



**TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY  
EMERGENCY PLANNING UNIT**

***Committee Report***

**Meeting : CIVIL CONTINGENCIES COMMITTEE : 18 JANUARY 2010**

**Subject : COMAH SITE EXERCISES AND COMAH REGIME UPDATE**

***Report of the Chief Emergency Planning Officer***

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform committee members of current and future developments in relation to the COMAH regime, and two COMAH (Control of Major Accidents Hazards Regulations 1999 (as amended) site exercises carried out at Shell UK Oil Products Ltd, Jarrow on 23-24<sup>th</sup> June 2009; and Rohm and Haas(UK) Ltd), Jarrow on 14-15<sup>th</sup> July 2009.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The duty to write specific 'off-site' emergency plans for industrial sites that fall under the COMAH 'top-tier' regulations lies with the Fire and Rescue Authority. This duty is discharged by the Emergency Planning Unit (EPU). One of the requirements of the COMAH regulations is that an off site emergency plan must be prepared and tested for any sites deemed by the 'Competent Authority' (ie the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency) to have major accident potential.
- 2.2 The COMAH regulatory regime aims to prevent major accidents and limit their consequences on man and the environment, with a view to ensuring high levels of protection. It gives effect to Directive 96/82/EC which aims for protection throughout the European Union in a consistent and effective manner.
- 2.3 Currently there are eight off site emergency plans in place covering seven top tier COMAH sites in Tyne and Wear (one site in Sunderland is a split site requiring two separate plans to be maintained) to which the above regulations apply.
- 2.4 These sites are of considerable socioeconomic importance and in some cases are, or may affect regional strategic assets. The EPU seeks to work with sites to enhance safety, protect the community, property and the environment. Following the Buncefield incident a number of recommendations have been made by advisory boards and panels. In addition the competent authority has asked the EPU to consider a number of matters. Broadly these may be divided into three categories

- 1) Developments in emergency planning
- 2) Enhancements in practice

### 3) Public Information

#### **3.0 CURRENT AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS IN RELATION TO THE COMAH REGIME.**

- 3.1 Developments in emergency planning revolve around data capture of partners activities, learning points from incidents locally and further afield and ensuring that information is shared with those who have a role in responding to the emergency at the site. The EPU is awaiting revised guidance on off-site planning from the Competent Authority; this is expected in the first quarter of 2010. The EPU is also working with partners in carrying out logistical analysis of off site plans (to be the subject of a separate report). This is especially appropriate as COMAH sites require multi agency specific planning.
- 3.2 Enhancements in practice have focused on response, working especially with colleagues from TWFRS, and on practical exercises. The EPU has also advised operators on 'Buncefield' suggestions made on working with the TWFRS.
- 3.3 Public Information recommendations have led to the EPU working with site operators and the LRF Public Communications Sub -Group to ensure that the information provided is appropriate and accessible. It is clearly important that should an incident occur, that the information provided to the public is concise, consistent and useful. The public information duty lies with the site operator.

#### **4 COMAH EXERCISES - 'OSPREY' AND 'PEREGRINE'**

- 4.1 In accordance with the requirements of the 'Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 1999', testing of off site emergency plans is required under the regulations to demonstrate that they are accurate, complete and practicable. Testing and review of each plan is statutorily required at intervals not exceeding three years. In addition the competent authority guidance says that "there will be considerable benefits from carrying out some of the exercises ....every year".
- 4.2 The aim of these exercises was to test and validate the Offsite Emergency Plans which included the testing of a multi agency response and the integration of agency plans into the offsite planning process.

The main objectives were to:

- Establish relationships between all agencies involved during the initial stages of a potential accident
- Promote exchange of information and understanding of roles between participants
- Encourage cooperation between each organisation

- Increase the awareness of all parties of the Local Authority, and Voluntary sector assistance available to support an incident
- To address the inter-action and relationship between the major incident plans of the Emergency Services, Local Authority and all other involved agencies
- To promote a unified, coordinated approach in response to media demands
- To assess the practicalities for the recovery phase and business continuity issues.

4.3 The Exercises were planned, coordinated and facilitated by the EPU and relevant partner organisations. Both exercises were held over two days. The first day was attended by representatives from the emergency services and the company, this day looked at the discovery of the incident and initiation of the on site response including the emergency services. The second day was attended by representatives from the Local Authority, the police, health agencies and the company, and focused on the impacts and response once the incident had involved the surrounding area and community.

4.4 A scenario was presented to attendees, appropriate to the operation and possible challenges specific to the site. This gave all agencies the opportunity to identify their responsibilities and actions they would take in such a situation, and how their actions would be coordinated. The exercise also explored a wide range of aspects including:

- Alerting procedures
- Communication arrangements between the agencies
- Establishment of cordons
- Warning and informing the public
- Dealing with casualties
- Identifying and dealing with Vulnerable people
- Public health issues
- Media arrangements
- Decontamination arrangements
- The potential wider implications of the event

4.5 Following the exercise a comprehensive evaluation was undertaken, to determine how future sessions could be enhanced and improved. Evaluation reports are published and circulated to participating organisations. The feedback from participants was very positive with an overall view that the exercise was successful and productive in that:

- The objectives of the exercises were achieved
- The exercises proved professionally relevant to participants

- There were a number of issues to be taken forward as a result of the exercise.

## **5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 Members are asked to note that two exercises have been held to ensure that the FRA has discharged, in part, its statutory obligations under the COMAH regulations' and successfully tested the validity of the two off site emergency plans.

---

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Control of Major Hazard Regulations 1999: Exercise Osprey Evaluation Report (Phase 2)
- Control of Major Hazard Regulations 1999: Exercise Peregrine Evaluation Report (Phase 2)