

Purpose

Production of an emergency plan is often included as an action within a Community Led Plan. This resource provides information to help your community put in place a local emergency plan so that you can be prepared, know what to do, and become more resilient.

What's involved

Developing a better understanding of safety issues in your community and proposing a range of actions that will make your neighbourhood a safer, friendlier place to live.

What is community emergency planning?

The heavy snow and flooding in many parts of the country in recent years caused significant disruption and encouraged communities to think about how prepared they are for an emergency. Climate change and extreme weather are often raised as issues in Community Led Plans. However, there are a range of other emergencies that could feasibly occur within a community setting, such as gas leaks, fires and major traffic incidents.

Therefore, a positive step for a community is to produce its own emergency plan: a practical working document which can be put into action when needed. A plan helps people prepare for any emergency, organises neighbourly help during the incident, makes appropriate links to emergency services and local authorities, and assists with recovery after the event.

What is an emergency?

An emergency is any event that causes, or threatens, death, injury or disruption to the community, damage to property or the environment.

Emergencies are sometimes referred to as major incidents, which are on such a scale that the effect cannot be dealt with by the emergency services, local authorities and other local organisations as part of their normal day-to-day activities.

Why is community emergency planning important?

Producing an emergency plan can have many benefits. It can:

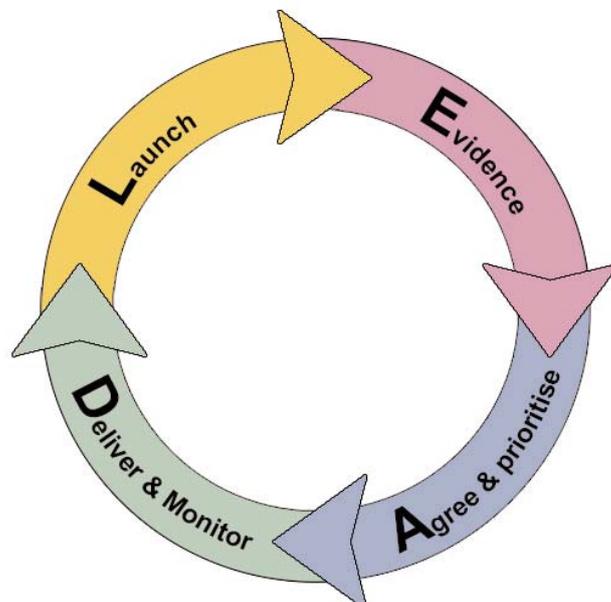
- Make your community aware of what it can do in advance to reduce the likelihood of an emergency arising
- Co-ordinate appropriate resources within your community, such as local knowledge and skills with buildings and other facilities so that an emergency has less impact on its inhabitants
- Enable your community to cope better with a disruptive event on its own where statutory authorities or emergency services are not immediately available
- Assist communication between the local community and statutory authorities
- Enable effective work with statutory authorities and emergency services
- Ensure that vulnerable people in your community are given the necessary help and support
- Inform your community so people know what to do and are able to respond, especially in those first few critical hours following an incident.



What can you do to address local emergencies in your Community Led Plan?

A Community Led Plan will allow your community to take action to maximise the potential of emergency planning locally, ensuring that everyone can get involved and contribute their ideas, time and resources to bringing about change.

To produce a good quality plan for your area, your community will need to progress through the 9 steps outlined in the ACRE Community Led Planning Toolkit, which can be summarised as 'LEAD'.



Stage	ACRE 9 step process
L aunch the plan	Getting started Establishing the steering group Taking stock and planning ahead
E vidence local need and aspirations	Understanding your community
A gree and prioritise actions	Prioritising and planning action Drafting your plan Finalising your plan
D eliver and monitor actions	Implementing and monitoring actions Reviewing your plan

Using the LEAD framework, some pointers are provided below to help you consider how to promote community emergency planning when putting together a plan for your area.

Stage 1 - Launch the Plan

When starting out, it's advisable to interest as many people, organisations and service providers in your Community Led Plan as possible. This will increase support for your plan and make it easier in the long run to deliver any actions you propose for your area.

When forming your steering group, make sure it comprises a cross section of people from your community. It is also important to explore what skills are available that apply to emergency planning. This might be as simple as someone who can organise drinks, first aiders, skilled communicators for listening and supporting people in distress, and those with other practical skills, such as arranging transport.

Be prepared to explain what community emergency planning is and that it can be seen as a practical action in response to local experiences. It needs to be made clear to people about what they could do, what they are not expected to do and what they should not do.

You may also want to let other professionals know about your plan at this stage, including your various local authorities. An important contact in district councils and larger tier authorities is an emergency planning officer whose role includes coordination with emergency and other services, especially in large-scale and longer-lasting emergencies. Parish or town councils might know what, if any, emergency planning happens at your local level.

Stage 2 - Evidence local need and aspiration

You can gather existing facts and information about emergency planning from different sources. When undertaking background research, be aware that there might be information about past local emergencies - photographs, newspaper cuttings and people’s memories can be useful. Remember to recall ‘man-made’ emergencies, like major traffic incidents, as well as those that are weather-related.

The most important thing to do however is consult everyone locally to find out what they think about emergency planning and whether this is an important enough topic to feature in your plan. When speaking to members of your community, you might find it useful to ask the following questions:

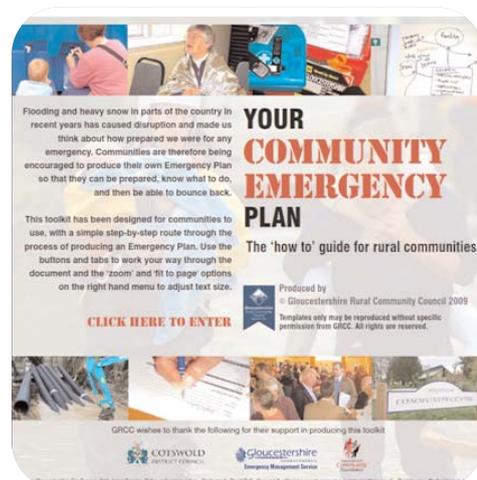
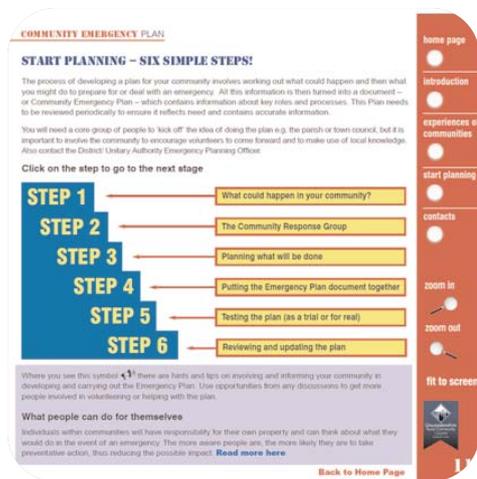
- What are the potential areas of risk within our community that might give rise to an emergency?
- Do you think our community is doing enough to address these potential issues?
- Do you think emergency planning is an issue worth pursuing as part of our Community Led Plan?

To reflect on and learn how some advance planning could have made a difference, ask local people and organisations to look back at any past emergencies including:

- What was the emergency and why did it occur?
- How did local people help each other?
- What was the impact and outcomes of the emergency?

You might also want to find maps with your area’s boundaries marked clearly. This will help people point out the locations of the areas related to the emergency on a map. Consideration should also be given to any issues that could arise for people living on the boundary of your plan area and you might wish to contact the neighbouring parish to involve them as partners.

You can do this using a range of different consultation methods to speak to people on their own terms. These are detailed in Step 4 of ACRE’s Community Led Planning Toolkit.



Stage 3 - Agree and prioritise actions

Once you have gathered sufficient information about your community, you will need to decide whether emergency planning is a priority issue to be addressed in your plan. This should be considered alongside evidence of any other social, economic, cultural and environmental issues you are aware of. This may require further consultation with your community as explained in Step 5 of the ACRE Community Led Planning Toolkit.

If your community wants to address emergency planning in your plan, you may need to undertake some further investigative work to plan specific actions that you can take forward.

Start by bringing together interested people into a working group. The working group might include three people who could lead on the separate aspects of the plan: coordination, welfare, and sorting out problems on the ground. That group could then start organising how and when the plan will be put together and its budget. You will also need to set up a Community Response Group (CRG), which will include people responding first in the event of the emergency; so try to include people who work locally.

At this stage, the roles of your working group might include:

- What are the areas of risk in your community? - find out the likely risks, their locations and what possible actions could be taken to mitigate these. There are national and regional risk registers available that colour code risks according to their likelihood
- What resources are available locally? – you may have some of this information available from your initial consultation. Resources are especially important during those first critical few hours. They are likely to include the village hall; but who has a key? Be aware of who has a first aid qualification, offers from people to keep their street informed and local knowledge, such as how to find alternative routes around a particular area at risk
- Key contacts - let your contacts know that a community emergency plan is being developed: businesses, organisations, statutory authorities and organise how you will work together
- Documentation – do not reinvent the wheel. There are a range of tools to help with constructing the actual emergency plan (see the list at the end of this guide).



When analysing the results of your consultation, you will need to consider what a community emergency plan will provide, and what it is not expected to do, before agreeing it as a priority action.

Remember, any actions that you develop should be 'SMART', e.g. Specific, Meaningful, Appropriate, Realistic and Timed. The ACRE Community Led Planning Toolkit has more details on this. You should also make sure that anyone that has an interest in emergency planning locally is included in this work.



Stage 4 - Deliver and monitor actions

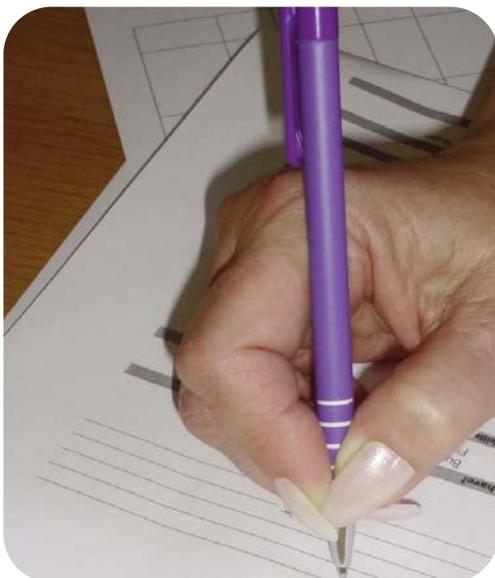
As you begin to implement the work in your plan, remember to maintain positive relationships with all those that have an interest in the work that you are doing to promote and manage emergency planning in your area. As the work builds momentum, you may well attract additional support for what you are trying to achieve.

Finally, it is recommended that you review your entire plan every 2 to 5 years. If you originally proposed actions relating to emergency planning, then check to see whether these have been achieved or not and whether emergency planning locally remains a priority. Understanding what has been successful can be useful for informing any future planning.

When you have produced your emergency plan, it is vital to issue a summary, giving residents the key points and contacts. Residents can keep this information by the phone: it could take the form of a leaflet or an insert in a local newsletter.

It is important to test how effective the plan is by trying out a paper exercise; like ringing your contacts to see if they can actually get to the village hall in the next half hour or perhaps enacting a scenario based on a potential real emergency. After testing your emergency plan it is essential to seek feedback on what went well or not and modify it accordingly. You might also want to link with authorities to help them be informed about this.

Remember to publicise news of your success and progress as you implement the plan. Good PR can generate interest even before you are finished and therefore make a launch a lot more effective.



Case Studies

Lechlade, Gloucestershire

Lechlade in east Gloucestershire had to put its Community Emergency Plan into action when a traffic accident ruptured a gas main in the town and 150 people had to be evacuated from their homes. This event underlined the importance of having a plan in place, ready to go. Once the Plan was activated, the systems were proved effective, and the volunteers were able to perform their roles well.

The accident happened at 6.30am - outside normal office hours, and when many residents were still in bed. The Police rang Cotswold District Council's District Emergency Planning Liaison Officer who is their next link in the chain and they subsequently contacted a community contact in the town. Within 15 minutes, Lechlade's Memorial Hall was open as a place of safety, with volunteers on site to make tea and to welcome people. The Memorial Hall was the ideal location as it had plenty of parking and easy access to the building and most residents knew where it was.

Following this event the town councillor gathered feedback from volunteers, the town council, emergency services, Cotswold District Council and Gloucestershire County Council to help review the plan. Useful lessons were learnt and now Lechlade has updated its plan to reflect these. The learning included a need to put up a notice at the hall much sooner, to let people know that the Place of Safety was actually operating. There was also a need to adapt their plan to include some of the additional community roles identified in the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council Emergency Planning Toolkit, so that better use could be made of human resources locally. They also agreed to keep abreast of any changes to telephone contact numbers so that these were up to date.

The emergency showed that the plan worked well, empowering the community to work effectively with the statutory authorities and emergency services, and for all involved to learn from the experience.

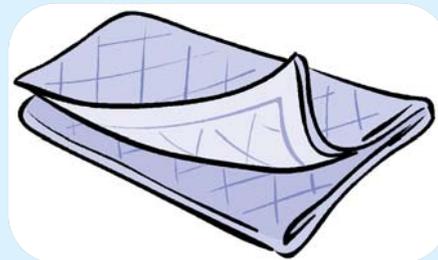


Weston sub-Edge, Gloucestershire

Two people were crucial to the initial development of Weston-sub-Edge’s Emergency Plan. As the instigators of the Plan in a small settlement of less than 500 people, these individuals were pleased that so many people came forward to support the development of the plan and make it integral to the community. Local people wanted to get involved and help in a wide range of ways meeting the requirement for different skills, expertise and resources.

These offers of help meant the organisers had been able to assemble committed Administration, Works and Support Teams and had numerous offers of practical resources should an emergency arise. These ranged from accommodation to vehicles and from camp beds, pillows and blankets to generators.

They found that the organisation of volunteers is fundamental. Given the nature of emergencies, volunteers may be called upon at very short notice, so Weston’s Plan included clear procedures for putting into action everyone’s roles quickly and safely.



Coates, Gloucestershire

Coates Parish Council and interested local people undertook an emergency planning assessment following guidance in Gloucestershire Rural Community Council’s (GRCC) Emergency Planning Toolkit. They found the exercise useful, especially to help get their many ideas into a first draft plan.

The GRCC Toolkit enabled The Coates Emergency Plan Working Group to see what gaps there were in their plan. The templates in the Toolkit helped them to organise information, including what emergencies were relevant to their community.

One of their key learning points was that their plan needed to be appropriate to their settlement’s size, which in Coates’ case, is a small village.

Parishes must to be realistic in terms of their objectives and aspirations. Any community has a crucial role but cannot and should not be expected to fulfil the role of County, District, other statutory authorities or emergency services.



Further information and support

Information and help is available on planning for community tourism projects. Some good places to start are:

Rural Community Action Network (RCAN)

RCAN members are charitable local development agencies, generally based at county level, which support and enable initiatives in rural communities.

RCAN members can help you to develop a Community Plan for your area. Using ACRE's Community Led Planning Toolkit, they can guide you through all aspects of the process, from recruiting volunteers, researching local facts and information, using the most appropriate consultation techniques and broking the involvement of different stakeholders to help deliver the actions you propose.

Please visit the ACRE website for more information, including contact details of your nearest RCAN member: <http://www.acre.org.uk/our-work/community-led-planning>

Gloucestershire Rural Community Council has developed a resource entitled – 'Your Community Emergency Planning Toolkit' and offer training and bespoke support. Contact: Marilyn Cox 01452 528491 marilync@grcc.org.uk www.grcc.org.uk

Local authorities

Your local authority has an emergency planning officer or team; let them know at the start that you are undertaking your emergency plan.

DirectGov

Information on the support that is available after a major incident.

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Dealingwithemergencies/Supportafteramajorincident/index.htm>

Defra

<http://www.defra.gov.uk>

Environment Agency

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk>

World Health Organisation

<http://www.who.int/en>

Pitt Review

Report on lessons from the 2007 summer floods.

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100807034701/http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/pittreview/thepittreview/final_report.html

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