



PREPARING SCOTLAND

# Warning and Informing Scotland

COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC

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# 01 Purpose of the guidance

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This document provides guidance to Category 1 responders, Strategic Co-ordinating Groups (SCGs) and their member organisations, on how public communication can help deliver strategic emergency management objectives. It aims to provide a better understanding of why effective and resilient public communication arrangements are an essential part of the response to, and recovery from, any incident or event.

It suggests a best practice approach that can be used in communicating with the public and satisfying the duty of responders to warn and inform the public.

It covers the issues in relation to multi-agency working, and where events involve more than one SCG area. In addition, it covers matters relating to community reassurance and engagement, which should complement other communications activity in some circumstances.

It has been written for a readership of strategic and tactical leaders, emergency planners and others working in resilience. It should be useful to communications practitioners and to the people who need to work with them before, during and after an emergency.

Throughout this document the term 'national' refers to Scottish arrangements or strategies. UK arrangements or strategies will be referred to as such.

The guidance was revised in 2011/12 in consultation with the resilience community, including communications specialists.

Some simple communications models and tools are set out at the end of this document.

1. Developing a communication strategy
2. Working with the media
3. The role and responsibilities of the SCG Public Communication Group
4. First hour public communication
5. Community reassurance and engagement

Local emergency communication plans, based on local risk registers, will continue to be the main source of guidance for SCGs, and provide the basis on which local arrangements are exercised.

# 02 Context

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Our lives are sustained by complex, interrelated structures that provide essential systems and infrastructure. The impact of a widespread failure in these systems, whatever the cause, would be felt throughout our communities.

Many kinds of threats and hazards have the potential to affect us. A terrorist incident could have very serious consequences, but events such as severe winter weather and pandemic disease also have the potential to seriously disrupt everyday life for the people of Scotland.

The job of communicating and engaging effectively with the public, to warn and inform them of risks and how to mitigate them, is affected by continual developments in communication technology. We can grasp this technology and use it to our advantage, but influencing human behaviour remains challenging.

## **The world of instant communication**

The public's ability to communicate quickly has never been greater. The widespread use of smartphones and social networking means that the public is able to deliver images and information almost instantly to the media and the emergency services, and to share their experience of events in real time.

This capability is also available to responders. There is a need to build understanding of new forms of communication, and to develop programmes that make the most of the opportunities they present.

## **The people dimension**

Society has moved on just as quickly as technology. With access to new and varied sources of information, the public demands and processes more information than at any other time in history, and it demands it with immediacy. Members of the public expect to be informed by the authorities, but they are likely to seek confirmation from both official and unofficial sources, including online fora and 'experts' appointed by the media.

The level of scrutiny of public institutions is high, and there is an expectation that authorities should be accountable if things go wrong.

Those looking to communicate with the public need to plan for all of this using a range of communication methods, and to build in the element of speed where necessary.

## **The world of the media**

The media continues to adapt and evolve the service it provides. In the last few years we have seen the rapid development of social media, as well as an increase in the number of broadcast channels and an associated increase in media outlets and around-the-clock media coverage. This diversity means that we cannot rely on reaching all members of the public through one media channel in an emergency. All provide potentially important means by which we can communicate with the public in accordance with our strategy.

## 03 General principles

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Effective communication with the public requires strategic thinking. This guidance sets out a process for strategic planning based on best practice.

The basic tenet is that the principles of good public communication that apply under normal circumstances also apply in an emergency, although they will be carried out in extraordinary circumstances. This is in line with the principles of integrated emergency management (IEM).

The involvement of the Public Communication Group (PCG) chair in full SCG meetings, even when there is not an emergency, will strengthen inter-agency relationships and make for a smoother transition into an emergency situation. It is recommended as a measure of good practice that PCG chairs become members of the full SCG meetings.

In certain circumstances, direct engagement with sections of the public may be required to offer specific messaging and reassurance. Subsection 5: *Responding to a terrorist attack: community reassurance and engagement*, contains more information.

### **Consider communication across all phases of an emergency**

There have been a number of suggestions about how warning and informing can be defined as a series of stages. In previous guidance there was mention of three distinct phases of communication.

1. Public awareness of risk (pre-event), and preparedness steps where relevant
2. Public warning (at the time of the event or when one is imminent)
3. Informing, advising and engaging with the public (immediate and long-term post event)

This simple structure provides a good foundation for planning and it is possible to develop it further by considering the key objectives of warning and informing. Research suggests that if the public is better informed about the risks, and the actions to be taken in an emergency, the emergency response will be improved.

The structure recognises that Category 1 responders are required to maintain arrangements to warn the public if an emergency is likely to occur or has occurred.

Recovery is a vital part of the process and there is an important requirement for communication and engagement with the public on the plans for recovery after an emergency. More information on the role of the PCG in recovery is included in *Preparing Scotland – Recovering from Emergencies in Scotland*.

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### **Set clear communication objectives**

These objectives can be defined and provide a set of strategic communication objectives facing the responders.

1. Raise awareness of risks
2. Alert people to immediate danger, together with associated call to action
3. Provide information for avoiding harm and obtaining assistance
4. Advise on steps being taken by authorities/responders
5. Explain steps taken to recover and return to normality

### **Develop an audience-based approach to strategic planning**

This guidance recommends an approach that focuses on the audience, not simply the means of the communication.

The ethos of this guidance is that communication is an integral part of the overall management of the response. In any event, the response and recovery strategy will call for particular behaviours from a number of different public groups.

It is important, therefore, not just to consider the public as a single group, but to segment it into a number of appropriate groups wherever possible dependent on their needs. One way to segment is to look at how the public can be linked by a number of factors. For example:

- proximity to the emergency (physical and/or emotional)
- demographics
- age, and other factors of vulnerability
- access to communication channels.

It is important to consider what information you need to provide to your audiences and also what information they need from you, and to choose channels for this communication.

For example, in the immediate aftermath of a terrorist incident, a simple objective might be to ensure that survivors evacuate an area or take shelter. In this case, the public needs to understand the nature of the risk and the reasons for the warning. By communicating in this way, we are raising awareness of the issue and providing more information, and by doing so should create the responses we are seeking. The communication is an important part in achieving the overall objectives. In addition, certain communities may require specific engagement work to offer reassurance or calm tensions.

In a different type of emergency, such as pandemic influenza, there may be a requirement for those that fall ill to stay at home and not come into work. Once again, there is a clear objective that will, in turn, support the strategy for managing the disease. Communication plays an important role in meeting this objective.

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### **Adopt an SCG-wide communication planning process**

In order to work in a joined up manner, consider a joint planning process. This can be a simple process based on current best practice. We are recommending that at the core of the planning process there should be a simple five-step approach to communication planning.

1. Audience identification
2. Objective setting
3. Information/message development
4. Choice of appropriate communication channel(s)
5. Monitoring/evaluation/review

An example of how this can be developed further is set out in Subsection 1 of this guidance, *Developing an Emergency Communications Strategy*. This provides an overview of how a five-step process can lead to the development of a robust communication plan. SCGs should develop this process further but the basic building blocks of communication planning are almost universally accepted.

Most of this guidance refers to the role of Scottish Government and local responders. However, it is also necessary to recognise that there may be an important communication role for UK Government Departments and Agencies. These organisations, along with some national agencies, may either work with the Scottish Government as part of a joint response, or have discrete responsibilities.

It is important that SCGs consider the involvement of UK organisations in their communication planning and recognise that it is difficult for UK and national organisations to track local planning issues. Wherever appropriate and possible, it will be useful for SCGs to invite such organisations to be part of local communication planning or to ensure that they receive copies of local communication for their information.

### **Use Community Risk Registers**

Efforts should be made to raise awareness among the general public about what risks are likely to affect them and what steps they could take to mitigate the consequences, ahead of events happening.

Community Risk Registers are published to help communities better understand the risks they face. They offer an effective starting point for engaging with communities on their perceptions of risk, and for explaining the context of risk along with the self-help measures they can take.

Advice and guidance for the public on preparing for all kinds of risk is available from the Scottish Government's emergency preparedness web portal at [www.ReadyScotland.org](http://www.ReadyScotland.org). Community Risk Registers, however, must provide the basis for locally tailored information, delivered in a variety of ways, on what members of the public should prepare for and how.

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A good example is the [Dumfries and Galloway Major Emergency Scheme](#), which includes the [ReadyDumGal](#) website and a range of communications materials, including a pocket leaflet, household emergency plan and fridge magnet.

### **Avoid an over-reliance on the mass media**

The fundamental purpose of the public communication function is not to feed the media, but to warn and inform, and provide reassurance to the public. The media is simply one – albeit very important – channel by which this is done.

The mass media, in particular the broadcast media, will be an important channel of communication. Broadcast media provide an effective way of delivering simple information quickly, and to a large section of the public.

There is, however, a need to recognise that the mass media does not guarantee access to the entire public within a limited timeframe. This is even more apparent during off-peak times of the media, such as an emergency developing overnight.

In consultation with a number of communication managers it has been possible to develop a list of communication channels that might be available during an emergency (see Subsection 1, Step 4). Though not all of these channels of communication will be appropriate in every case, it provides a checklist for communication planning.

In developing a communication plan it is important to consider how these different channels could be used to ensure information reaches the appropriate audiences. An important element will be the consideration of timescales. Social media trends develop in minutes, enabling the public to share information about ongoing situations with conventional media very quickly.

### **Consider the impact of social media**

The rapid development of new ways to use ‘social space’ means that the communications landscape is constantly changing. While the social media have significantly boosted the speed of communications between individuals, some organisations have been understandably slower to make the most of the benefits they offer. Clearance procedures for lines and messages mean that often issues have moved on considerably before the authorities have the chance to become involved in the conversation.

Social media comprises a whole range of communication tools and new ones are emerging all the time. The key to using them successfully is to apply the core principles of effective public communication, using the five-step approach to communications planning outlined above.

# 04 Roles and responsibilities

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## **Agree a lead responder beforehand**

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and regulations discuss the need to agree a lead responder. It suggests that the Strategic Co-ordinating Groups (SCGs) may identify a particular responder as the one with lead responsibility for warning and informing the public or for leading in particular types of emergency. It also suggests that an alternative option might be to agree a process for identifying a lead responder when an emergency occurs.

In practice one of the key tasks of the lead responder will be to activate the joint arrangements. Having a clear lead in the early stages of an emergency is an important factor in the success of warning and informing the public and the speed at which the multi-agency communications response is activated. Some responsibilities include:

- Contact other lead responders
- Deliver urgent warnings to the public
- Co-ordinate communication activity
- Assist other responders to communicate.

It is important to note that a lead responder is not expected to carry out the duty to warn and inform in isolation. In fact, it is highly unlikely that one responder organisation alone will be able to handle the sheer volume of media enquiries and other activities that an incident will generate. The duty remains a responsibility for all Category 1 responders. In agreeing to appoint a lead responder, it sets out a collective arrangement that allows for partnership working and mutual aid.

Where possible we would strongly recommend that a process is agreed that identifies lead responders in advance for different contingencies, as far as this is feasible. In deciding this it is appropriate for the lead responder to be the organisation which has the primary co-ordination role in the response to the emergency, in other words integrating communications with the emergency management response.

A system of activation should be adopted that involves an around-the-clock response. Emergencies are not confined to the working day. It is important that a process is in place to identify an emergency, to activate the joint arrangements and quickly put in place the human resources and a strategic approach to handle the public communication requirements.

## **Ensure that communications advice is available at every level of decision making**

### **Strategic**

SCGs may have established procedures in place to choose a lead responder for communications, which would then be represented at strategic level. This represents best practice and we would recommend that SCGs ensure that they have immediate access to a strategic communication adviser. It is especially important to be clear where national responders such as SEPA and the MCA are involved.

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The strategic communication adviser will fill an important role, being involved in discussions and giving specialist advice and feedback to the SCG and others, and also working with all the key communication managers from the Category 1 responders and, for certain emergencies, Category 2 responders. There are also certain types of emergency where a communications lead may be taken by adviser organisations to the SCG, such as Government departments (e.g. Animal Health).

It is important that this strategic advice is not limited to the area of media relations. The media have an important role in warning and informing the public, but there is a need to consider a full range of communication channels at a strategic level.

A key element of any emergency strategy needs to be engagement with the public in order to achieve whichever public behaviours are called for during and after an incident.

Communications advice also has an impact on the development of the wider response strategy. There should be procedures in place to:

- Obtain information about public awareness and opinion, to inform strategy
- Support the identification of key individuals or groups whose actions and opinions are critical to the success of the strategy
- Enable strategic engagement with news editors and news planning teams in key media outlets.

### **Tactical**

At the tactical level it is important to manage the public communication process and have a structure in place to manage the various communications functions, and the appropriate level of human resource to deliver the strategic objectives.

This should be a flexible arrangement. It might be appropriate that the senior communication manager, whose role it is to manage the communications team under the direction of the individual acting as the strategic communication adviser, is from a different responder organisation. This reflects the partnership nature of the response required to a major incident.

SCGs should use their established Public Communication Group (PCG) as the basis to develop a multi-agency emergency communication function.

When the PCG is activated for an emergency there are a number of key functions that need to be managed:

- Identify key groups and individuals affected by strategic and operational decisions
- Develop a co-ordinated communication plan
- Prepare joint messages/statements
- Establish communication facilities (i.e. communication centre, media briefing centres)
- Co-ordinate the functions to ensure implementation.

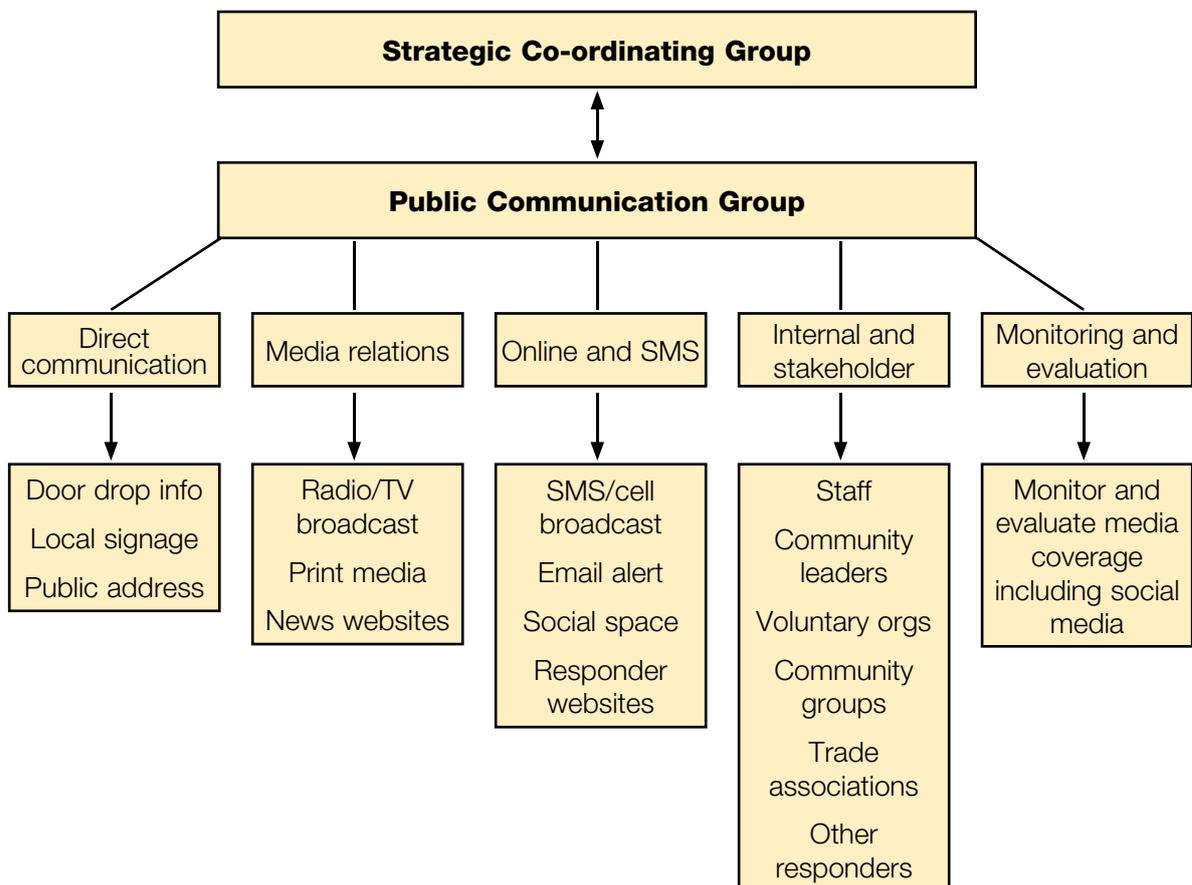
As with any communication team, decisions have to be made about the roles and responsibilities within the team. The team has to be sustainable for the task required.

A simple structure is shown below. Ideally, the senior communication managers have agreed a system of joint working in advance of an emergency. Issues such as the compatibility of IT systems have been considered. A communication plan has been developed and agreed and a number of named individuals have been tasked with taking forward different aspects of the implementation.

The PCG strategic management should recognise the importance of the media as a public communication channel and place the majority of its communication managers in that sub-group, working alongside a number of trained spokespeople.

Communication managers should be designated to lead the other sub-groups, drawing in support from appropriate staff from other key functions.

For example, the web managers from across responder organisations could be tasked with updating responder websites and monitoring social space, under the direction of a communication manager, who provides information about the key messages and the overall communication objectives.



### Agree communication functions

Co-ordination between responders is key to the success of this approach, as is agreement on the different communication roles, and an understanding of why they are needed.

For example, in order to ensure consistency of communication it is important to consider who should take the roles as spokesperson and public communicator.

Working in partnership, different roles for responder organisations can be planned, trained and exercised.

There are two communications dimensions to an emergency:

- Firstly, there is a division between communication of information focused on managing the immediate response to the emergency, and then the related consequence management issues.
- Secondly, it is possible to create a division between the communication at a national level and at a regional level.

The diagram below starts to map out the different communication responsibilities we would expect in an emergency.



This framework defines the four different communication roles; co-operation and information sharing is key to the successful delivery of each of these.

At the local level it identifies the key role of the lead responder as the spokesperson on the detail of emergency events. In particular emergencies this might involve a senior police officer acting as the key spokesperson.

In such a case, the SCG comes together collectively to agree a spokesperson to communicate some of the wider consequences of an emergency. This would allow the SCG to agree who should be the key communicators, for example, a senior official from the local authority acting as the spokesperson, together with any agreement needed about what individual organisations should or should not communicate. The role of these commentators may continue throughout the recovery phase.

There are benefits in terms of managing the message and creating a consistent communication programme. In protracted emergencies in particular, it provides a structure that can be resourced from a pool of communication managers.

### **Scottish Government and the Resilience Room**

Scottish Ministers have a role to provide national leadership during emergencies in or affecting Scotland. The key principle here is subsidiarity: operational control at the lowest practical level required and co-ordination and support at the highest level required. So, while emergency response is led at the front line, the Scottish Government can play a key role supporting and co-ordinating the emergency response. A vital part of this is the co-ordination of information and public messages. In the event of an emergency, the public will often turn to the Scottish Government and to responders for information and reassurance about the emergency and the response to it. Those involved in this should engage early and effectively to ensure that messages are consistent and of maximum help to the public.

In most circumstances the Scottish Government Communications Directorate will very quickly develop a public communications strategy aimed at delivering reassurance, agreed messages and public advice. A communications officer will become part of the Scottish Government Resilience Room (SGoRR) response, and the strategy will be reviewed at meetings of the Cabinet Sub Committee. Experience shows this will evolve on a daily basis, requiring regular communications with key personnel within the SCG public communications functions. Government will require up-to-date, accurate information relating to the incident and the response, so that Ministers can explain the overall response effort and build public reassurance by demonstrating that the emergency is being dealt with effectively.

In the event of a terrorist incident in Scotland, the UK Government would be in the lead on counter-terrorism matters, while the Scottish Government's role is dealing with the consequences of the incident in Scotland. So while Scottish Ministers have a clear role on the consequences following a terrorist attack, there remains the possibility that UK Ministers, including the Prime Minister, may also become involved. Scottish Ministers would also be

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expected to provide information to the Scottish Parliament about what has happened and what is being done. Any public communications will be prepared in consultation with the police, Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service (and UK Government as appropriate).

Scottish Ministers would expect to be kept up to date with the fast moving developments because they would be asked for their response by the media. It's important they receive information about, for instance, the numbers of injuries and casualties, so there are no discrepancies in the information being given to the media.

Scottish Ministers will wish to voice their support and praise for the work of the emergency responders and others helping at the location of such an incident. They may visit the scene, when safe and convenient to do so. They'll also want to highlight what's being done to get any disrupted public services back up and running. New or innovative approaches should also be highlighted, to demonstrate the efforts being made to ameliorate the consequences and return to relative normality, and the ability of responders and members of the public to react positively to challenging circumstances.

The Public Communication Group can assist with all of this, working with the Scottish Government Liaison officer (SGLO), where one has been appointed, or with SGoRR directly.

### **Training and exercising the public communications function**

There is a requirement in the Act for responders to ensure they have plans in place to carry out local exercises for the purpose of ensuring that the public communications arrangements are effective.

Though it is important to exercise the communication functions as part of the wider strategic decision-making and tactical management process, there is merit in staging exercises which focus solely on practising and assessing the public communication arrangements.

Training and exercising public communications has two clear dimensions:

- The role and function of the professional communications advisers/practitioners
- The strategic and tactical decision-makers who will have a role in communicating with the public during an emergency.

We recommend the development of a training programme that includes:

- Awareness of the Act's requirements and the Scottish Government's *Preparing Scotland* guidance
- Understanding of the role of communication managers
- Local procedures for joint working
- Lessons from emergencies and exercises

Where possible the National Exercise Programme will include events which enable public communications to be tested.

# 05 Beyond the general principles

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## **Linking with other SCG sub-groups**

For the Public Communication Group to fulfil all of its functions effectively, there needs to be strong links with, or representation on, other SCG sub groups, which may include the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC), Recovery Working Group and the Tactical Group. The level of resource required to attend meetings and process activity following decisions will be very significant.

## **Multi-agency, multiple SCG events**

Where an event has impacted on more than one area, sub-groups from two or more SCG areas may need to work closely together, quickly establishing effective methods of working and sharing information.

Certain events may also mean that organisations not usually represented at the regular Public Communication Group meetings may need to become involved, and they will be much less familiar with the response structures in place. The Public Communication Group should take its lead from the strategic group and link with other groups accordingly.

## **Key high-level messages for specific types of emergencies**

In some cases it may be possible to identify simple key messages in advance of an event, to enable greater efficiency in the first hours of an emergency, and to free up valuable time to concentrate on the more demanding elements.

Simple factual information that is easily identified beforehand can be brought together in a fact sheet or key messages brief, to be pulled off the shelf or updated as needed.

A core of emergency preparedness advice now exists on the Ready Scotland website at [www.readyscotland.org](http://www.readyscotland.org), and this can be used as the basis for tailoring local messages.

An example of a first hour public communication plan is included at Subsection 4.

Top-level messages that can be used in relevant communications in the aftermath of a terrorist attack are included in Subsection 5.

# **Subsection 1**

## **DEVELOPING AN EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

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The communication strategy must flow from the Community Risk Register and the wider strategy adopted by the SCG, and recognise that the overall aims will be to protect life, property and the environment.

An audience-based approach supports these overall aims by ensuring that the appropriate groups or individuals are engaged in the most effective manner. There may be a number of different audiences, requiring different types of information (for example instructions on action to be taken, advice on wider consequences, or reassurance) and delivered through a variety of communication channels.

The suggested approach involves five steps.

1. Audience identification
2. Communication objective setting
3. Information and message development
4. Communication channel choice(s)
5. Monitoring, evaluation and review

This subsection provides more information about how to take forward the development of a communication strategy.

### **Step one – audience identification**

Identify the groups or individuals that you need to communicate with. Consider the various individuals and groups that will have an impact on the success of your activity. For example, following a major incident one key objective might be to inform the public in the surrounding area to take shelter. Ensuring effective communication to the public of this message is vital to the success of the response strategy.

This provides a good starting point for the development of a strategy. It is important that, as part of the initial communication, planning consideration is given to the differing information needs of various audiences.

How this would work in practice is set out below, where we've used an example based on a sudden explosion in an urban setting. We can identify a number of different audiences with differing information needs, and from that we know there needs to be a range of different prioritised communication tasks.

#### **Casualties, survivors and other and possible victims:**

Group A – survivors

Group B – potential victims who need to take action to avoid further harm

Group C – those in the area whose activities may be disrupted by the consequences

Group D – those not directly affected but know or are related to those involved

### **The wider public**

Group E – those not affected but are concerned or alarmed about the wider implications

Group F – the news media

Consider the needs of vulnerable groups including older people and those with disabilities. Local knowledge, advanced preparation and planning will help you determine what messages they will need and how those messages can best be delivered.

### **Step two – objective setting**

Communication is a key part of achieving the overall objectives. Keep objectives focused on what you want to achieve. For example:

- What are you asking of this particular audience?
- Do you want them to be more aware of a particular issue?
- Are you looking for their support?
- Do you want them to evacuate or take shelter?

In the scenario above, the strategic decision-makers must determine what advice will ensure public safety, i.e. lock down or evacuate. That advice must then be communicated in the quickest most effective way for the audiences concerned. Whether further harm occurred because this advice did not reach people is something that will be the subject of inquiries in future.

### **Step three – information and message development**

In the Act and its regulations it is made clear that care should be taken to avoid alarming the public unnecessarily. There is also mention of the need to protect information which is sensitive in terms of security, public safety, commercial confidentiality or personal data protection.

Communication is about delivering the information required, which may involve explaining in a factual way what has happened, as well as what the response is or is likely to be, and why. Different information will be required at different stages of an event.

### **Step four – choice of appropriate communication channel**

There are a number of different communication channels that should be considered for communicating with the audiences identified. Think carefully about the communication channel that suits your audience and is most appropriate for your message. Start with a consideration of the importance of your communication, when your audience needs to receive the information, what their media consumption will be. Just because the message has been sent, does not mean it has necessarily been received or understood, so it is worth building in some way of checking that it has.

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If you can plan ahead for particular emergencies, it might be helpful to ask your target audience what would be the most useful way for you to communicate with them. Local civil contingencies officers have responsibility for maintaining generic and risk specific plans; it's within the latter that audiences are most likely to be pre-defined. Public communications specialists will work with their local officers to incorporate public communications and audience identification information into the established plans.

Some examples of different communication channels in an emergency are set out below. This is not an exhaustive list but provides a starting point for drawing together a new model of communication.

#### Mainstream media

- Radio: national, regional and community

- Television

- Newspapers and other publications

#### Online communication

- Social media

- Websites

- Email alerts and RSS feeds

#### Direct communication

- SMS/cell broadcasting

- Door to door delivery

- Local signage/electronic notice boards

- Loud hailers/sirens/local public announcements

- Helplines/recorded messages

#### Internal communication

- Informing/supporting staff

- Staff as communicators of the key messages

#### Opinion formers/community leaders

- Elected representatives, local and national

- Other community leaders

#### Indirect/network communications

- Voluntary organisations and community groups

- Business groups/trade associations

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**Step five – monitoring, evaluation and review**

An equally important step in the process is monitoring, evaluation and review. In the short term it is important to learn any lessons as the event is unfolding to ensure that messages can be adapted and that the communication strategy continues to support the wider response and recovery programmes.

From the outset, it is important for those involved to record their actions for possible review, including the possibility of communications being considered in a court or public hearing, post event.

The monitoring, evaluation and review process should be undertaken regularly and not be carried out in isolation. These five steps form a cycle of activities that will ensure the strategy remains dynamic and relevant.

## **Subsection 2**

# **WORKING WITH THE MEDIA**

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While there is a need to avoid an over-reliance on the mass media, good media relations will help enormously when communicating in an emergency.

The mass media, and in particular the broadcast media, is an important channel of communication. Broadcast media provides an effective way of delivering simple information, such as messages about evacuation or rendezvous locations, quickly and to a large section of the public.

The media can be used to boost morale, providing positive news and in particular talking about recovery, which will help with promoting business continuity, and getting communities involved in decision-making or contributing to the recovery process.

There is an important role for the local media. Having an informed and engaged local newspaper provides a positive platform for providing a community with information about local plans and also helps in terms of recovery. Local radio has played an important role in delivering real-time information and strengthening community resilience during recent flooding events. Investing time to develop a strong and effective working relationship with local media will result in a better understanding of each other's perspectives and needs when an emergency occurs.

### **24-hour media**

The development of social media and 24-hour news has changed the way in which an emergency will be reported. Phases of media coverage that might have traditionally taken several days to roll out, now take place over a matter of minutes and hours.

Recent world events, as well as the experience from exercises, have demonstrated the demand created by 24-hour news media. This means it may not be possible to rely on a single source of information, such as media centre briefings, to meet this demand. Communication strategies need to reflect this.

Some of the issues for consideration include:

- The demands of 24-hour news media – news headlines every 15 minutes
- The speed and impact of the use of social media, and its potential for information gathering as well as message giving
- Citizen journalists using their phones to record events before emergency responders or professional journalists arrive, and providing these images to broadcasters
- Identification and training of modern spokespeople
- Technical requirements for mobile broadcasting.

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### **The Scottish Media Emergency Forum**

A strong relationship with the media will place responders in a positive position to communicate with the wider public.

The Scottish Media Emergency Forum (SMEF) is a vehicle to enable joint discussion between senior officials and the managing directors of major Scottish media outlets, and may meet from time to time at the request of the Scottish Government.

# **Subsection 3**

## **ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PUBLIC COMMUNICATION GROUP**

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### **Provision of public communication advice to the Strategic Co-ordinating Group**

#### **Guidance for local responders**

The Act makes clear the importance of public communication and the obligations placed on organisations classed as Responders.

This guidance provides advice to local responders on the establishment of a Public Communication Group (PCG), to support and advise the multi-agency Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) in the event of a major emergency where there is likely to be a requirement for co-ordinated communication. This guidance invites local responders to consider collectively the implementation of these arrangements in their area.

#### **Purpose of Public Communication Group**

To ensure timely co-ordinated communication advice during the response to an emergency, local responders are invited to consider collectively through the relevant Strategic Co-ordinating Group, arrangements for establishing advice to the SCG when required. They will also need to identify a designated SCG lead and alternates.

The establishment of the PCG is likely to be particularly important where there may be a major emergency. In such cases it is especially important to work jointly to ensure that communication capability is sustainable across all functions as well as ensuring that there is the capacity to deal with the increased level of communication, in particular when managing the media, for the duration of the emergency and recovery phase.

#### **Activation**

The PCG must be activated as early as possible in an emergency. The communication of alerts and public information is a critical element of the initial response. SCGs should therefore ensure that their wider activation processes includes the communication function at the earliest opportunity. A first alert system for PCG members can be agreed to facilitate early communication.

The level of resource needed to sustain activity in a prolonged set of circumstances should not be underestimated. It is standard practice, for example, for the BBC to send multiple separate news crews to the scene of any major event or emergency. One of the first tasks of the PCG will be the development of a staffing plan that includes details of the allocation of responsibilities and management of resources. This will continue to be required for the duration of the emergency, and the PCG may have to factor in how commemorative events will be managed, perhaps six or 12 months down the line.

#### **Role**

The PCG brings together communication practitioners operating under the strategic direction of the SCG. The SCG would agree the high-level objectives guiding the multi-agency response, including the immediate priorities.

It must be recognised, however, that in the early stages of an emergency, before an SCG has been convened, PCG members may already have effectively taken strategic decisions on key messages. At an early stage the PCG will develop recommendations for strategy to put to the SCG. Only then will the SCG be in a position to develop a communication strategy for subsequent requirements and direct the work of the PCG.

The PCG should be able to advise the strategic group on issues such as public awareness and public opinion, identifying key individuals or groups critical to the success of the strategy. An important element of this is advising on strategic engagement with the media.

The individual directing the PCG should be a member of the strategic group.

The PCG in response to an emergency should be able to:

- Prepare strategic advice on public communications
- Identify key groups and individuals affected by emergency, response and recovery
- Develop and deliver a co-ordinated communication plan
- Prepare joint messages/statements
- Establish communication facilities
- Manage the media relations process.

### **Composition**

The composition and function of the PCG can be emergency specific and should be tailored to local requirements.

Members should have the necessary knowledge and skills to collectively provide advice in any emergency.

To ensure that the PCG operates effectively, it will be necessary to ensure that representatives taking part in discussion at a multi-agency level have the authority to make decisions on behalf of their organisation, including both issues of communication planning (e.g. message development) and allocation of resource.

It is important to ensure that early decisions are made to establish the capacity to carry out planning, including providing advice to strategic managers, as well as delivering the communication function.

Traditionally communication teams have been developed in line with functional disciplines. Our recommended format involves a simple structure based around key functions.

### Policy/Strategy Group

- Develops the communication strategy
- Consists of heads of communication from Category 1 responders

Supported by five functional implementation teams

- Media relations
- Web/online communication and SMS
- Direct communication/marketing
- Internal and stakeholder communication
- Media/public opinion monitoring and evaluation, including social media

By its nature, the PCG should involve a wider group than might normally be involved in emergency communication planning or exercises (e.g. web teams, marketing and public affairs professionals). It is important to bring in individuals who work in the widest range of communications roles, so that there are enough members to staff the various functions of the PCG. Essential to this is the agreement that SCG member organisations will release individuals to undertake work as part of the PCG for as long as is needed. Continuity of normal business is also a consideration.

Consider drawing volunteers or providers of commercial services into the PCG.

It is important this is considered when training and exercise plans are being developed.

### **Leadership**

The Act talks about the need to agree a lead responder.

In the initial stages of any emergency the immediate concern is likely to be the risk to human health and any possible mitigation measures required.

Given the speed at which events often unfold, we would strongly suggest that lead responders are identified in advance. It might be appropriate to identify the police as the lead responder in cases other than those directly related to public health.

Initial actions for the lead responder should include:

- Contact other responders
- Deliver urgent warnings to the public
- Co-ordinate the communication activity
- Assist other responders in communicating
- Provide strategic communication advice in the first instance

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**Immediate communication**

The development of a joint arrangement does not limit the communication of information by individual responders to protect human life, property and the environment.

If the lead responders are designated in advance they should be able to provide that initial warning, even before the joint arrangements have been activated.

This does not remove the responsibility for individual agencies to warn the public if they believe that there is imminent danger.

# Subsection 4

## FIRST HOUR PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

This example provides an outline of the communication plan for an emergency, using the audiences set out in Preparing Scotland. It illustrates how a simple communication planning process can be used to segment the public and develop different communication methods. The monitoring of social media activity should be initiated immediately an event occurs – how an organisation uses this method as a means of communication is a matter for their judgement.

Who are we talking to? (Target audience)	Why are we talking to them? (Objectives)	What do we want to say? (Key messages and information)	How would we say? (Choice of communication channel)	Tactical implementation
Survivors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Move from danger</li> <li>- Report to community centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evacuation information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emergency responders on the scene</li> <li>- Police support with PA equipment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Co-ordinate with responders</li> </ul>
Local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Control public around the incident</li> <li>- Establish communication links</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoid harm</li> <li>- Stay indoors and shut windows</li> <li>- Wait for further information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Police support with PA equipment</li> <li>- Media including local radio station broadcast</li> <li>- Social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Co-ordinate with responders</li> <li>- Emergency alert to radio station</li> </ul>
Citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keep area clear</li> <li>- Continue delivery of services across public sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoid the area, support continuity efforts</li> <li>- Information about the incident</li> <li>- How you can help</li> <li>- Advice on continuity (e.g. travel information)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Media including local radio station broadcast</li> <li>- Responder websites</li> <li>- Electronic message boards</li> <li>- Social media</li> <li>- Email/SMS alert system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Web co-ordinator appointed and information distributed to web teams</li> <li>- Alerts message agreed and alert system activated</li> </ul>
Relatives and friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use to gather information</li> <li>- Reassurance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information about the incident</li> <li>- Point of contact for information about relatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relatives helpline</li> <li>- National media including radio and TV</li> <li>- Responder websites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First media release issued to all outlets</li> </ul>
Wider public across region and Scotland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reassurance</li> <li>- Business continuity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information about the incident</li> <li>- Wider implications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- National media including radio and TV</li> <li>- Responder websites</li> <li>- National/Govt websites</li> <li>- Social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Media conference organised/spokesperson briefed/Q&amp;A developed.</li> </ul>

## **Subsection 5**

# **RESPONDING TO A TERRORIST ATTACK: COMMUNITY REASSURANCE AND ENGAGEMENT**

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### **Responding to a terrorist attack: community reassurance and engagement**

Scotland, along with the rest of the UK, faces a sustained threat from terrorism and violent extremism.

The UK's counter-terrorism strategy, CONTEST, was agreed in 2005 to meet the challenges posed by the international terrorist threat and revised in 2011. Many national and local agencies play an active role in delivering CONTEST in Scotland, particularly the 'Prepare' strand of the strategy, which is aimed primarily at mitigating the impacts of a terrorist attack.

Recent counter-terrorism exercises have identified a need for new national guidance to help Category 1 and Category 2 responders, national agencies, and local voluntary and community sector partners improve the effectiveness of community reassurance and engagement in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. This would be in addition to the public communications work undertaken by the SCG's Public Communication Group (PCG).

The Scottish Government guidance 'Responding to a Terrorist Attack: Community Reassurance and Engagement' has been produced in response. It recommends that the SCG would establish a multi-agency community reassurance and engagement (CRE) sub-group (in some cases referred to as a cell), which would be led by the police and report directly to the SCG.

The CRE sub-group leadership would be part of the SCG's Public Communication Group and work closely with the PCG in the aftermath of a terrorist attack to develop reassurance messages.

The CRE guidance is based upon the principle that communities will require clear communication in the aftermath of a terrorist attack, especially if there are public health dimensions. Some communities may also require direct engagement and specific messages of reassurance, in order to feel safe and protected.

The local CRE sub-group would take responsibility for the proportionate and appropriate implementation of various intervention options, which are set out in chapter 2 of the CRE guidance. This should complement the activity of the PCG.

The following top line messages should be woven through relevant communications:

- Terrorism is a real and serious threat to us all in Scotland and the rest of the UK.
- Terrorists are criminals and murderers and we all need to work together in Scotland to tackle the terrorist challenge.

In addition, media monitoring undertaken by the PCG will help the CRE sub-group assess community tension.

Further information and the full guidance on community reassurance and engagement is available from the Scottish Preventing Violent Extremism Unit, Room 2F 62, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ on 0131 244 0693 or 0131 244 0951 or email [SPVEU@Scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:SPVEU@Scotland.gsi.gov.uk). The guidance is also available on the [Scottish Government website](#).





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