

CROSS-BORDER PILOT TO MAP EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT RESOURCES

THE NEWLY-ESTABLISHED CROSS-BORDER EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP IS CURRENTLY WORKING WITH THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ALL-ISLAND RESEARCH OBSERVATORY ON A PILOT PROJECT TO MAP RESOURCES SUCH AS LOCAL AUTHORITY OFFICES, REST CENTRES, EVACUATION CENTRES AND FIRE STATIONS ALONG THE BORDER AREA. REPORT BY DEIRDRE O'FLYNN.

Emergencies and natural or man-made disasters – whether forest fires, gas leaks, oil spills, foot and mouth disease, or severe weather – do not respect geographical borders, particularly on a landmass as small as the island of Ireland.

Unfortunately, major incidents can lead to the loss of lives, property, and environmental destruction and can result in the loss of social and economic activities in the affected areas. Because two jurisdictions operate on the island of Ireland, it then becomes increasingly important that authorities on both sides of the border use the necessary resources to contain the particular situation and safeguard lives.

Whilst good cross-border co-operation has existed between the primary emergency response agencies at an organisational level for many years, there is a need for a more formalised collaboration and planning by statutory agencies with responsibility for emergency management. This would allow for a co-ordinated and effective response to any emergencies or disasters that may occur along the border areas.

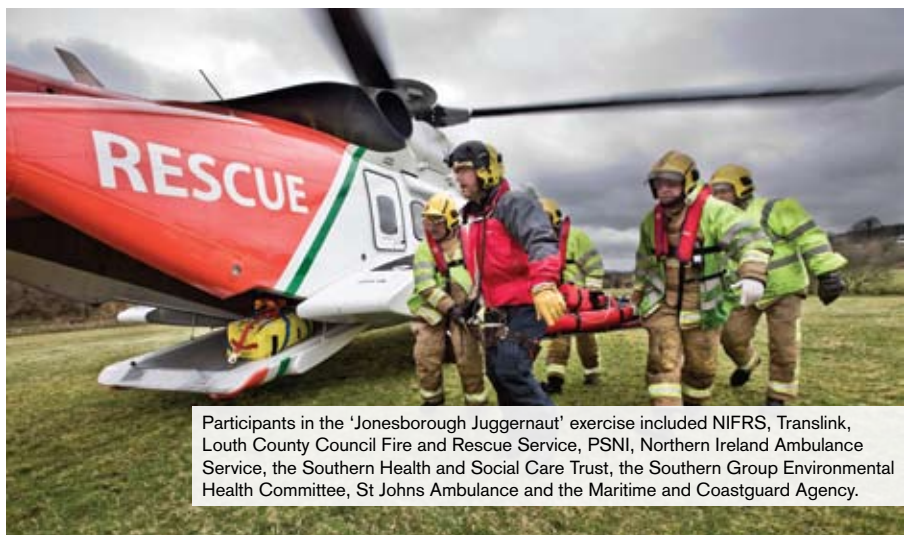
In light of this, the new Cross-Border Emergency Management Working Group aims to increase co-operation between the statutory agencies involved in emergency management. Its brief is to develop strategies and procedures for emergency and disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and response.

NATURAL PROGRESSION

The G8 summit at Lough Erne resort in



A multi-agency cross-border emergency training exercise – 'Jonesborough Juggernaut' – tested operational command and response to an extensive railway and multiple road traffic collision incident in the border area (Jonesborough, Co. Armagh) in March.



Participants in the 'Jonesborough Juggernaut' exercise included NIFRS, Translink, Louth County Council Fire and Rescue Service, PSNI, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, the Southern Group Environmental Health Committee, St Johns Ambulance and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Co. Fermanagh in 2013, when some delegations were accommodated in the Republic, highlighted gaps in information and collaboration at local level on both sides of the border when local authorities had to liaise with their equivalent organisations outside their own jurisdiction.

The group has emerged as a natural progression to the close working relationships built up during the successful three-year 'Driving Change' collaborative project that set out to improve the health and safety of the people living and travelling in the border area by delivering a range of improvements in relation to road safety.

That project, which ran from 2010 to 2013 was a partnership between the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS), the fire services of the six 'border counties' in the Republic of Ireland, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) and Public Achievement, a youth focused voluntary organisation.

"We had talked in the south about links with our colleagues in the north and

identifying who those colleagues would be," noted Finian Joyce, chief fire officer with Leitrim County Council and co-chair of the Cross Border Emergency Management Working Group.

"We have had good working relations with the fire services in the north and, through the Driving Change initiative, we established links with local authorities in Northern Ireland." Joyce's northern co-chair is the Emergency Planning Co-ordinator with the Western Group Environmental Health Service



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MEMBERSHIP OF CROSS-BORDER WORKING GROUP

Membership of the Cross Border Emergency Management Working Group will contain representatives from the following agencies:

Republic of Ireland

- Five representatives of the North West Major Emergency Management (MEM) Regional Working Group (representing Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal).
- Five representatives of the North East MEM Regional Working Group (representing Cavan, Monaghan, Louth and Meath).
- One nominee of Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, Dublin.
- One nominee from Garda HQ.

Northern Ireland

- Ten nominated representatives from the Southern and Western First Responders Groups.
- Local Government (representatives from Southern & Western Group Environmental Health Groups).
- Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).
- Northern Ireland Ambulance Service.
- Public Health Agency & Northern Health and Social Care Trust.
- Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.
- A nominee from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister's Civil Contingencies Policy Branch will also be represented on the group.
- A nominee from PSNI HQ.

Other members may be co-opted on a temporary basis as necessary.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Strategic objectives of the Cross-Border Emergency Management Working Group:

- Act as a multi-agency strategic emergency planning group for the statutory agencies north and south.
- Enhance cross-border co-operation and resilience in emergency management and civil protection consistent with the principles of the emergency management cycle.
- Develop joint protocols, training and the sharing of information in line with the parent emergency management framework document.
- Strengthen and co-ordinate cross-border emergency management arrangements in the areas of risk assessment, prevention, preparedness, mitigation and response.
- Further the development of a support network between the respective agencies.
- Ensure, as far as possible, the interoperability of major emergency plans and response arrangements both north and south.

(WGEHS), Joan McCaffrey.

The Working Group, which is in its infancy, comprises equal representation from both jurisdictions, with representatives nominated from respective parent government departments and the regional emergency management groups in each jurisdiction (see Side Panel 1).

MAPPING BORDER RESOURCES

So far, the group has met on a few occasions, and has agreed its membership requirements and terms of reference. Next on the agenda is to agree its business plan and areas of priority.

"We're taking things slowly and working out how the protocols on everything, including mobilisation and activation of resources, would work," noted Finian Joyce. Despite its infancy, progress is already being made with one significant initiative underway.

The Working Group is working with the International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) and the All-Island Research Observatory (AIRO) to map the emergency management resources along the border area on a pilot basis.

Its study area will be based on the southern and western environmental health group areas for Northern Ireland and, in the Republic, on the North West and North East MEM Regional Working Groups.

"This will map resources such as local authority offices, rest centres, evacuation centres, and fire stations", said Joyce, with amenity sites, holding areas, sand bag locations, and links to external plans/documents also to be included.

"By clicking on the facilities on the map (to be hosted on the AIRO website www.airo.ie), users will be presented with information on size, capacity, type of service, contact details and details on the nearest fire services (based on drive-time analysis). We hope to extend this to include information on the police and ambulance services at a later date."

CONTACT DIRECTORY

A second beneficial aspect of the link-up with the ICLR and AIRO is the compilation of an expanded cross-border multi-agency contact directory. "This will be a great resource as it will outline who to call, their contact details and areas of responsibility because there are different roles and responsibilities in local

authorities across the border," said McCaffrey.

"Access to this information and to the mapped resources will make all the difference when something happens." On a practical level, it will mean quick and direct access to the relevant person in the relevant emergency service or local authority on the other side of the border so that information can be shared quickly and, if necessary, a co-ordinated response initiated without delay.

In addition, the pilot project, expected to be completed in January 2015, will identify potential risks around possible areas such as transport, severe weather, animal health, human health, and industrial accidents.

EMERGENCY FRAMEWORKS

The Working Group is a clear manifestation of cross-border co-operation in emergency management, as outlined in the Republic of Ireland's Major Emergency Management Framework (2006) and Northern Ireland's Civil Contingencies Framework (2005). These frameworks are the vehicles within which the emergency services on their respective sides of the border operate.

The new group is also a vehicle for improved cross-border collaboration as identified by the North South Ministerial Council. Not least, it is a communications channel where agencies from both sides can become familiar with the very different emergency management structures, frameworks, and legislation that have evolved separately both North and South.

"In the north, for instance, we have Responder Groups in the west and south while the equivalent in the south would be the North West Major Emergency Management (MEM) Regional Working Group [representing Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal] and the North East MEM Regional Working Group [representing Cavan, Monaghan, Louth and Meath],"



In April 2015, the 26 existing local authorities in Northern Ireland will reduce to 11 'super councils', according to the northern co-chair Joan McCaffrey, Emergency Planning Co-ordinator with the Western Group Environmental Health Service (WGEHS).

said McCaffrey.

In addition, the local authority structure is set to change in the north. "In April 2015, the 26 existing local authorities in Northern Ireland will reduce to 11 'super councils'," she added. "This reform will significantly change boundaries and will also give additional powers to strengthen local government."

One significant change will be the establishment of sub-regional civil emergency preparedness groups. "These groups will comprise organisations that work together to facilitate multi-agency preparation for emergencies which may impact on a sub-regional level.

"One of the specific functions of these groups will be to liaise and co-ordinate with neighbouring groups and, where relevant, with emergency planning arrangements and structures in the border counties in Ireland," noted Joan McCaffrey.

All of this information certainly will be useful when the Cross-Border Emergency Management Working Group meets in September to discuss the short-, medium-, and long-term priorities for its business plan and work programme.