A guide to writing a Community Emergency Plan

'What will you do if it happens to you?'

Background – why do you need a plan?

Nearly all emergencies affecting communities are dealt with by a joined up, multi-agency response (the emergency services, local authorities, utilities and voluntary agencies). However, a situation could occur, such as extensive flooding, storm damage, deep snow, power outage or major incident, which could put pressure on resources.

We know communities pull together automatically to support each other when emergencies occur. However, you can make your response even more organised and effective, by preparing a Community Emergency Plan. Emergency responders[1] say that it helps when they know who to talk to in the community and have planned what to do in advance.

There is no way of knowing if, when, or under what circumstances you may need to have a community plan. However, having a plan will make you feel confident you've done everything you can if an emergency occurs.

Emergency planning is about putting strategies in place to reduce the impact of an incident.

Introduction

There is no legal requirement for communities to do emergency planning, however, section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives community councils the power to do anything that will benefit the community (or part of it) where there is no other specific power covering the action. A Community Emergency Plan can help a community cope until the emergency responders arrive and also to recover in the long term.

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[1] Emergency responders are split into two groups: Category 1 and Category 2 responders. Category 1 responders have a legal duty to respond and include "blue light services" (Police, Fire, Ambulance, Maritime and Coastguard Agency), local authorities and port health authorities, health bodies (Public Health England), Environment Agency and Defra. Category 2 responders have a duty to assist Category 1 responders in a major incident, if needed. Category 2 responders include utilities companies (gas, water, electricity providers) and transport agencies (Network Rail, harbour authorities, Highways Agency, etc.)

Having a Community Emergency Plan **does not** mean that a group should or could replace the emergency responders. Never do anything which puts you or anyone else in your community at risk.

How communities cope with emergencies depends on how well they:

- prepare for
- respond to and
- recover from emergencies.

More resilient communities:

- are aware of risks that may affect them and how vulnerable they are
- use existing skills, knowledge and resources to prepare for and deal with the impacts of an emergency
- work together to complement the work of emergency responders before, during and after an emergency.

This guide helps communities identify the skills, information and knowledge needed to develop a suitable plan. For templates and case studies, visit the Devon Community Resilience Forum [website][2].

1. Getting together
1.1 Who should be involved?

Preparing a Community Emergency Plan will need voluntary input from the community, local knowledge and resources. Remember you are the local experts.[3]

A community should first select a Community Response Team (CRT) to manage the planning process and assist in carrying out the plan. We suggest developing a Community Emergency Plan with your town/parish council. Councillors could be part of the team to give it authority, access to local records and continuity. You could also involve friends, neighbours, emergency services (police etc.), and the local authority emergency planning officer. Involving community groups such as residents associations, scout groups, Neighbourhood Watch groups, and the local Rotary club could make your plan even more resilient.

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[2] www.devon.gov.uk/index/councildemocracy/publicsafety/emergencies.htm.
[3] ACTion with Communities in Cumbria
http://www.cumbriaaction.org.uk/Portals/0/ACT%20Guidance%20Sheets%20Toolkits%20Workbooks/DT032%20CEP%20Toolkit.pdf

CRT members should:
a) Live in the community
b) Have good local knowledge
c) Have support of and speak on behalf of the community

Start by organising an open meeting. You could discuss:

a) The benefits of planning ahead
b) How the community would cope in an emergency
c) Who could help prepare a plan

1.2 Responsibilities

The CRT should be responsible for:

a. **Gathering information**: Collecting information about community resources including manpower, equipment and material*.
b. **Identifying and preparing for risks**: Carrying out a risk assessment*.
c. **Writing a suitable self-help plan**
d. **Updating the pla**n: Keeping important contact details up to date
e. **Validating the plan**: Test the plan by undertaking exercises
f. **Coordinating and leading the response**

* For templates and case studies, visit the Devon Community Resilience Forum website.

2. Organising the work
2.1 Contents

At the beginning, think about the content of your plan. For ideas, read the plan template on the Devon Community Resilience Forum [website](#).

The plan should:

- provide a framework so that communities can support themselves when assistance from emergency services, local authorities and other agencies is delayed or overwhelmed
- increase the resilience of the community, through the development of a robust and coordinated approach that compliments plans of responding agencies

Objectives of the plan might be to:

- Identify risks to the community, plan activation protocol and relevant response actions
- Identify community resources including manpower, equipment and materials available during an emergency
- Identify vulnerable people within the community
- Establish roles and responsibilities
- Provide contact details for the CRT, community resources, the emergency services and other responders including local authorities
- Decide by whom, how and when the plan should be activated

A general checklist is included in Annex A, to help you get started.

2.2 Getting started

The approach will be different for every community. Emergency planning is not 'one size fits all'. Plan your strategy to suit your local conditions and needs. You might find it useful to review other communities' plans and adapt them to suit you. For examples of other communities' plans, visit the Devon Community Resilience Forum [website](#).

Some emergency situations are relevant to all communities and can be used for ideas e.g. flooding, power outage, isolation, major incident[4] and flu pandemic.

Organise a CRT meeting and discuss what might be involved. Produce an itemised budget (if needed) and allocate responsibilities. Arrange meetings for the year, with clear objectives and timescales.

When you have done this, assess the options available and resources needed. Fundraising may be needed. Organisations are increasingly prepared to contribute as they see how community planning can benefit the communities they are located in/responsible for. There is a lot to be achieved by getting 'support in kind' and non-financial help.

A list of people within the community who are vulnerable would be helpful in directing help and identifying priorities. Special care should be taken collecting and storing data in this category. Consideration should also be given to local diversity/language issues. Some people will need information provided in a different way, or with extra care and

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[4] A Major Incident is defined in the 2009 ACPO Guidance on Emergency Procedures as "any emergency that requires the implementation of special arrangements by one or more of the Emergency Services and generally includes the involvement, either directly or indirectly, of large number of people".

attention. This includes Deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL), other people whose first language is not English (including recent migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, families of foreign students and tourists), people with learning disabilities or certain mental health conditions, very young people and very old people. Language Line should be used (contact through your local authority duty emergency planning officer/Police). 'Easy Read' communication cards can be used to aid communication with all these groups. For more complex information, BSL and foreign language interpreters may be needed if community volunteers do not have these skills (contact through your local authority duty emergency planning officer).

Some people will be 'housebound' or have difficult moving and may need assistance. Likewise, Blind and visually impaired people may have difficult navigating away from a dangerous situation.

To support people with mild to severe sensory loss, use both visual and aural alerting systems where possible.

Where possible, facilities should be provided for people for religious observance such as prayer.

Remember, people not thought vulnerable may become vulnerable during an emergency, e.g. people who do not speak English as their first language, tourists/visitors, people with visual or auditory impairments, people with mental or physical impairments, and people with injuries or temporary conditions/illnesses.

2.3 Related and interdependent planning

Think about the multi-agency response so that the plan supports and compliments it. Devon County Council, district councils and emergency services have an emergency response structure. Include the following diagram in a plan to help explain this:
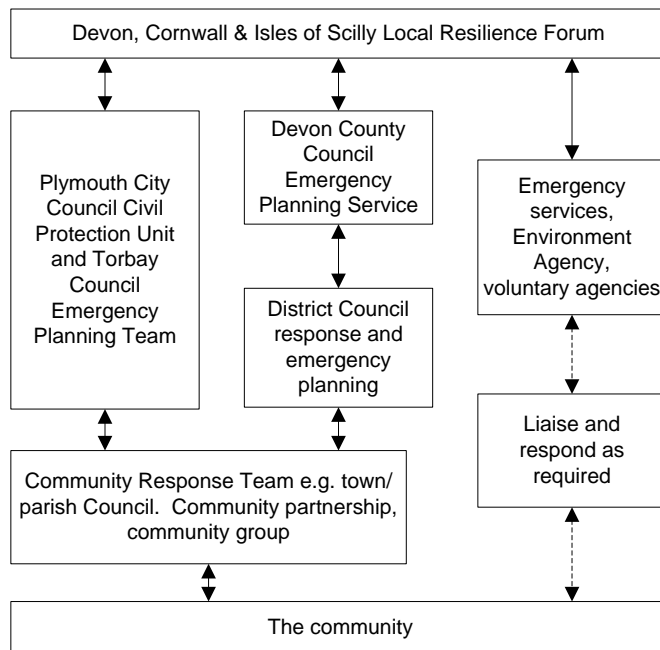
2.4 External assistance

Your community may decide to appoint or consult an Emergency Planning Advisor. Advisors don't need to be a member of the CRT or live in the community. They should, however, have knowledge or experience of emergency planning or management, offer good advice and help prepare a plan.

2.5 Data protection

Share the plan in line with the Data Protection Act and other relevant legislation. Any information that identifies an individual must only be recorded with specific consent and stored securely. Further information on the collection, processing and storage of personal data can be found on the website of the Information Commission's Office[5].

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[5] www.ico.org.uk

2.6 Family/Householder Emergency Plan

Emergencies may affect the whole county. A Family/Householder Emergency Plan can help householders cope and reduce the support needed from the community. Valuable assets and resources can then be used to support vulnerable people.

For a plan template, visit the Devon Community Resilience Forum [website](#).

2.7 Further guidance and legislation

For information and guidance, visit the UK Resilience [websitehttps://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/Event/devon-community-resilience-forum-inaugural-event](#)[6]

Specifically, the Civil Contingencies Act, November 2004[7].

3.   Knowing the unknowns

3.1 Identifying and preparing for risks

Be aware of the risks to the community and understand their affect. Improve your community resilience and prepare for risks relevant to the area. The CRT should carry out a risk assessment and think about responses to different emergencies.

To plan for emergencies you need to know:

- The risks to the area
- How often they happen
- What are the impacts?
- Are there any vulnerable people within the community?

Focus on risks important to the area and which you can respond to.

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[6] [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience](#)
[7] [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience/preparedness/ccact](#)

Categories of emergency can be found on the UK Resilience website[8]. Examples of community level risks include:

- Natural events: severe weather such as flooding, low temperatures, snow, heatwave and drought. The affect may be isolation.
- Human health: including flu pandemic
- Loss of mains services: due to technical failure, severe weather, terrorist activity or industrial action
- Major accidents: transport accidents such as train, road, ferry or aviation. This category also includes industrial accidents and environmental pollution caused by; accidental chemical, biological or radioactive releases, major industrial fires and explosions, environmental contamination and maritime pollution.
- Animal diseases: including foot and mouth
- Fire (thatched roofs, agriculture storage barns)

Other factors can impact an event and should be thought about in the risk assessment, e.g. bad weather conditions can increase the impact of an emergency. For advice from Emergency Responders and local authority emergency planners, visit a Devon Community Resilience Forum event.

For each risk, think about what actions are needed to reduce it happening or minimise its impacts.

3.2 Infrastructure

Emergency responders may not have knowledge of the local area and will require help to identify vulnerable infrastructures and people etc. Include a list of important local infrastructure in the plan. Relevant agencies can then be informed when they are in danger. Examples include telephone exchanges, electricity sub stations, water pumping stations, train stations, railway lines, industrial sites, vulnerable bridges and roads etc.

3.3 Maps of the community

Include maps of the community in the plan highlighting any key buildings, major hazards etc. Maps are available from many sources, including:

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[8] www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience/emergencies.aspx

- Google Earth[9]
- Libraries
- Ordnance Survey[10]
- Environment Agency (flood maps)[11]

3.4 Health and safety

Think about the health and safety of people during an incident (include people being helped and those helping). The CRT should carry out a risk assessment for volunteers and their tasks. For detailed information and advice on health and safety, visit the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) website[12].

Health and safety issues include:

- Safety officers: remaining vigilant and checking safe access in and out of any building providing shelter
- Dangerous materials: locking away anything that may be dangerous i.e. keeping cleaning fluids and tools away from children
- Spills and trip hazards: clearing spills immediately to prevent falls and putting a warning sign at the site of the spill. Checking trip hazards are visible and displaying trip signs
- Reporting: asking people to take responsibility for themselves and reporting anything hazardous
- Activities: checking lifting and handling of equipment is in line with HSE
- Signs: displaying signs e.g. toilets
- Registration: registering anyone using a community shelter, including those helping
- Vulnerable people: taking particular care of young, unaccompanied children, vulnerable frail or disabled, or sensory impaired people. Checking there is always more than one person supervising
- Information: providing information to help people cope better
- Allergies: e.g. allergies to fur and feathers if pets are near
- Smoking: no smoking in the building. Providing a bucket of sand outside the building
- Cleanliness: checking public health issues e.g. cleaning toilets and food handling
- Log: keeping a log of events and actions
- Risk assessments: updating risk assessments in all buildings and on all equipment at regular intervals during an incident

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[9] https://www.google.co.uk/maps/@
[10] www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk
[11] https://www.gov.uk/check-if-youre-at-risk-of-flooding
[12] www.hse.gov.uk

4. Identifying skills and resources

4.1 Resources

Every community has human and material resources. The best way to find out who can offer manpower or equipment is to ask. There will be skills that people can volunteer and invaluable equipment stored within business, homes, garages and farms. There may also be people who can provide a room for the night. For a community resources survey form, visit the Devon Community Resilience Forum website.

4.2 Manpower

Find out 'who' is in the community and gather together the skills and knowledge needed during an emergency – doctors, nurses, retired professionals, child minders, first aiders, caterers, amateur radio operators, local councillors, vets, clerical workers, drivers, plant operators etc.

4.3 Tools and equipment

Gather information about who has 4x4 vehicles, tractors, vans, plant machinery, generators, trailers, emergency lighting, battery run radios, fuel, amateur radio sets, sandbags, signs etc. Don't rely too much on voluntary organisations, they may be needed elsewhere.

4.4 Additional considerations

- Heating: what alternative forms of heating are available and where can generators be located. If there are none, how else might people be kept warm e.g. blankets?
- Water storage: think where you would store water in the event normal water sources become contaminated or restricted. Also, write into a plan the most suitable sites for water bowsers – give particular thought to vulnerable locations e.g. community hospitals, nursing and residential homes.
- Food supply
- Transport: volunteers previously considered under 'equipment' may be able to assist. Others may be happy to act as a taxi service to those in need. This information should be collected during the community survey.
- Finance: during an emergency, local authority financial services use special financial arrangements. Before spending money in response to an emergency the

town/parish council can ask permission from its local authority (district council/unitary authority). Where saving life is involved the local authority is unlikely to prohibit spending. Careful housekeeping is necessary and parishes should keep accurate records for anything they spend. Under the Local Government Act 1972, Section 138, local authorities can give financial assistance to residents who are affected by a disaster. However, claims for compensation following a major emergency may not be payable immediately.

4.5 Contacts lists

Organisations, groups, individuals etc. may need to be contacted during an emergency. Any contact details that are not already in the public domain, such as police, fire and rescue service, utility companies etc. should have a restricted distribution.

Some suggested contacts lists for a plan are:

- CRT: including a community/parish cascade list, such as the sample telephone tree in the Community Emergency Plan Template)
- Key organisations: outside agencies that may be needed during an emergency. E.g. emergency services, district/county/unitary authorities, parish council and neighbouring parish council contacts, utility suppliers, water companies, Environment Agency, BT, local radio stations, RSPCA, voluntary organisations etc.
- People willing to assist: A list of general volunteers
- People with specialist skills
- Owners and operators of specialist equipment/transport

5. Resolving legal issues in advance

5.1 Insurance

Think about suitable insurance. It should cover all those writing the plan, people involved (including volunteers) and resources used in the response, once the plan is activated. Ask your town/parish council if their insurance policy covers you for Public Liability and Officials Indemnity, as well as the minimum cover recommended by the National Association of Local Councils.

6. Organising key facilities

6.1 Community shelter

If people need to leave their homes, the district and/or county council, or unitary authority, will open a rest centre.

For the short term, identify suitable shelters within the community (for people and/or pets). For example, a village or community hall, church hall, school, barn or outbuilding. Also identify who could provide a room. Make sure the shelters are not on a floodplain[13].

Record details in the plan and include location/address, key holders' names, capacity and facilities available etc.

When planning community shelters think about:

- Blankets
- Camp beds
- Transistor radio
- Waste disposal bags
- Pillows

- Lighting equipment
- First Aid equipment
- Kitchen equipment
- Fire fighting equipment
- Dry clothing

- Food/Drink
- Cutlery
- Crockery
- Toys/Entertainment
- Toilet facilities

Finally, thank about catering: where are food stocks, who will cook it, and where and how it can be cooked, hygiene. Remember, electric and mains gas may not be available.

7. Keeping in touch

7.1 Communications

In an emergency you will need reliable communications. Landlines and mobiles may not work. Alternative methods available may differ, depending on the type of incident. Think about:

- Internal communications: If landline and mobile phone networks don't work use hand held battery operated 2-way radios
- External communications: In some emergencies, mobiles, television and mains-operated radios may not work and the community is isolated. To keep up to date

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[13] https://www.gov.uk/check-if-youre-at-risk-of-flooding

with what is happening, the community should be told to listen to local radio stations on a battery operated/wind-up radio e.g. key information on road or school closures are usually reported on local radio. Also think about an analogue telephone in case there is no power and digital telephones don't work, and access to an amateur radio. Notice boards, local meetings, community leaflets, telephone cascade systems, or door-to-door visits could be considered too.

7.2 Warning and informing

Think about how you will inform the community about an emergency if telephones don't work. Three main methods may be:

- Written: Updates placed on church/parish/community notice boards
- Verbal: Meetings/briefings and even 'messengers' and megaphones
- Door-to-door visits

8. Activating the emergency plan

8.1 Triggers and notification

The plan should be activated when the community thinks it's needed. Decide on clear thresholds and triggers when writing the plan. A simple alerting and cascade system may be needed to help activate the plan and to check that nothing and no-one is forgotten.

The CRT might decide to have an emergency meeting, when a plan is activated. A pre-written agenda could be written and used. A plan could be activated by a decision taken by the:

- parish council, and/or
- the CRT

If a community is at risk of flooding, register for the Environment Agency's free flood warning service. This may help decide when to activate a Community Emergency Plan for flooding.[14]

Advise the district council if you activate a plan.

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[14] https://www.gov.uk/check-if-youre-at-risk-of-flooding

9. Taking control

9.1 Managing the incident

When a plan is activated, command, control, coordination and communications are essential. Decide who will do this and how it will be done. Plan for a key person(s) being unavailable. Who will take their place? Everyone should understand their role and responsibilities.

9.2 Incident control point

Choose an Incident Control Point (ICP). This may be the local police station, village hall, leisure centre, or other suitable building. Another ICP should also be chosen in case the first is unavailable. Location is important and flood zones[15] or other high risk areas should be avoided if possible.

9.3 Roles and responsibilities

In the absence of the emergency services, the CRT should be prepared to coordinate and lead the community response and act as a central point for information and communication for the community, emergency services and local authorities. The CRT should:

- Provide vulnerable people with additional support
- Check communications are maintained within the community and with local authorities
- Check confidentiality is maintained where needed
- Maintain his/her own action log
- Create a 'grab bag' containing the plan and any suitable clothing/equipment which may be needed
- Have enough knowledge of the plan to act as coordinator
- Support the coordinator in their tasks

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[15] https://www.gov.uk/check-if-youre-at-risk-of-flooding

9.4 Incident logs

It's recommended that accurate records are maintained in an emergency. Examples of records include:

- Event log: a log of events that records:
    - Time
    - Event (brief details)
    - Action taken
- Supplies and expenditure log: a log of supplies and expenditure to help a post incident audit and asset reimbursement

9.5 Stand down and recovery

9.5.1   Stand down

Think about stand down procedures after an emergency. These might include:

- Emergency closed: confirmation with the emergency services that the emergency is closed
- Return home of evacuees: if a community shelter has been used, authorisation for the return home of evacuees or their movement to longer term accommodation
- Equipment: return of all equipment/resources
- Manpower: stand down CRT members if no longer needed
- Debrief: carry out debrief on the incident

9.5.2   Recovery

Recovery is the rebuilding, restoring and rehabilitating of the community following an emergency/incident. This could be from a simple debrief, to reconstruction and ongoing support to the victims and wider community. The CRT should plan the recovery actions on guidance from other agencies. This might include guidance from:

- The Government: guidance is available on the UK Resilience website[16]
- The Home Office publication: 'Recovery – An Emergency Management Guide'[17]
- The local authority (district, county and unitary authorities): they will provide much of the guidance, assistance, support and resources for recovery

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[16] www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience

[17] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/recovery-an-emergency-management-guide

10. Testing a plan

It is advisable to teach people the plan and to test it. This helps to check there is a trouble-free response and to learn lessons to improve the plan.

Plan for different situations. Write tabletop exercises to test different emergency situations. Get interested parties together to take part and discuss. Visit the Devon Community Resilience Forum [website](#) for ideas.

The CRT should meet every three months to discuss community resilience and every six months to review the plan and check contact numbers are correct. When updating the plan, think about version control:

Date of amendment	Date for next revision	Details of changes made	Changed by
DD/MM/YY	DD/MM/YY	Annex X added	xxxx
DD/MM/YY	DD/MM/YY	New CRT members added	xxxx
DD/MM/YY	DD/MM/YY	Updated volunteer details	xxxx

Checklist

Checklists can be helpful in ensuring that nothing of importance is forgotten. While the following is not intended to be an exhaustive list, the CRT should give careful consideration to:

- General policy (taking into account your community, parish and circumstances)
- Equipment and supplies
- Who to involve
- Neighbourhood skills survey to identify available expertise within the community
- Community Emergency Plan content
- Call-out system/telephone cascade system
- Key holders
- Thresholds and Trigger points for the activation of the plan
- How to inform the community before, during and after an incident
- A list of vulnerable people (with their permission) to check on, transport considerations and options for helping and supporting them. If they identify themselves as needing help on the information gathering forum, it may be prudent to visit them at home and take a written record of their areas of need. If a list of all vulnerable elderly, disabled or frail people could be included in the Community Emergency Plan and made available to your local authority emergency planning staff when they are dealing with an emergency in a community, it would enable responding organisations to go directly to the assistance of those in most need of help and prevent time-wasting. <u>Remember to comply with the Data Protection Act. Individuals must give their consent for you to hold their personal details and they must be held securely.</u>
- Emergency Telephone Directory contact list