealing with cross-boundary emergencies; adequate financial and human resources; effective arrangements for the free flow of information; regular audit and inspections; development of a research agenda; and adequate arrangements for the education and training of emergency planning personnel.

Emergency planning arrangements in England and Wales

Emergency planning in the U.K. includes structures at local, regional, and national levels involved in the response to disasters. The organisational framework for the present system that is operated in London is provided in Figure 1.

In July 2001, during the consultation period of the most recent review, responsibility for emergency planning moved from the Home Office to the Cabinet Office under the auspices of the 'Civil Contingencies Secretariat' (CCS) with the declared aim to "... to improve the U.K.'s resilience to disruptive challenges at every level" (Home Office 2001, p. 1). Local authorities can seek advice from central government through either CCS or a nominated Lead Government Department (LGD) if more appropriate to the type of incident (e.g., a radiation emergency).

Although 'Government Offices of the Regions' (GORs) exist at regional level, their role and responsibilities during a disaster appear vague at best. This is clearly evident when assessing the recent examples involving their activation such as in the 'fuel crisis' in 2000 and the foot-and-mouth outbreak in 2001. In general, the regional level within England and Wales has an undefined emergency planning role, currently in the process of being clarified as part of the review.

The Department of Health is almost a separate entity in terms of organisational structure; with representation at

the central government level, as well as a regional level that supports Strategic Health Authorities (StHAs), and NHS Trusts at local level. An Emergency Planning Coordination Unit (EPCU) within the Department of Health has the responsibility for developing policy and maintaining national guidance in terms of emergency preparedness and provides national coordination for health if required in response to a major incident (NHS Executive 1998, p. 12). The Directorate of Health and Social Care provides the 'regional' coordination arm (facilitated by the Health Emergency Planning Advisors) that is tasked with ensuring that plans are compatible with other responders and comply with national guidance (ibid.).

The Home Office (1997, p. 4) publication *Dealing with Disaster* suggests the "...core of the initial response will normally be provided by the emergency services and as necessary by the appropriate local authority or authorities." The police, fire, National Health Service (which includes Strategic Health Authorities, Acute Hospital Trusts, Primary Care Trusts, and Ambulance Trusts), and local authorities are considered to be the main agencies providing or contributing to the local response to disasters.³ Support for the emergency services and local authorities is provided by a number agencies and organisations such as volunteers, industry and commercial organisations, the Environment Agency, and assistance from the military.

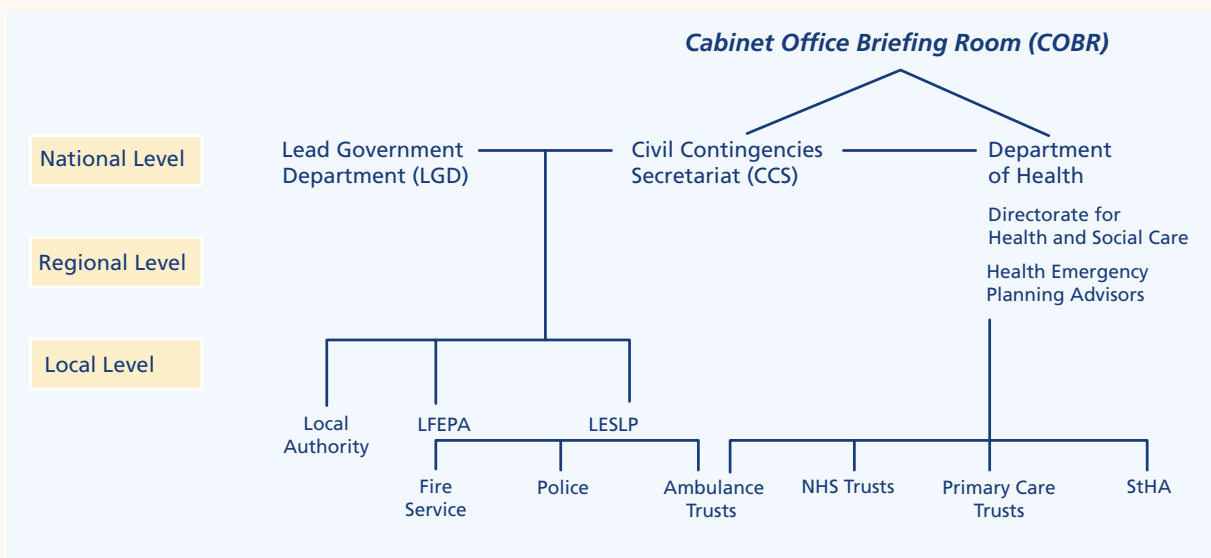


Figure 1. Emergency planning System in London (Source: Norman 2002, p. 8)

3. Disasters are normally managed using three nationally agreed operational levels of response: Operational (Bronze) Level, Tactical (Silver) Level, and Strategic (Gold) Level. These three levels are recognized by organizations normally involved in a response to a disaster and allow a common framework for all responding organizations. A Strategic Coordinating Group can also be formed to focus on the provision of resources, prioritization of requests, and forward planning for the successful resolution of the incident and return to normality (Home Office 1997, p. 16).



Figure 2. Map of the London Boroughs (Source: Norman 2002, p. 15)

Emergency planning arrangements in London

The emergency planning situation in London mirrors the complex nature of emergency planning in the rest of the U.K. London as the capital of the U.K. is one of the most influential financial centres in the world, with a population of 13 million (Mitchell 1999, p. 29). It is divided into thirty-three boroughs (forming the greater London conurbation) that are governed by Local Councils (see Figure 2).

It is important to note here that London, unlike any other major city in the U.K., is in a unique position with regard to arrangements for emergency planning because it is also the seat of government. This creates a hierarchy of power in the capital that is firmly rooted in five hundred plus years of history and rests overwhelmingly in Whitehall. For, although the responsibility for and function of emergency planning resides at the local level with the thirty-three local authorities that make up the Greater London conurbation in reality should a major event of the type and order of 9/11 take place, then the coordination of arrangements for dealing with it would undoubtedly be assumed by central government.

A number of organisations and forums exist in London, some of which were created to promote a pan-London response to disasters. Other organisations may have such a role in the future. The main organisations include: London Emergency Services Liaison Panel

(LESPL), the Mayor of London, Greater London Authority, the Government Office for London, and the London Assembly. The LESPL Panel has created the Major Incident Procedure Manual (also LESPL 1999) to describe "... the agreed procedures and arrangements for the effective coordination" (LESPL 2000, p. 7). "The Mayor, London Assembly and the Greater London Authority comprise a new and unique form of strategic citywide government for London" (GOL 2002). The mayor is responsible for strategic management to deal with London-wide issues and coordinating action on a pan-London basis; however, the mayor does not currently have a legislated role within emergency planning in a disaster situation. The Association of London Government supports the London Boroughs and Greater London Authority, whereas the Government Office for London supports the Minister for London and a number a government departments.

London Resilience is another pan-London group housed within the CCS; it was established after the attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC). Initially, London Resilience was viewed as a temporary subcommittee tasked with assessing the state of 'resilience' of emergency management within the capital. London Resilience is now a permanent group mainly staffed by secondees from the organisations represented on the committee to ensure London is prepared for a 'catastrophic' incident (Kowalczyk 2002, p. 16).

A 'catastrophic' incident could be seen to include an exceptional incident outside the current realm of experience. A number of London organisations provided seconded staff to London Resilience to undertake an assessment of emergency management; this assessment involved a questionnaire and interviews with individual practitioners, departments, and organisations across London. The results from the assessment were compiled into a report produced in March 2002. However, due to the security-sensitive nature of the report, it was classified 'confidential' by London Resilience, with only participating practitioners and organisations privy to the report; however, aspects of the report may be disclosed in the future (Kowalczyk 2002).

London Resilience is, however, recommending a number of general changes to the emergency management system in London. These recommendations include a new and more formal command and control center structure with a 'diamond' level of command for catastrophic incidents (Kowalczyk 2002). A new regime for strategic management in London will also be developed which will include a generic emergency plan for London and clear protocols for the roles of organisations involved in the response to a 'catastrophic' incident (ibid.). Furthermore, organisations will receive individual recommendations to improve future performance of their emergency management responsibilities (ibid.). In June 2002, a new group of secondees joined the London Resilience Team to further develop the above initiatives and begin to formulate the practical implications of implementing these changes.

The current system in London between local-level responders and central government appears disjointed. Organisations above the local level appear to formulate their own plans and arrangements with little integration with other organisations, departments, or levels involved in emergency management, as admitted by Brigadier Abbott in the Ministry of Defence Select Committee in January 2002. "What we have found since 11th September is that the plans for one particular department may well be sound but the problem is they are not synchronised with the other departments. It is the ability to synchronise not only central government and the elements of central government but also down in the nation at local level, whether it be authorities, boroughs or the police, which is important" (Ministry of Defence 2002, p. 3). The difficulty comes, not from everyday emergencies, but from an incident that does require a multiagency and multilateral response, as seen during the fuel crisis and flooding during 2000 and the foot-and-mouth crisis in 2001, which resulted in a disjointed and disorganised response. Brigadier Abbott from the CCS admitted in the Ministry of Defence (2002, p. 3) Select Committee that "...we do not learn our lessons" (p. 81).

Research carried out over a number of years since 1998 indicates that every facet of the local-level response in London, from voluntary organisations to the emergency services, are in regular liaison with each other (Norman and Coles 2002). This frequency of liaison, particularly with the voluntary organisations, is a positive one and reflects local-level involvement in volunteer organisations interests and activities. However, the picture is not quite so positive where regional and central government are concerned.

Two organisations exist at now 'regional' level, the Mayor's Office and the Government Office of London (GOL). Central government level is considered to include the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, the Department of Health, and other government departments that may have a role in responding to a disaster.

Research has indicated that less than half of the organisations questioned were in regular contact with regional level of government (ibid). This may, however, reflect that as a new entity the Mayor's Office has an unclear role in terms of emergency planning, as participants did question whether it was considered a 'regional' organisation. Also, there is presently no legislated emergency planning role for the Mayor's Office. The role of the GOL is also confusing, with no emergency managers at the regional level (the Department of Health is the only central government department with its own regional emergency managers) and what would appear to be complete disconnection (both vertically and horizontally) from any other department or organisation.

With regard to central government, the emerging picture is overwhelmingly one of confusion. Although the responsibility for emergency planning moved from the Home Office to the CCS in July 2001, research carried out by Norman (2002) also identified similar levels of confusion when emergency planning was the responsibility of the Home Office. The results are stark. CCS is the only other level of emergency planning above the local response, and communication once every three months hardly seems adequate (ibid). It is hoped they are merely finding their feet in this transition period and not setting the precedent for the future functioning of their department.

When mapping the coordination arrangements for Greater London, some difficulties were encountered. These were not with the complexity of the arrangements, but rather, to echo the Sunday Express (Hall and Palmer 2002) report, with their haphazard nature and the confusion found at all levels that surrounds them. The relationship between the organisations involved in emergency planning and the lines of communication is shown in Figure 2. The diagram represents the lines of communication and

liaison in London before and after 9/11 and provides a model of the current levels of communication between the London boroughs up to central government. The diagram clearly demonstrates the new lines of communications that have suddenly opened since 9/11. It is our contention that, before effective coordination can take place, lines of communication must be well established and operating in a two-way fashion, both vertically and horizontally. As the model shows, this is clearly not the case.

The evidence gathered in the research is clearly supported by the work of others. For instance Toulmin, Givans, and Steel (1989, p. 120) have formulated a model of 'intergovernmental distance' which suggests that there are constraints in disaster communications between the various levels of government and agencies involved in undertaking their normal duties and emergency tasks simultaneously. A number of models for coordination have been formulated by such authors as Drabek (1985, 1986, 2001), Rosenthal, Charles, and 't Hart (1989), Flin (1996), Sylves and Waugh (1996), Paton, Johnston, and Houghton (1998), and Waugh (2000). What has become evident is a move away from traditional and often highly structured systems of organisation with unity of command, task specialisation, and where communication is often top-down, towards a more 'structurally fluid' organisation that does not rely on hierarchy and formal communications systems. This type of organisation is referred to by Waugh (1990,

p. 10) as a 'professional bureaucracy' and by authors such as Drabek (1985, p. 91), Sylves and Waugh (1996, p. 93), and Paton, Johnston, and Houghton (1998, p. 7) have formulated coordination models based on this concept of more 'structurally fluid' organisations.

It is apparent that the emergency planning system operating in London leaves a lot to be desired, and if, as we suspect, it is a reflection of what is happening in the rest of the U.K., then we should indeed be worried. However, it is important to note here that London is the seat of government in the U.K. and considered to be a megacity where responsibility for emergency planning rests at the local level. Should there be a major incident on the scale of 9/11, it is almost certain that, unlike New York City, control will be assumed by central government. Cabinet minutes to this effect were recorded in 1982, when the possibility of a major flood in London was discussed. Such a dichotomy creates a duality of tensions that are firmly rooted in the power base that has existed in London for over five hundred years. Coles (1998) noted immediately after the last U.K. review of emergency planning that the system in the U.K. was haphazard at best. Moreover, Parker and Handmer (1992a) pointed out in 1992 the one thing that characterises the way past governments and industry have handled disaster has been their inability to disseminate and share information following incidents "... in marked contrast to the 'right to know' law of the United States." In four years since 1998, not much has

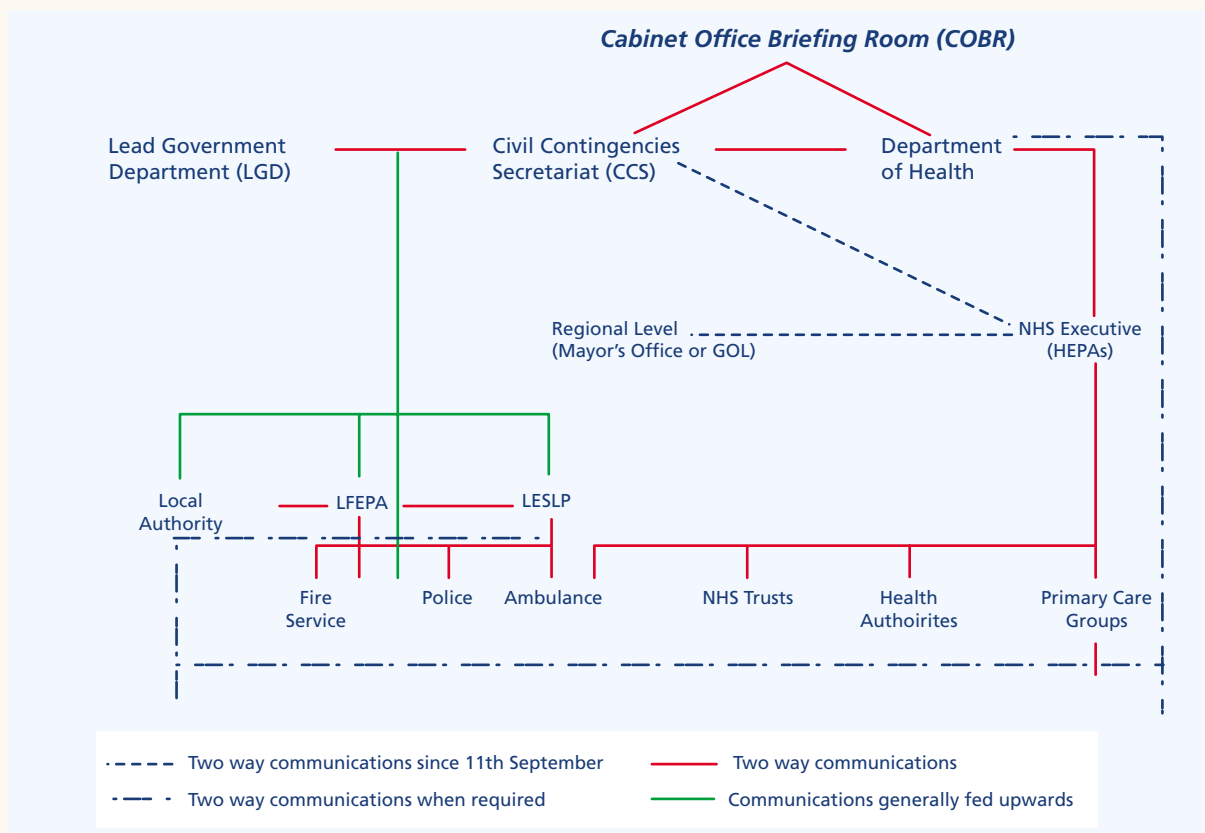


Figure 3. Lines of Communication and Liaison in London before and after 9/11 (Source: Norman and Coles 2002)

changed and following the recent review government procrastination will ensure it will not do so until at least 2003/2004 (Weatherill 2002).

It is clear from the results of the research carried out between 1998 and 2002 that the response at the local level within the London boroughs is working despite a small downturn since 1998. The emergency services, local authorities, and pan-London liaison groups communicate regularly, which has helped to build an effective and coordinated response. The regional level seems to present a confusing picture where ill-defined roles are the norm. Before September 11, no lines of communication, either vertically or horizontally, were evident in an emergency planning role. Although it is probably true to say that the Mayor's Office and GOL would like a role within emergency planning, one must question the political motivation rather than practical expertise this would afford London. Lines of communication have been established since September 2001; however, their role, responsibilities, and authority within emergency planning appear no more transparent.

Conclusion

It is evident from this paper that some of the problems that beset emergency planning in England and Wales in the 1980s and 1990s are still ongoing in 2002. The important issues of legislation, structure, communication, and coordination have still to be addressed by central government, although the most recent review is going some way to doing this, albeit slowly. However, there is to some extent still a veil of secrecy surrounding how emergency planning takes place, a situation that was noted in 1990 by Hodge (1990) and by Beishon (1990). Responsibility for this lack of transparency must be shouldered by Whitehall, which could do much more to raise awareness to the issues of civil protection.

Local authority civil protection in the U.K. is about to experience a major change. This has been evidenced by the current review and the ongoing consultation process regarding a proposed new statutory duty. This paper has critically examined the current status of local authority emergency planning and found that a comprehensive reorganisation is indeed needed if the government is to maintain its principal responsibility of the safety and protection of the public. Since July 2001, the responsibility for emergency planning at central government level rests with the CCS. It has been identified that there is considerable confusion about the role of CCS which, coupled with the lack of vertical communication between borough level and CCS that is evident in Figure 3, demonstrates a serious weakness in the vertical system. As stated earlier, it is hoped they are merely finding their feet in this transition period and not setting a precedent for the future functioning of their department.

Waugh (2000, p. 154) suggests disasters can create policy windows when the "... the need to act and to prepare for future events" is heightened and he further suggests that these 'windows' close very quickly as the memory of the event fades. These opportunities for emergency planning are a rare occurrence. It would appear then that the high hopes for the review have already been dashed as the policy window appears to have been closed just over six months after the attacks of September 11, 2001; for, as the Sunday Express (Hall and Palmer 2002) has stated, the "Cabinet Office has told local authorities that it will be at least two years before it can find time for legislation to go through Parliament to set up a proper nationally coordinated system." So, it appears that the future of emergency planning has again been subjected to delaying tactics and empty promises. The lack of political will on this issue may result in a complete system failure at a point in the future when London's recovery from disaster may rely on it; at that point emergency planning will become part of the disaster.

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Authors

Sarah Norman
Eve Coles
Centre for Disaster Management
School of Science and the Environment
Coventry University
Priority Street
Coventry CV1 5FB
ENGLAND
(Email: Norman) norm2is@yahoo.com
(Email: Coles) e.coles@coventry.ac.uk