

Preparing for Emergencies:

Guide for communities

March 2011

Aim of this leaflet

This leaflet will help you take the first steps to think about why and how you can help your community to be prepared for an emergency. It invites you to think about:

- why it is important to be involved and be prepared;
- what you can do to make it happen in your community; and
- the help available to you to do this.

Case studies show examples of how communities and organisations have equipped themselves to be ready to support people through emergencies. These can be used to help you think about what you might do in your community.

What is community resilience and why is it important?

Emergencies happen. Your local emergency responders will always have to prioritise those in greatest need during an emergency, especially where life is in danger. There will be times when you may be affected by an emergency but your life is not in immediate danger.

During this time, individuals and communities may need to rely on their own resources to ensure they are able to cope with the consequences of the emergency. Many communities already spontaneously help one another in times of need, but previous experience has shown that those who have spent time planning and preparing for this are better able to cope, and recover more quickly.

Benefits of community resilience

Volunteering and helping one another does not need to be organised by central or local government. Local people who are prepared and able to respond effectively and recover quickly from emergencies show us how successful community resilience can be. This activity is most successful when in partnership with local emergency responders.

How resilient is your community? Your ward, borough, village or street? Your sports club or other community group? And what can you do to help build this resilience? By building on existing local relationships and networks, using local knowledge and preparing for risks, your community will be better able to cope during and after an emergency.

Recovery from an emergency can be a complex and long-running process. A resilient community will not only be better prepared to respond at the time of an emergency, but will be better equipped to recover in the long-term.

Case study Fairford Emergency Action Group

“Through the Town Council and with support from Cotswold District Council, we formed an Action Group to co ordinate our community response to the risks we face. In Fairford these include flooding, aircraft incidents (from the nearby RAF bases), and traffic accidents with a major trunk road going through our town’s narrow streets. We bought equipment (such as high visibility jackets) to help in potential future crises and identified and equipped premises to be used as a place of safety if residents have to evacuate their homes. We held a full live practice of procedures involving many residents, local authorities and emergency services, and shared our experience with other parishes in the Cotswolds. We are planning to test out our emergency callout procedures to ensure that they are effective. In order to alleviate the risk of flooding to the town, we have a volunteer workforce that annually clears the ditches and watercourses so as to provide natural overflow conduits for the main river to carry excess water away from homes and businesses.”

What you can do to help

a. Make your contribution

Your help and skills in leading your community and helping them to be more resilient and prepared could be vital.

b. Work in partnership with local emergency responders

Your community should know what local emergency responders are able to do for you in an emergency and vice versa – this means talking to each other during the planning and exercising process.

c. Don’t put yourself at risk

Individuals and community groups should never do anything which puts themselves or their community at risk.

d. Talk to each other

Talk to other communities who have done this work and experienced some of the successes and frustrations of developing community resilience locally. We can help to put you in touch with other groups if you would like to share your experience with others. You can contact us at community.resilience@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk.

Case study Sedgeberrow Flood Group, Worcestershire

“Following the 2007 floods, we have worked together to minimise the damage flooding has on the community and help those who need assistance. We appointed a flood warden, set up a Flood Group, developed a Flood Emergency Plan identifying community resources that could be used in an emergency, and held an open village meeting with experts to inform everyone on local hydrological and meteorological issues and how the village can develop resilience through self help.

We are working with local landowners to look at longer term catchment issues and have developed a self help scheme with volunteers from ‘dry’ properties helping those in ‘at risk’ properties and obtained an emergency warning siren to be activated on receipt of a flood warning. We communicate monthly to the village via a community magazine and held a ‘Sedgeberrow one year on’ party to help the recovery process.”

What does a resilient community look like?

Communities in the UK already involved in preparing for emergencies show some or all of the following features:

- Are aware of risks that may affect them (both nationally and locally) and how vulnerable they are to such risks. This helps motivate them to personally take action to prepare for the consequences of emergencies.
- Work in partnership to complement the work of the local emergency responders and other organisations before, during and after an emergency.
- Use existing skills, knowledge and resources to prepare for, and deal with, the consequences of emergencies.

Case study Sunderland Point, Lancaster

“We are an isolated community of about 70 residents in about 35 properties at risk of tidal flooding and coastal erosion. We set up a Community Association working with the Environment Agency and other partners to increase our resilience to a range of risks in the event that external help may not be immediately available.”

Case study DangerPoint initiative, North Wales

“DangerPoint is an independent charity, based around a purpose built education visitor centre featuring interactive, visual safety scenarios. It was set up to educate young people and communities across North Wales about how to avoid risks and accidents. A project has been recently established to raise awareness of the safety issues around flood risk.”

Case study Vicar of Frampton on Severn. Gloucestershire

“I saw the impact of flooding on neighbouring communities and recognised the risks to our community. The village had previously experienced the Foot & Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001. I championed the benefits of producing a community emergency plan for the area. The Parish Council went on to recruit a group of residents who produced an emergency plan using local knowledge and expertise.”

Case Study South Woodham Ferrers Community Safety Forum, Essex

“The Forum was set up as a voluntary partnership group involving the police, fire & rescue, ambulance, borough council, town council and local groups/organisations to establish a ‘joined up community’. In collaboration with Chelmsford Borough Council, our local yacht & sailing clubs have set up a ‘River Watch’ scheme to check river levels in a flood alert situation to provide an enhanced warning to the town.

The clubs have also established a procedure with the local fire station to ensure small boats are made available should the need arise to respond to a flood situation. In partnership with Chelmsford Borough Council and the Town Council, a primary ‘Emergency Rest Centre’ facility has been established in the town. A community resilience exercise has also been undertaken involving all the emergency response groups and a Community Emergency Group set up.”

Case study Birmingham Communities and Neighbourhoods Resilience Group

“Our group was formed in July 2008. The membership comprises representatives from over 100 existing community, disability and faith groups together with the emergency services and voluntary organisations. The group works with the Birmingham Resilience Team to help ensure that emergency planning in Birmingham meets the needs of the diverse communities within our city. We focus on specific issues such as pandemics, flooding, climate change, and the city centre. We also work with volunteers, known as Birmingham Resilience Champions, who promote the importance of emergency preparedness within the city and support the response of the Birmingham Resilience Team.”

Case study The Hanneys Flood Group, Oxfordshire

“Following flooding in 2007 and 2008, we formed a community flood group and carried out a programme of flood alleviation measures including weed removal and bank strengthening and heightening of the local brook. We installed a data logger on the brook to measure water levels and established a regular maintenance regime for the brook and critical ditches. We have worked actively with the Environment Agency, the Parish, District & County Councils, local landowners and residents and established a website to help spread information to villagers and other flood groups.”

Community emergency planning

Building community resilience is something that many people and communities already do.

It is not about creating or identifying a whole new community network or a one-off response to or recovery from an incident, but rather an ongoing process of using and enhancing existing relationships to better improve the emergency preparedness of an area.

Some existing local community groups will have information on how to get involved or how they can fit resilience into their agenda. These could include parish councils, faith organisations, Neighbourhood Watch groups, Scout Groups, residents associations and youth groups.

Communities should know what local emergency responders are able to do for them in an emergency and vice versa – this means talking to them before an emergency happens.

Five steps to getting started

The steps outlined below are only a suggestion for getting started in building resilience in your community. There are many other ways to build resilience and you may wish to tailor it to the specific needs of your community.

1. Begin by considering who your community is and which communities you belong to

Geographical communities (those people living close to you) are the obvious choice for, and main beneficiary of, community resilience. However, many people do not recognise their community as the people they live near. As such, other communities (such as those who share an interest in a particular topic or sport) should be considered as valid groups within which to prepare for emergencies. Community resilience is not about creating or identifying a new community or network; it is about considering what already exists around you, what you already do, who you already talk to or work with; and thinking about how you could work together before, during and after an incident or emergency.

2. Get in touch with existing local networks you can work with

Many community groups already work to support and enhance life in our communities; e.g. flood wardens, Scout groups, parish councils, residents associations and Neighbourhood Watch groups. Think about how you could use their skills, resources and expertise to make a more resilient community.

Case study Lechlade Emergency Response and Flood Action Committee, Gloucestershire

“The Town Council set up an Emergency Planning Committee and developed an Emergency Plan in consultation with the local community. Having assessed the risks, it was clear that the priority in all of the most likely emergencies would be the evacuation of people from their homes to a place of safety. The strength of the community came to the fore with the Memorial Hall and Recreation Ground Trustees offering the use of the community hall as a place of safety, the Women’s Institute taking on responsibility for operating it, and the Lechlade and District Lions offering practical support such as help with evacuating affected residents.”

3. Choose a community representative for your emergency plan

These people represent their local community by providing the link between the community and the statutory bodies that provide emergency response services to them. Think about who would take on this role in your community. You could consider asking local elected members to represent the community and co-ordinate this work.

4. Establish a Community Emergency Group (or incorporate preparedness activities into an existing group)

There are Community Emergency Groups already established in both rural and urban areas where people have recognised the need to consider what their community might need in an emergency, and have set about helping themselves to be prepared. You do not have to establish a new group. You may instead wish to build on and use existing community groups and consider how they might include building community resilience into their activities.

Case study Chelmsford Borough Council, Essex

“We approached the local parish councils and encouraged them to appoint a liaison officer for emergency planning and set up a Community Emergency Group of local volunteers. Volunteers have helped to compile a parish emergency plan, and assisted with information gathering (e.g. the number of single storey properties within a flood zone), helping us achieve better quality information via local knowledge. Volunteers also assist with the initial emergency response pending arrival of Council resources.”

5. Develop a Community Emergency Plan

Consider how you could use/complete the template Community Emergency Plan for your community which can be downloaded from:

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/communityresilience>.

Preparing as individuals and families

Individuals and families who are resilient will be better able to help themselves in responding to and recovering from personal, local and national emergencies and provide support to those around them.

For further guidance on building your individual or household resilience, see the [Preparing for Emergencies](#) pages on the Directgov website.

How the government will help

The government will:

- work to remove the barriers which prevent participation such as concerns about liability and insurance;
- provide toolkits, templates and checklists to help you - improving these based on your feedback;
- listen to your feedback on our toolkits and information;
- help put you in touch with the right people and provide ways for you to communicate with local emergency responders and other communities;
- give you up-to-date and accurate information about risk;
- set up relevant web pages to communicate and share information with you; and
- champion your work nationally and listen to, and learn from, your good practice.
- The Government's *Strategic National Framework on Community Resilience* sets out in more detail the government contribution to enhancing and building individual and community resilience.

Where to get more information

The [*Strategic National Framework for Community Resilience*](#) sets out the strategic aims and objectives of the overall Community Resilience Programme. You are likely to find this document most useful if you who want to see how the Community Resilience Programme fits into the wider objectives of the Government.

The [*Community Emergency Plan Toolkit and Template*](#) set out a number of practical suggestions for how you can get started in building resilience in your community. They include a suggested generic template plan that you can adapt for use locally. You are likely to find these documents most useful if you want to see an example of the practical steps you could take to create a community emergency plan.

The [*Preparing for Emergencies*](#) web pages are aimed at individuals, families, communities and businesses that want to find out more about how they can prepare for emergencies. The pages aim to answer questions around individual and community resilience and increase awareness of risks and vulnerability to risk. They also set out some easy steps for how you can improve your household preparedness. You are likely to find this information most useful if you would like more general information about emergency preparedness.

For further information on the Community Resilience Programme, please contact community.resilience@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk or write to Community Resilience, Civil Contingencies Secretariat, 22 Whitehall, London, SW1A 2WH.

Useful Links

Preparing for Emergencies

www.direct.gov.uk/preparingforemergencies

The home of resources for individual and community resilience.

Local Resilience Forum

<http://interim.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience/preparedness/ukgovernment/lrfs.aspx>

This web page provides contact details for Local Resilience Forums throughout England and Wales.

National Risk Register

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/national-risk-register

The online home of the National Risk Register.

Environment Agency

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

08708 506 506

For information on environmental risks, including flood warnings.

British Red Cross

www.redcross.org.uk

0844 871 11 11

Information on the simple precautions that can be taken to prepare for a range of emergency situations, along with advice on how to cope when they do.

WRVS

www.wrvs.org.uk

0845 601 4670

Information about the services WRVS provide (including emergency response) across the UK.

St John Ambulance

www.sja.org.uk

08700 104950

Information about how first aid training can make a difference to people in an emergency.

RSPCA

www.rspca.org.uk/in-action/international/emergencyresponse

0300 1234 555

The RSPCA has put together some guidelines so that you can be prepared to get your animals to safety in the event of flooding.

Informed. Prepared. Together.

www.informedprepared.eu

A gateway to resources, information and practical tools for developing the ability of individuals, communities and organisations to be better prepared to cope with emergencies and disasters.

Radio Amateurs' Emergency Network (RAYNET)

www.raynet-uk.net

The UK's national voluntary communications service provided for the community by licensed radio amateurs.

Glossary

Community Resilience

Communities and individual harnessing local resources and expertise to help themselves during an emergency, in a way that complements the work of the emergency services.

Community Risk Register

An assessment of local risks that have been identified within a Local Resilience Forum area. It is written, maintained and published by the Local Resilience Forum.

Emergency

An event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the United Kingdom; the environment of a place in the United Kingdom; or the security of the United Kingdom or of a place in the United Kingdom.

Emergencies can also affect you at home, for example house fires, broken down boilers, burst pipes etc.

Local emergency responders

Organisations that respond to emergencies in your area. They include the fire, police and ambulance services, as well as your local authority and other organisations.

Local Resilience Forum (LRF)

A group formed in police area boundaries of England and Wales by key local emergency responders and specific supporting agencies for the purpose of fulfilling their duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

National Risk Register

A report produced by the Cabinet Office which outlines the Government's assessment of significant potential risks to the United Kingdom.

Rest centre

A building which is designated by a local authority for the temporary accommodation of evacuees. This may include overnight accommodation.

Risk

A measure of the likelihood and impact of a potential emergency.