

# Civil contingencies - Guidance overview

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

First published 23 October 2013 Updated 3 April 2024

## Aim of this guidance

The aim of this guidance is to:

- provide police forces with a framework for responding to and recovering from an emergency or major incident
- assist police officers and police staff to develop contingency plans and local major incident plans
- assist police officers and staff involved in any capacity in the response to an emergency or major incident

Civil emergencies require a professional, structured and coordinated response from all the emergency services. Police, alongside all other responder organisations, need interoperable arrangements to manage major or complex incidents successfully and to meet legislative requirements.

## What this guidance covers

This guidance covers police contingency planning and response to civil emergencies, regardless of the cause. It focuses on interoperability between responder organisations when providing an emergency response and incorporates recommendations from incidents and public inquiries. Police roles and specialisms are covered, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the other emergency services.

Major incident plans must be relevant to local circumstances and contain guidance on joint working and, where appropriate, on the capabilities of specialist response agencies. They need to be flexible to allow capability and capacity to respond to a wide range of potential emergencies and major incidents. This guidance is therefore not prescriptive to accommodate local and regional variations as appropriate. Interoperability must however be placed at the centre of force major incident plans. This includes referring to the principles set out in the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

The [Strategic Policing Requirement \(SPR\)](#) sets out the capabilities needed by police forces to prepare for and respond to civil emergencies. The [National Police Chiefs' Council \(NPCC\) Mobilisation Operational Guidance \(2022\)](#) provides a framework for meeting the SPR.

This authorised professional practice (APP) contains copyright of Greater London Authority, which has been reproduced with kind permission. It also contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence version 1.0, obtained from the [COVID-19 public inquiry UK](#).

## Legislation and guidance

Civil protection activity is governed by the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#). The Act and associated guidance provide a framework for civil protection in the UK for responder organisations. Associated Cabinet Office guidance includes:

- [Emergency preparedness](#), which provides guidance on Part 1 of the Act and its associated Regulations and non-statutory arrangements
- [Emergency response and recovery](#), which sets out the generic framework for civil protection

Other national products and bodies also support civil protection in the UK.

- [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#), which provides agreed joint working practices and principles for interoperability. It aims to improve the way that responder organisations work together when responding to an incident.
- The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) civil contingencies portfolio, which works closely with government departments and stakeholders to enhance preparedness for civil emergencies.

This list is not exhaustive and other entities, national products and bodies are referenced in this guidance. Where possible, more detailed or specific products are cross-referenced and linked to.

## JESIP

JESIP provides a foundation for all multi-agency planning, response and recovery. It should be embedded within responder organisations through their plans, policies, procedures and training.

The main principles of JESIP are:

1. co-locate

2. communicate
3. coordinate
4. jointly understand risk
5. shared situational awareness

Several products to help promote and embed interoperability have been produced by JESIP. All these products are derived from information found in the [Joint Doctrine](#).

## ResilienceDirect™

[ResilienceDirect™](#) is a secure web-based platform that supports strategic collaboration between partners locally, regionally and nationally, including the devolved administrations. It is administered by the Cabinet Office. Emergency procedures information can be accessed through ResilienceDirect. A username and password is required to access this service via any standard internet connection.

The [Cabinet Office provides guidance on resilient communications](#) by using ResilienceDirect.

## NPCC civil contingencies portfolio

The NPCC civil contingencies portfolio sits within the operations coordination committee. The portfolio's remit is broad. It includes the workstreams that could be involved in responding to a civil emergency. These include the following.

- Flooding, severe weather and climate change.
- Casualty bureau.
- Multi-agency gold incident command (MAGIC) training/College of Policing.
- Local resilience forum.
- Business continuity.
- Nuclear emergencies.
- Disaster victim identification.
- Search and rescue.
- Animal diseases.

The portfolio brings together workstream leads and stakeholders from across central government and other agencies.

# Definitions

The following originate from the [lexicon of UK civil protection terminology](#), which sets common and agreed definitions used in the multi-agency business of civil protection. The lexicon is one of the underpinning elements of interoperable communications and coherent multi-agency working.

## Major incident

An event or situation, with a range of serious consequences, which requires special arrangements to be implemented by one or more emergency responder agencies.

A major incident can take many different forms, such as natural disasters, transport incidents, industrial and terrorism.

A major incident may be declared by one or more responder agency if the above definition is met. Once an agency has declared a major incident, it must be communicated to other agencies by the appropriate mechanism in the M/ETHANE format.

## Emergency

An event or situation that threatens serious damage to human welfare in a place in the UK, the environment of a place in the UK, or the security of the UK or of a place in the UK.

## Critical incident

Any incident where the effectiveness of the police response is likely to have a significant impact on the confidence of the victim, their family and/or the community.

A critical incident definition may vary between different organisations. This means that confusion with major incidents can arise if an incident involving other agencies is declared a critical incident. The strategic coordination group (SCG) should ensure that the rationale for declaring such an incident is fully communicated. It must be stressed however that the general interoperability principles should still apply. Police forces in conjunction with other responders need to recognise the potential for such events to escalate. They should identify when the response should increase to avoid being overwhelmed.

Community impact assessments are as applicable to emergency and major incidents as they are to homicide inquiries and public order incidents. These can help to:

- identify factors that may influence community stability or cohesion
- establish the community's views of the community
- assess implications of the emergency or major incident on the community or sections of the community

For further information see APP on [Critical incident management](#).

## Role of the police in major incidents

The police role in major incidents is to:

- save life and prevent further loss of life, in conjunction with the other emergency services
- prevent escalation of the incident
- coordinate the response phase of the incident (some exceptions apply)
- coordinate and communicate between the emergency services, local authorities and other supporting organisations, both at the scene of the incident and elsewhere – this includes activation of the strategic coordination group (SCG)
- secure, protect and preserve the scene
- provide traffic management and identify evacuation routes (in consultation with the highways authorities and local authority)
- investigate any criminal offences, obtaining and securing evidence in conjunction with other investigative bodies where applicable
- collate and disseminate casualty information
- coordinate the provision of public information, in conjunction with other agencies
- recover, identify, reconcile and repatriate the deceased in a timely and dignified manner on behalf of the coroner
- prevent and detect crime
- conduct a thorough investigation with appropriate authorities
- lead the establishment of a survivor reception centre and a family and friends reception centre
- establish documentation teams
- develop an accurate and coordinated media plan
- restore 'new normality' to the community

# Tags

Civil emergencies