



# Town & Parish Emergency Groups

September 2003



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**Produced by the Emergency Planning Division  
East Sussex County Council**

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# 1 Introduction

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- 1.1 The widespread flooding and severe weather events experienced over the last few years have highlighted the difficulties for the emergency services and local authorities in being able to respond fully without the assistance of the local communities affected. These and other emergency scenarios have shown that there are actions the local community can take to help themselves, particularly in rural areas. These actions will be more effective if the local community has a planned and co-ordinated response prepared and in place before an emergency strikes.
- 1.2 With this in mind, East Sussex County Emergency Planning Division has developed a strategy document (**A Strategy for Community Based Emergency Planning**) that lays the foundations for local communities to develop their response in conjunction with the emergency services and local authorities.
- 1.3 Town & Parish Councils should take the lead on behalf of the local community; their response can be enhanced with the assistance of community emergency volunteers.
- 1.4 The purpose of this document is to help those volunteers with their emergency planning work. They are encouraged to work closely together with their neighbouring communities since they may be able to help each other with training and preparation. Throughout the county as a whole there is a considerable amount of local knowledge and expertise.

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## 2 Aim

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- 2.1 To provide Town & Parish Emergency Groups with a guide to preparing a local emergency plan for their communities that harmonises with inter-agency arrangements so as to assist in mitigating the impact of a major incident or emergency.

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## 3 Objectives

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- 3.1 To provide practical advice and guidance to Town & Parish Emergency Groups.
- 3.2 To ensure that the planning arrangements developed are appropriate to the needs of the community.
- 3.3 To ensure that any planned response will harmonise with the emergency services and other responders.
- 3.4 To encourage support from the Town/Parish Council.

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## 4 Fundamental Principles

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- 4.1 The need for a local plan must be recognised by the Town/Parish Council concerned, and formally minuted at its meeting.
- 4.2 One person acting alone cannot undertake production of the plan. Two or three councillors or nominated volunteers from the community should be identified to write the plan. An emergency co-ordinator and deputy should be appointed.
- 4.3 The plan must harmonise with existing County and District emergency planning arrangements and established inter-agency practices.
- 4.4 A 'Level 1 Awareness Raising' exercise, as outlined in the 'Strategy for Community Based Emergency Planning' document should be held involving interested parties to identify willing participants and ideas for inclusion in the final plan.
- 4.5 The plan must not commit anyone to an unrealistic level of activity.
- 4.6 The plan should address 'All Hazards' and not be confined to a specific risk. That said, there might be certain hazards that pertain to a particular area i.e. forest fires, isolation in severe weather or floods. Local planners should assess their area and refer to identified hazards and take them into account.
- 4.7 Those implementing the plan must follow the advice and guidance of the emergency services responding to the incident and work co-operatively with them.
- 4.8 In addition to helping the local community, the plan is written to assist the Borough/District council to fulfil its emergency response requirements and the plan should be referred to in the Borough/District Council emergency plan.

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## 5 Structure and Contents

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- 5.1 The plan should outline the role of the emergency group and local councillors in an emergency, and be structured in three distinct parts:
  - General information including the community's emergency response and call-out procedures.
  - A description of the communications arrangements, ideally linking the community with the Town/Parish Council and the District Council. Radios could play a key part in this where such schemes exist.
  - A list of local resources that might usefully be employed. These should be contained in a series of appendices.
- 5.2 The plan should be prefaced with an index of contents and a short introductory paragraph signed by the chairperson of the Town/Parish Council.
- 5.3 Further guidance and a plan template is attached at Appendix 'A'
- 5.4 Health and Safety issues need to be addressed and activities likely to be undertaken by volunteers must be risk assessed. The group should check that the activities of volunteers during an emergency would be covered by their own personal insurance or the Town/Parish or the Borough/District Councils insurance arrangements.
- 5.5 A guide to risk assessment is attached at Appendix 'B'
- 5.6 The draft plan must be presented to the Town/Parish Council for comments and approval prior to final submission.

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## 6 Confidentiality

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- 6.1** All personal data included in the plan must have the approval of those individuals concerned. They will need to be assured that their personal details will be circulated on a 'need to know' basis only.
- 6.2** Further guidance on legal requirements under the Data Protection Act 1998 is at Appendix 'C'

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## 7 Circulation and Updating

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- 7.1** The final plan should be circulated amongst the volunteers and copies sent to the Town/Parish Council and District/Borough Council. It should be held in such a way as to permit ease of access and amendment.
- 7.2** The plan should be updated annually by the emergency co-ordinator or deputy, with particular emphasis on details contained in the appendices. However, personal information should be amended as soon as changes are notified. The main contents should generally remain the same.

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## 8 Validation

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- 8.1** It is important to test the quality of the plan by way of an exercise, based on an imaginary scenario. Shortcomings can then be identified and rectified. The local emergency planning officer will assist in preparation and conduct of such an exercise and participants should include representatives of the local emergency services where possible.
- 8.2** Due to the large number of Towns/Parishes in East Sussex, it would make sense for groups to join together for the purpose of the exercises.

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# Appendix A

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## Structure & Contents of Emergency Plan

The following is a guide for persons nominated by the Town/Parish Emergency Group for writing the local emergency plan. Explanatory notes and background information appears in italics. It may be useful to follow the template suggested below:

### Index of Contents

#### Foreword from the Chair of the local Town/Parish Council

#### Introduction

##### (As follows:)

A 'Major Incident' can be defined as "An incident endangering or likely to endanger life and property that to deal with would be beyond the scope and facilities of normal day to day operational capabilities for those services responding".

Such incidents can occur anywhere and usually at the most inconvenient time. Seldom do they happen where and when expected. Rarely is warning given.

Whilst the emergency services will be quick to respond, they are likely to require information, knowledge and assistance that can only be provided at grass root level. Likewise, the Borough/District council would need local help to enable normality to be restored in the short, medium and long term to the benefit of the community.

Note: The definition of 'Major Incident' may later need to be amended to 'Emergency' as defined under the proposed Civil Contingencies legislation.

## 1 Aim

### Insert 'Aim of the Plan' as follows:

- 1.1 To enable this Town/Parish to respond in an appropriate and effective manner to a major incident (or emergency) by assisting and supporting the Borough/District council and emergency services in harmony with their existing arrangements.
- 1.2 In the event of isolation, to respond by self-help within the capabilities of the community until support from the emergency responders is available.

## 2 Objectives

### Describe the Objectives of the Plan as follows:

- 2.1 To describe the response and callout mechanism alerting the council to the actual, or potential threat of a major incident.

*When a major incident occurs, the emergency services notify the Emergency Planning Duty Officer, who in turn alerts the District/Borough/County Councils of the support required. It is anticipated that the District/Borough Council emergency co-ordinator will in turn alert the town/parish council emergency co-ordinator when this becomes a response requirement. This process needs to be identified in Part 1 of plan (as below). A cascade system with actual names and telephone numbers of members of the town/parish emergency group should be part of an appendix. (See call-out below).*

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# Appendix A

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2.2 Define the role of those who respond to an emergency.

*Describe who will do what within the planned capabilities of the group. There will be roles that are common to each area viz. emergency co-ordinator, communications officer etc. Roles will become clearer following the 'Level 1' exercise.*

2.3 To establish and maintain an effective communications network within the community and with the District Council.

*This could be the setting up of a radio scheme where one exists, a street warden scheme or other method of disseminating information to the local community and feeding back information/ situation reports to the Borough/District council.*

2.4 To maintain information pertinent to the Town/Parish community that may be of assistance to the emergency services.

*This could mean people with special needs or are vulnerable and need help to evacuate and/ or who has got chainsaws etc. available.*

## **3 Main body of the plan**

In three parts: -

### **3.1 Part 1 – General Information & Call Out**

#### **3.1.1 General Information**

The main body of the plan should describe how the objectives are to be achieved. It should be clearly and simply set out with numbered paragraphs.

A brief description of the Town/Parish, its demography and topography together with an outline of identified hazards to the area, i.e. prone to isolation in severe weather, would be useful to the emergency responders.

#### **3.1.2 Notification and Callout Procedures**

Notification of incidents which are, or are likely to become emergency situations would be received by the Borough/District Council from the County Emergency Planning Officer, or sometimes direct from Sussex Police. On receipt of such information the Borough/District Council will notify the Town/Parish Emergency Group Co-ordinator and will outline the help wanted as soon as that becomes a response requirement. The co-ordinator and deputy should be available out of hours.

It would be desirable for the emergency co-ordinator to be a member of the Town/Parish Council with access to keys to premises or authority to obtain them. This element should describe in simple terms the procedures the Town/Parish Council and Emergency Volunteer Group have put in place to receive notification of an emergency affecting the community. This must take into account both in and out of office hours and any subsequent call-out procedures for members of the council and emergency volunteer group. The initial point of contact should be communicated to the Borough/ District council for inclusion in its emergency plan.

Where circumstances dictate, the Emergency Group should be prepared to react independently where a need is immediately apparent and in cases where communication with the Borough/ District Council is not possible.

On receipt of such a notification the plan will be activated in whole or in part by a cascade of calls to assemble the volunteers. Details of volunteers and their contact details should be contained in an appendix for ease of amendment and to restrict circulation.

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# Appendix A

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The most likely requirements in an emergency are:

- The provision of temporary shelter until the Borough/District rest centre plan can be implemented, even if this should be established on a very temporary basis at a local hall, or similar premises as holding points only.
- Where facilities exist, the setting up and operation, or assistance in setting up and operating of an emergency communications network.
- The ability to network information within the community.
- Assistance to the emergency services and other responding agencies, particularly with local knowledge of persons considered vulnerable or at risk.
- Liaison with the emergency services at the scene through the Borough/District Council 'Tactical Officer' (The council officer at the scene with the liaison function).
- The provision of frequent assessments and situation reports, particularly in the early stages of an incident.

This listing is not necessarily in order of priority, nor is it exhaustive. Situations may dictate other purposes for which the volunteers could be very effectively used.

### 3.1.3 Roles & Responsibilities

Once it is established who will be doing what, a tried and tested method is to prepare briefing sheets or task sheets beforehand for the person fulfilling a role. These are essentially job descriptions and very useful in outlining what is expected of those responding and as an aide memoire when under pressure.

They can also contain simple reminders in relation to health and safety such as, 'wear high visibility tabard' or other routine matters such as 'bring identification card' where issued.

Some form of identification would be highly desirable. Therefore, councils may wish to consider issuing identification cards to emergency group volunteers.

### 3.1.4 Health and Safety

The tasks which people are to be given as part of a plan should be assessed and the risk assessment document attached as an appendix to the plan. It should be updated following any incident or reviewed annually. See Appendix B for further information.

## 3.2. Part 2 – Communications System & Radios

### 3.2.1 Communications

Where it exists, a description of the communication system linking the emergency group to the Borough/District Council Emergency Control Centre i.e. radio system, should be described.

The purpose of a scheme is for the towns & parishes to have a means of emergency communication between each other, as well as with the Borough/District Council Emergency Control Centre, in the event of a major incident affecting a part or parts of the district.

It must be flexible in setting up, not being dependent on an instruction to become operational. Success of radio schemes relies heavily on volunteer participation.

It is suggested that where a scheme exists, town and parish operators set up initial emergency radio communications networking once aware of a major incident affecting, or likely to affect their own or adjoining areas.

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## Appendix A

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Control of the network, at that stage, would rest with the initiating source until such time as the Borough/District Council Emergency Control Centre became operational.

Circumstances may indicate the setting up of a small network within one identified area only.

Whatever the circumstances, ability to effectively communicate matters of importance should determine individual radio location sites.

All communication to and from the emergency services commanders will normally be through the Borough/District Council.

Radio discipline is important, clear language and brevity are essential. If groups require training in the use of the radio system, assistance may be sought through the District Council. A brief guide to radio etiquette is contained in Annex 1 of this appendix.

When closing down it is important to ensure that all other current users of this emergency communications network are notified.

### 3.2.2. Records

It is important for any organisation, voluntary or otherwise, in response to a major emergency to maintain accurate records of their participation.

Such records serve the following purposes:

- To chronicle the response and provide a source of update material to the volunteer team and other agencies involved.
- To provide a source of documentary evidence for any subsequent debrief, review or inquiry.

It is suggested that the emergency co-ordinator keeps a log of the emergency group involvement. Such a record should commence at the time of receiving first notification of a major incident. Records should include detail as to the disposition of volunteers.

All messages should be hand written in black ink and block capitals. The contents should be Accurate – Brief - Concise.

Original records should be sent to the Borough/District Council at the conclusion of the event, unless otherwise requested.

### 3.2.3. Closure

In any emergency, a stage is reached where immediate onsite responses have been met and the emphasis moves into medium and long term recovery planning.

Town/Parish councils will be notified by the Borough/District council of any decision to stand down the response. It will be the responsibility of the emergency co-ordinator to ensure that this is communicated to all the volunteers.

There may of course be matters that the Town/Parish council may wish to follow up for the community in liaison with the Borough/District council to help assist restoration of normality.

A debrief should be held involving all relevant parties to the response by the Town/Parish council and an opportunity should be sought to be represented at any debrief held by the Borough/District Council who could then provide feedback at any subsequent inter-agency debrief.

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# Appendix A

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## 3.3. Part 3 - Local Information and Resources

Volunteers and people living in the Town/Parish will have information regarding vulnerable people living in the community that may not be immediately available to the emergency responders. Such knowledge will be very useful to them in the event of evacuation or communication of important messages. If a database of such information is kept it should be in an appendix. However, reference should be made to Appendix C before such a database is prepared.

A list of useful local resources that can be made available in an emergency, how they may be obtained, and who is responsible for them, would be very useful. This information should be in a separate appendix.

### Note:

If the plan is part of a specific inter-agency plan of which it will be an appendix, reference should be made to that plan.

## Annex 1

### Radio Procedures:

- Before you speak check that the airways are clear. ***Do not interrupt conversations.***
- To speak press the transmit button and hold down whilst speaking.
- Identify your position or callsign and whom you wish to contact i.e. name of control.
- Do not shout, however urgent your message. It will lead to distortion.
- Hold the microphone about two inches from your mouth and at a slight angle; try to shelter from high winds that will distort your message.
- At the end of your transmission say '**over**' and release the transmit button.
- Make sure the transmit button is never accidentally left open; otherwise the whole system will be blocked.
- At the end of the conversation/message say '**out**'. This will let other people know that the airway is clear.

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# Appendix B

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## Health and Safety

The activities that volunteers are likely to be involved in whilst undertaking emergency work will come under Health and Safety Legislation. This means that those activities should be subject of a risk assessment prior to being carried out. This may seem to be an onerous task for a volunteer group to undertake. However, a risk assessment is nothing more than a careful examination of what, in the emergency volunteers role, could cause harm to people, and what precautions are necessary to prevent harm.

Legislation requires planners to go a little further in that such assessments should be documented before the activity is undertaken. This ensures that the duty of care to others and the thinking is focussed. It is in everyone's interest that no harm should come to anyone through the activities of emergency groups.

Risk assessing is a logical process of considering what activity is being undertaken, what are the hazards reasonably expected to be faced whilst undertaking that activity, the degree of risk of harm being done to that person, and what measures can be put in place to reduce that risk.

**Hazard** means anything that can cause harm. **Risk** is the chance that somebody will be harmed. The following steps will help in carrying out an assessment:

- 1 Look for the hazards** – what in your plan are you asking people to do that could reasonably cause harm. Ignore the trivial and concentrate on significant hazards which could result in serious harm or affect several people. Ask the volunteers what they think.
- 2 Who might be harmed and how** – think about people's ages and abilities, think about other members of the community who may be affected by the actions carried out in pursuance of the plan.
- 3 Evaluate the risks** – and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or if more should be done. How likely is it that each hazard could cause harm? What do you reasonably need to do to reduce the risk? There will always be some risk. Here is a simple way of evaluating risks:

- How serious is the hazard? –
  - Death = 4
  - Serious injury = 3
  - Minor injury = 2
  - Negligible = 1
- How likely is the risk? –
  - Probable = 4
  - Likely = 3
  - Remote = 2
  - Unlikely = 1

Seriousness x Likelihood = **score**

The Benchmark for acceptable risk is a score of 6 or below.

- 4 Record your findings** – and tell the volunteers about them. Risk assessments must be suitable and sufficient, you need to show that a proper check was made, that you asked who might be affected, that you dealt with all the obvious hazards and the precautions are reasonable and the remaining risk is acceptable. A template is attached with examples which may be found useful. You must keep the record for future reference.
- 5 Review** – Exercises or a real incident or other changes may show up new hazards. These should be taken into account and the risk assessment updated. It is good practice to review the assessment annually. It should be signed by the person who undertook the assessment.

## Appendix B

Remember, you do not need to be an 'expert'. The reason you are being asked to prepare the risk assessment is because you have knowledge of the plan and your local area. If you need further guidance, it can be obtained through your Emergency Planning Officer/Co-ordinator or the HSE who produce guides and publications.

### Risk Assessment Record Template

Name of Town/Parish:							
Name of District Council:							
Persons Considered <i>i.e. Volunteers, members of the public etc.</i>							
Index	Activity description	Hazard include who may be harmed & how	Control Measures Already In Place if any	Risk Level	Further Action Req'd if any	Further Action Complete date	Person Responsible <i>i.e. Vol. &amp;/or group leader</i>
1	e.g. Traffic	Volunteer may get run over by moving traffic, no legal powers	High visibility tabard issued	M	Brief that tabard must be worn		Vol. and group leader
2	Warning vulnerable people of impending evacuation	Distress caused to elderly/sick making condition worse	Volunteers have ID card and tabard which is to be worn	L	Brief on people at risk if known & care not to cause panic		Vol. and group leader
3	Deployed for long hours	Fatigue detrimental to health	Records kept of deployment & times				Vol. and group leader
4	etc.						
Assessors Name			Date of Assessment				
Town/Parish Clerk			Next Assessment Due			Copy sent to District Council	

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# Appendix C

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## Confidentiality

Paper or electronic records of peoples names, addresses and telephone numbers that are kept for call out purposes, or as holders of resources, or as identified as being in some way vulnerable, are subject to Data Protection Legislation.

All such records must be handled in line with the following principles:

- 1 Personal data shall be processed fairly and lawfully.** This means that the information is being collected with the knowledge and consent of the subject and that consent is documented.
- 2 Personal data shall be obtained for a specified lawful purpose and shall not be further processed in a manner incompatible with that purpose.** The information is being collected for emergency planning only. It shall not be passed on for any other purpose.
- 3 Personal data shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the emergency planning purpose.** It should be the minimum required, i.e. it is suggested that it is not necessary to know a persons medical condition, merely whether they or ambulant or non-ambulant.
- 4 Personal data must be accurate and where necessary kept up to date.** It is suggested a regular review regime be adopted and documented.
- 5 Personal data shall not be kept for any longer than is necessary.** It is suggested that once a person moves out of the Town/Parish, the data be destroyed. The person may move within a Town or Parish, but the risks to that person that first justified the data collection may be different elsewhere.
- 6 Personal data shall be processed in accordance with the rights of the subject.** The subject has a right to view the data and check the accuracy and require that errors be rectified and inaccurate data to be destroyed. It is suggested that, in accordance with Human Rights legislation, although the data is kept for a necessary and lawful purpose, if a person withdraws consent to the data being kept, it should be destroyed.
- 7 Personal data shall be kept secure.** Appropriate measures shall be taken to prevent unauthorised access, loss, destruction or damage of data.
- 8 Personal data shall not be transferred outside UK.** The law allows for the transference of data under conditions, but it is deemed unnecessary to the purpose here.

It is not necessary for the Town/Parish Emergency Group to notify the Information Commissioner as they are **processing** data on behalf of the District Council under its emergency plan. The District Council are the data **controllers**. District Councils will already be registered and such data may already be lawfully obtained and kept by them. Town/Parish Emergency Groups should check with their District Council via the Emergency Planning Officer/Co-ordinator that the way they intend to deal with the data is acceptable to that District Councils Data Protection Officer.