



A FRAMEWORK FOR MAJOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



INTRODUCTION TO A GUIDE TO WORKING WITH THE VOLUNTARY EMERGENCY SERVICES



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'A Framework for Major Emergency Management' (2006) replaced the *Framework for Co-ordinated Response to Major Emergency*, which has underpinned major emergency preparedness and response capability since 1984.

The Framework sets out the arrangements by which the Principal Response Agencies (PRAs) work together in the management of large-scale incidents.

The Framework also sets out Government policy in relation to the role and participation of communities and the Voluntary Emergency Services (VES) in the emergency management process. The Voluntary Emergency Services are recognised as a community in themselves, contributing to the wider community in time of need.

The expectation is that this Guide will assist the PRAs to adopt a co-ordinated approach, working with the Voluntary Emergency Services and progressing in a manner appropriate to that sector, to achieve common milestones in emergency response capacity.

This document, like others in the guidance series, is subject to regular review and, for that reason, it is requested that any comments and/or insights that arise during its implementation are fed back to the national level. Comments should be addressed to:

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20th December 2009

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Guide has been prepared under the aegis of the National Steering Group on Major Emergencies for use by staff of the Principal Response Agencies, and is written from that perspective. However, it builds from a significant consultation process with the Voluntary Emergency Services which began in late 2005, during the development of the Framework.

Following publication of the Framework in September 2006, a national seminar was held which facilitated further discussion between the National Working Group on Major Emergency Management and the Voluntary Emergency Services. The assistance, both formal and informal, of representatives of the Voluntary Emergency Services in the development of this Guide is acknowledged.

The purpose of this Guide is to enhance and enable the PRAs and the Voluntary Emergency Services to work to the common objective of implementing the Framework and, as part of that process; it sets out good practice for collaboration between the statutory and voluntary sectors. In doing this, the Guide recognises that there have been instances in the past where collaboration between these sectors has been less than what might have been expected. The Guide attempts to learn from such experience, and to deal with cultural as well as structural issues which may have hindered successful collaboration in the past.

The aspirations which this Guide sets out to deliver on are based on the belief that the PRAs and the Voluntary Emergency Services are jointly charged with “working together for the casualty”, a view underpinned by the Government decision to adopt and implement the Framework.

2. VOLUNTARY EMERGENCY SERVICES IN THE FRAMEWORK

Section 5.6.4 of the Framework sets out how Voluntary Emergency Services may be called on to assist the Principal Response Agencies:

“There are a number of organisations and agencies which may be called on to assist the principal response agencies in responding to major emergencies..... Further information on these organisations and arrangements to mobilise them is provided in Appendix F13. These arrangements should be agreed with each agency (or confirmed in the case of pre-agreement) and set out in each principal response agency’s Major Emergency Plan.”

In 2003 a report¹ by South Tipperary Voluntary Emergency Services highlighted the potential of the Voluntary Emergency Services sector to assist the Principal Response Agencies in major emergency response. In general, the Voluntary Emergency Service organisations can provide a pool of people, vehicles, equipment and facilities. In particular, they can provide personnel, with skills and training, who can assist the Principal Emergency Services at a time when they are, by definition, overstretched.

The Voluntary Emergency Services comprise a mixture of statutory and non-statutory organisations, as outlined in sections 5.6.4.2, 5.6.4.3. and 5.6.4.4 of the Framework.

In order to set the context for this document, a brief description of the component organisations that form Ireland’s Voluntary Emergency Services sector is set out below.

Civil Defence

Civil Defence is a statutory organisation of volunteers, which can provide a very important resource for use in major emergencies in support of the Principal Response Agencies. Civil Defence services, which include over 3,000 active volunteers, are structured on a county basis and are operated by the Local Authorities. A Civil Defence Board, with a national Civil Defence Headquarters, oversees and assists the development of the Local Authority based Civil Defence organisation.

¹ Holland Pat (Editor), South Tipperary Voluntary Emergency Services: A Year of Working together for the Casualty (2003). This report was edited by Pat Holland on behalf of the South Tipperary Voluntary Services Committee. While copyright is retained by the committee, the report can be circulated, quoted or duplicated by all services represented on the committee, or others on request, on the understanding that the report and the recommendations within it are the work and property of the Committee as a whole and should be credited as such. Mr Holland may be contacted at Pat.Holland@southtippcoco.ie. © South Tipperary Voluntary Services Committee, Clonmel, May, 2003.

The Irish Red Cross

The Irish Red Cross is established and regulated under the Red Cross Acts, 1938-54. These statutes define a role for the Irish Red Cross as an auxiliary to the state authorities in time of emergency and also provide the Red Cross with a specific mandate to assist the medical services of the Irish Defence Forces in time of armed conflict. The President of Ireland is President of the Irish Red Cross and the Chairman is appointed by the President, on the advice of the Government. The Department of Defence is the Government Department associated with the organisation – a senior official of that department sits on the Board of the Irish Red Cross.

Irish Red Cross's membership comprises (in 2009) 5,500 volunteers, supported by staff in Head Office in Dublin and three regional offices. Volunteers are organised in local units, with overarching county and regional structures. The membership is country wide, with 80 units in all twenty-six counties in the state.

The Non Statutory Voluntary Emergency Services

The non-statutory Voluntary Emergency Services sector includes: the Order of Malta Ambulance Corps, The St John Ambulance Brigade of Ireland, Mountain Rescue Teams, Cave Rescue Teams, Search and Rescue Dog Associations, River Rescue Units, the Amateur Radio Emergency Network (AREN), Community Inshore Rescue Units, the RNLI, and Sub-Aqua Units. These organisations represent a significant resource which can assist the Principal Response Agencies during "normal" as well as major emergencies. Their ongoing service to the public includes attendance at public events, as well as searches for missing persons and the rescue of persons in distress.

Relevant Framework Provisions

The following Framework provisions form the basis for PRAs working with the Voluntary Emergency Services sector:

- Each Principal Response Agency's Major Emergency Plan should provide for the inclusion of relevant Voluntary Emergency Services to be part of, and to work in, the response to a major emergency (Section 5.6.4);
- The Framework recognises that the volunteer organisations operate under their own incident management/ command structure and systems (Section 5.3.1);
- While internal command of the volunteer organisation resides with that organisation, the Framework makes provision for each volunteer organisation to be linked with one of Principal Response Agencies, and, during the initial response, to operate under the control of the designated Controller of Operations of that agency. (Appendix F13). The recommended links between PRAs and Voluntary Emergency Services are shown in Table 1 below.

Principal Response Agency	Linked Voluntary Emergency Service
An Garda Síochána	Mountain Rescue Teams Irish Cave Rescue Organisation Search and Rescue Dogs Association Sub-Aqua Teams
Health Service Executive	Irish Red Cross Order of Malta Ireland - Ambulance Corps The St. John Ambulance Brigade of Ireland
Local Authority	Civil Defence

Table 1. Principal Response Agencies with Linked Voluntary Emergency Services (Appendix F13)

- The Framework provides for volunteer organisations to use their own communications systems for internal command purposes during major emergencies. However, it is necessary for Principal Response Agencies to provide for communication between the Voluntary Emergency Services and the Controllers of Operations so as to enable the Officer in Command of each volunteer organisation to communicate effectively with the relevant Controller of Operations and provide such reports as are required on their activities.
- To facilitate effective co-operation and co-ordination between the different PRAs and the Voluntary Emergency Services at the site, the Framework also provides that:
 - During a response, each Voluntary Emergency Service should appoint a liaison officer to the Support Team of the relevant Controller of Operations (Section 5.6.7);
 - The relevant Controller of Operations should provide a communications link (normally a UHF hand-portable radio) to the head of the Voluntary Emergency Service organisation on site;
 - Requests from other services for volunteer organisation assistance should be made to the relevant Controller of Operations, who, in consultation with the On-Site Co-ordinator, other Controllers of Operations and the Officer in charge of the Volunteer Organisation, will determine the tasks to be requested/assigned to the volunteer organisation resources, and for the re-allocation of those resources as the situation requires;

- Volunteer organisations should be stood down from the site by the relevant Controller of Operations, as the situation warrants (Section 5.13.2); and
- Voluntary Emergency Service representatives should attend operational debriefings and a report of all activity undertaken by the volunteer organisation should be compiled for submission, through the linked Principal Response Agency, to form part of the overall report of the incident.

Voluntary Emergency Services to Operate Relevant Framework Provision

The Framework provides that all organisations on site, including the Voluntary Emergency Services, will recognise and operate the provisions set out in the Framework including:

- The Lead Agency and Co-ordination Systems;
- The Information Management System;
- The Site(s) Management System; and
- The Public Information/ Media Arrangements.

Each Voluntary Emergency Service will be required to be familiar with these provisions and systems and to fit their arrangements to the Framework provisions.

Integrating and Managing Voluntary Emergency Services Support and Assistance

The Framework makes provision, in Section 5.6.7, for integrating and managing the support and assistance of Voluntary Emergency Services responding to an emergency. The Controller of Operations who mobilises a Voluntary Emergency Service is responsible for:

- Determining the scope and scale of tasks requested/assigned;
- Instigating a monitoring and reporting system;
- Ensuring that a Liaison Officer from the Voluntary Emergency Service is appointed to his/her Support Team;
- Ensuring that the Voluntary Emergency Service is included in the communication mechanisms employed (Technical and Information Management); and
- Ensuring that the needs of the Voluntary Emergency Services are considered in the Site Management arrangements.

Where a Voluntary Emergency Service may be required to respond in a major emergency situation, the relevant Principal Response Agency should provide the earliest possible call-out or standby for the Voluntary Emergency Service, so as to provide adequate time for their response.

3. ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN WORKING WITH VOLUNTARY EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mutually acceptable arrangements are needed to ensure that the considerable resources of the voluntary sector are available to assist the Principal Response Agencies in the event of a major emergency. The organisation of such arrangements is facilitated for the PRAs by the fact that Major Emergencies, of necessity, involve working in a multi-agency context, alongside a variety of organisations and agencies, including the Voluntary Emergency Services.

In the past, difficulties have occurred in the working relationships between PRAs and the Voluntary Emergency Services. Many of these difficulties can best be understood as dilemmas to be resolved. For instance, the desire for autonomy among volunteer groups may be at variance with the need of the PRAs to exert control on an emergency situation; likewise, some staff in a PRA may fear the implications of working alongside volunteers; there may be a perception in some situations that organisations are competing for roles, rather than complementing each other; and a volunteer organisation's need for publicity, to underpin ongoing recruitment/public donations, may be at variance with the requirement for sensitive engagement with the media at a multi-agency event. These dilemmas need to be tackled.

However, it is important to understand that these dilemmas cannot always be dealt with in the same direct way that they would be managed in paid employment situations. Instead, they are more likely to be overcome by building relationships, knowledge, understanding, respect and trust between the PRAs and the Voluntary Emergency Services and it is the responsibility of the staff of both the PRAs and the Voluntary Emergency Services to work together towards that goal. In this regard, particular responsibility falls on the leadership of both sectors to foster these relationships. The objective of this section is to raise the consciousness of staff in the PRAs of the need to consider the sometimes very different perspectives of the Voluntary Emergency Services and to explore the issues which need to be considered in the building of relationships.

Knowledge Understanding Respect and Trust

In order to build the PRA/Voluntary Emergency Services relationship, it is essential that both parties should get to know each other. Individuals within an organisation usually assume that others know more about the organisation than is actually the case. It is always a good starting point, for both PRA and Voluntary Emergency Service organisations, to prepare short presentations and/ or factsheets about themselves and it is helpful if these are in a format which can be widely distributed within other organisations.

Moving beyond simple knowledge about Voluntary Emergency Service organisations, it is also necessary to gain some understanding of the dynamics of the Voluntary Emergency Services sector. For example, why do people give up

that increasingly scarce personal resource - free time - to engage with a Voluntary Emergency Service? What is the culture of the particular organisation? What is the history of the unit? How is it progressing? How does it function? What are its leadership structures? How is it funded? Is it closely linked to a national co-ordination body or is it an isolated unit? How does it get on with other volunteer services?

Understanding in this sense will only come from a significant level of contact. Also, while individual PRA officers and leaders may gain valuable insight and understanding of a Voluntary Emergency Service, to be fully effective, this needs to be transferred to a wider audience within the PRA.

Appraising Current Relationships

The officer of a PRA charged with developing the relationship with an individual Voluntary Emergency Service has to start with an appraisal of the current state of that relationship. Key issues to reflect on include:

- Self-reflection - What are my attitudes to the Voluntary Emergency Services? What is my history with them? What may be their perception of me as an individual?
- Knowledge and understanding – what stage of development is the Voluntary Emergency Service at? What is the culture, especially, the form of organisation and leadership?
- History – what has the relationship been like recently? Have there been specific difficulties? What lies behind this – what underpins good or weak relationships?
- People – who will be working with us primarily in building relationships? What culture/ background are they coming from?
- Likely resistances – who within the PRA or the Voluntary Emergency Service are likely to resist attempts at better collaboration? For what ostensible reasons? What other reasons might lie behind this? What can be done to overcome these?
- It is also useful to consider what the Voluntary Emergency Service perceptions of a PRA may be:
 - They may see variance in relationships;
 - They may see and understand clearly the counter pressures to engaging with the Voluntary Emergency Service;
 - They may be concerned with “Parity of Esteem” issues;
 - They may have been in competition, eg on Major Event sites?

It is also useful to reflect on what the Voluntary Emergency Service may have to offer:

- Experience of Major Event duties, rescues, searches;
- Some personnel overlap with State Services – e.g. Paramedics, Fire Fighters, Gárdai, Defence Forces;
- Local community presence/ knowledge;
- Leadership/ command structures;

- Peer support systems;
- Trained personnel;
- Resources such as boats, rescue equipment, search dogs, radios, four wheel drives and personnel carriers.

Factors that may be Useful in Strengthening the Relationship

There are a number of factors that may be useful in strengthening the relationships between the Principal Response Agencies and the voluntary sector. These factors include the following:

- There is a defined Government Policy to be implemented;
- The Major Emergency Framework Project offers an ideal opportunity to build good relationships; there is a bigger picture than the local issues, which sometimes may have impeded relationships in the past;
- The success or otherwise of the inclusion of the Voluntary Emergency Services will be subject to external appraisal and scrutiny; and
- Explanation will be required where inclusion of the Voluntary Emergency Services is not successfully achieved.

Potential Pitfalls

In building relationships with the Voluntary Emergency Services, there are a number of potential pitfalls which can arise. It is important that all concerned understand that, in situations where individuals, on either the PRA or the Voluntary Emergency Service side, engage in actions which are designed to have, or do have, the effect of damaging inter-agency collaboration, they will be taken to task by their own organisation and appropriate and effective sanctions will be swiftly applied. This message has to be clear to all in order to prevent escalation and/or re-occurrence.

Such actions could include:

- Public utterances which show disrespect for another organisation;
- Seeking to use the Framework to gain an unilateral public profile, to the exclusion of, or at the expense of, partner agencies; and/or
- Making adverse comment about individuals or their organisations during an exercise or at an emergency scene.

These potential pitfalls are best dealt with in advance by agreeing, on paper or informally, to a “contract” between the organisations, committing them to a public attitude of respect towards each other while allowing for frank and open discussions after an event in private.

4. STRUCTURES AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL PRA/ VOLUNTARY EMERGENCY SERVICE COLLABORATION

Approach to Structures and Arrangements

This Guide promulgates an approach which fits with the principles underpinning the Framework and is modelled on the South Tipperary experience. The approach of the Voluntary Emergency Services in South Tipperary has greatly increased their capacity to work both together and with the local PRAs, for the benefit of the casualty, while respecting the independence and distinct identity of each voluntary service.

The Individual Voluntary Emergency Service/PRA Link

The primary structure for the successful integration of the Voluntary Emergency Services into emergency operations is the link between each Voluntary Emergency Service and its relevant PRA, as set out in Table 1 of this Guide.

This Guide promulgates an approach that includes:

- Full Voluntary Emergency Service participation with its relevant PRA;
- Each Voluntary Emergency Service agreeing to work in a major emergency response under the control of a PRA, in accordance with the terms of the Framework, while retaining its autonomy and its own working arrangement;
- During a major emergency, mobilising a liaison officer from each Voluntary Emergency Service to join the Support Team of the relevant PRA Controller of Operations;
- Pre-agreed and mutually acceptable arrangements, governing the roles, mobilisation, communications, operation and reporting of the Voluntary Emergency Service with the relevant PRA and others involved in the response; and
- Harnessing the work of the Voluntary Emergency Service to an optimum level, in support of the PRAs and PESSs.

Wider Voluntary Emergency Services/PRA Co-ordination

As well as the individual Voluntary Emergency Service/PRA link, already discussed, it is considered appropriate and beneficial to provide for wider co-ordination of the Voluntary Emergency Services with the PRAs in a region, as well as for intra-Voluntary Emergency Service co-ordination. To facilitate this process, it is recommended that each MEM Regional Working Group should establish a sub-group, with representation drawn from the Voluntary Emergency Services organisations in the region which are interested in working with the PRAs during major emergency situations. (Where it is considered appropriate, for geographic or other reasons, this Regional Sub Group may be replaced, or supplemented, with a number of Sub Regional Groups, perhaps based on an individual county or a number of counties.)

The aims and objectives of these Voluntary Emergency Service sub-groups are to foster inter-service collaboration and to ensure appropriate, mutually acceptable arrangements for the integration of the work of the Voluntary Emergency Services with the Principal Response Agencies within the Region. These Voluntary Emergency Service sub-groups can also provide an additional platform, where the PRAs and the Voluntary Emergency Services can work together, to enhance preparedness and co-ordination with the following initial objectives:

- To develop a resource list for the Voluntary Emergency Services in the Region/Area;
- To develop Voluntary Emergency Services mobilisation/call-out arrangements;
- To work to include the voluntary sector in major emergency preparedness, training and exercises;
- To consider communication requirements, including inter-service communications;
- To consider arrangements for access to Critical Incident Stress Management services, including awareness/training for voluntary services;
- To organise joint events;
- To consider and pursue areas where the PRAs can provide practical assistance to the Voluntary Emergency Services, while respecting their independence; and
- To review the roles/tasks which the Voluntary Emergency Services could provide in normal situations as well as during major emergencies.

The above recommendations are aimed at promoting/developing the Voluntary Emergency Services in harmony with the Principal Response Agencies and with each other, in the interests of the casualty.

In a complementary process, Voluntary Emergency Service organisations, which are interested in working with the PRAs during major emergencies, might also consider coming together to form Voluntary Emergency Service Committees on a Regional or even National basis, as appropriate.

5. POTENTIAL ROLES FOR THE VOLUNTARY EMERGENCY SERVICES

The Framework sets out the functions and roles of the PRAs in major emergencies. In preparing to undertake these functions and roles, the Framework requires the PRAs to consider and include the capacity of the Voluntary Emergency Services sector to undertake functions on their behalf or to support them in their roles.

The process of identifying roles for the Voluntary Emergency Services, preparing for working with them, exercising/ using them and evaluating the success or otherwise of that involvement, is a cyclical one, which should be undertaken as a joint venture between each Voluntary Emergency Service and its linked PRA. It should not be done unilaterally, in isolation, or without agreement between the parties.

Each Voluntary Emergency Service has, in general, a specific mission or area of operation in which it strives to work. It is vital that there is clarity on both sides in relation to the roles of a Voluntary Emergency Service, so that there is no reason or excuse for their exclusion, where there is a valid need for them, and so that they can undertake the development work necessary to underpin and audit their capacity for these roles.

In general the roles of a Voluntary Emergency Service in major emergencies should:

- Be in line with any relevant national policy, guidance or direction;
- Reflect the core mission and competencies of the Voluntary Emergency Service;
- Reflect the real/audited capacity of the Voluntary Emergency Service;
- Build on the strengths of the Voluntary Emergency Service, including their community links and local knowledge, and fill a gap in community need;
- Be developed out of or link to the Voluntary Emergency Services role in normal emergency or public event work;
- Be pre-planned and agreed between the Voluntary Emergency Service and the relevant linked PRA; and
- Be written into both the PRA's MEP and the Voluntary Emergency Service's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

As set out in the Framework, the actual tasks requested of / assigned to a specific Voluntary Emergency Service by the designated Controller of Operations on the day of the emergency should reflect:

- The needs of the situation and of those affected/ threatened by the emergency;
- The risks associated with the situation; and
- The capacity, competence (knowledge, skills and experience) and pre-planned roles of the Voluntary Emergency Service.

In addition to their potential roles at the site of a major emergency, the Voluntary Emergency Services can play a very significant role off-site. While there may be a desire to be at the centre of activity, in certain circumstances the key support from the Voluntary Emergency Services may be best given off-site.

What is important is that clarity on the task/roles of the Voluntary Emergency Service is arrived at between each Voluntary Emergency Service and its linked PRA. It is also important that the Voluntary Emergency Services are not misled into preparing for agreed roles but never being called or used in an emergency situation.

Voluntary Emergency Service Support for Local Authority Functions

Civil Defence is the main Voluntary Emergency Service linked to the Local Authorities. It is expected that the Civil Defence service could assist a Local Authority during a major emergency in the following areas:

- Rescue
 - Open Country
 - Buildings and Transport
 - Water
- Fire-fighting
- Body Recovery
- Flood Relief
- Radiation Detection
- Provision of Transport

Civil Defence also has the potential to undertake a number of specific functions, including:

- the operation of Reception Centres for evacuees/displaced persons, including the logging of information;
- the operation of temporary accommodation for evacuees, including the provision of food, bedding, welfare etc.; and
- the provision of food/catering for personnel at the site of a major emergency.

Voluntary Emergency Service Support for An Garda Síochána

It is expected that the Civil Defence could assist An Garda Síochána in the following areas:

- Traffic & Crowd Control
- Search and Rescue
- Evacuation

Mountain and Cave Rescue Teams are to the fore in undertaking search and rescue in their specialised areas of operation. Mountain Rescue Teams, in particular, have well developed knowledge and skills, and are, in general, the service called upon by An Garda Síochána to undertake and lead search and rescue in elevated/ difficult terrain.

Subsidiary Search and Rescue and In-Shore Rescue Units of the Irish Red Cross, could also support An Garda Síochána.

The River Rescue and Sub-Aqua clubs may also be called to assist the Garda Sub-Aqua Team in response to water based emergencies.

Voluntary Emergency Service Support for the Health Service Executive

There are a number of well-established organisations, which regularly provide casualty care and support at large scale public events, and which can mobilise significant resources in support of the HSE during a major emergency in terms of ambulance transport, first-aid, and casualty evacuation. These include the Civil Defence, the Irish Red Cross, the Order of Malta Ambulance Corps and the St John Ambulance Brigade of Ireland.

With their expertise and focus in the areas of first aid, casualty support and casualty transport, these organisations can play a significant role in assisting the Ambulance Service in a number of areas. This support may be at the site of a major emergency, particularly where an event is of extended duration, but is more likely to be off-site, involving tasks such as the movement of existing hospital patients, as part of a decanting process.

They can also provide off-site support to the HSE in a number of other areas, including the care and support of Evacuees and Survivors, in particular by manning Rest Centres, as well as supporting the Friends and Relatives of casualties. For further details see Guidance Document 6: “**A Guide to Managing Evacuation**” on the Major Emergency Management website at www.mem.ie.

6. SPECIFIC ISSUES TO CONSIDER

In this chapter, some specific issues which underpin successful collaboration between PRAs and the Voluntary Emergency Services are considered. Some of the headings in this chapter are repeated as recommended headings for a typical PRA /Voluntary Emergency Service Agreement, as set out in Annex 1.

Callout and Mobilisation Procedures

One of the key differences between the PES and the Voluntary Emergency Service sector is in their response time to an emergency alert. It is expected that the staff of a Principal Emergency Service will respond within a very short time on being alerted to an emergency situation. The Voluntary Emergency Services, on the other hand, depending as they do on volunteers, are not usually in a position to respond as quickly. (This is why they need to be on call-out or standby as early as possible). The objective of mobilising the Voluntary Emergency Services during a major emergency, therefore, will usually be to provide an auxiliary or relief service, which can provide support (or take over at prolonged operations), when the initial PES response is overwhelmed by the scale or duration of the emergency.

It is important to note that some of the Voluntary Emergency Services, such as Mountain Rescue Teams, do act as front line responders, although the nature and overall timeline of their activities are not as minute critical as the Fire or Ambulance Services. In these circumstances, what is required of the Voluntary Emergency Service is to have pre-planned, appropriate, reliable callout mechanisms, operating to agreed procedures.

It is envisaged that each PRA will include in its Major Emergency Plan a provision for notification to be given to its linked Voluntary Emergency Service(s) on the declaration of a major emergency by any one of the three PRAs. This notification procedure may include a standby arrangement, where that is appropriate.

Each Voluntary Emergency Service will be expected to:

- Have an agreed contact point (or points) which can receive this notification and cascade it on within the service;
- Use relevant Communications/ Information Technology, such as text alerts, to mobilise volunteers, in addition to the more traditional use of landlines for ringing around;
- Consider using dedicated paging mobilisation services where the Voluntary Emergency Service is regarded as a front-line service, (eg Mountain Rescue Teams);
- Have nominated mobilisation centres to which volunteers will attend, and where they will form into their units, don appropriate PPE, etc; and

- Keep the relevant PRA briefed on progress with the mobilisation, if necessary via a member who is not responding, who can act as Rear Control while the Voluntary Emergency Service's team is in transit.

Travelling to the Scene

The Framework specifies that no service should mobilise/ travel to the scene of a major emergency unless specifically requested to do so by the relevant PRA. As noted above, a Voluntary Emergency Service may be requested to provide important support services at locations other than the site of the major emergency. When mobilised to a major emergency site, Voluntary Emergency Service personnel should:

- Travel to the scene, having been requested to do so, in their service vehicles; these vehicles should be readily identifiable, to assist the PRA officers responsible for Site Management arrangements;
- Vehicles fitted with emergency blue lights and sirens (eg Voluntary Emergency Services' ambulances) should travel in accordance with the relevant Road Traffic Regulations (SI No342 of 2006), which apply to the statutory services;
- No vehicle should be fitted with blue lights or sirens except in accordance with the above Regulations and with the specific approval of the linked PRA; and
- In general, drivers from different agencies should not drive vehicles of any other agency or service.

Voluntary Emergency Service Rendezvous Point (RVP)

Voluntary Emergency Services may have insufficient liveried Voluntary Emergency Service vehicles to transport responders and their equipment to designated response areas. Voluntary Emergency Service responders reporting to emergency incidents, therefore, are often required to report in private vehicles, marked with official Voluntary Emergency Service signs, to a pre-designed Rendezvous Point (RVP). Controllers of Operations who requests the deployment of Voluntary Emergency Services should consider the designation of an RVP to allow the Voluntary Emergency Service personnel to assemble and prepare prior to deployment. The location of this designated RVP should be issued as part of the Voluntary Emergency Service mobilisation instructions.

Training Standards

One of the most frequently expressed concerns among PRAs relates to the standard of work/ service which a Voluntary Emergency Service volunteer can be expected to provide. PRAs sometimes express concern at the standards and consistency in training in some Voluntary Emergency Services. However, in general, where nationally recognised training and accreditation standards exist for the functions involved, the Voluntary Emergency Services endeavour to use these standards and to train and accredit members and this accreditation may, in fact, be a significant incentive to volunteers.

The Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) Education and Training is a case in point. Each PRA should endeavour to identify (or develop) appropriate national standards, which their linked Voluntary Emergency Service can use to train their volunteers. It is also intended that the Voluntary Emergency Services should train their volunteers in the arrangements set out in the Framework, in order to enable them to know and work those arrangements, should they ever be required to do so.

Private Mobile Radio (PMR) systems are in common use among the Principal Emergency Services and the Voluntary Emergency Services. Each Voluntary Emergency Service needs to adopt and use common radio procedures in order to facilitate communications with their linked PRA and other Voluntary Emergency Services. Each PRA should supply a copy of its radio procedures to the linked Voluntary Emergency Services, and should agree call-signs with them.

While each Voluntary Emergency Service is responsible for implementing its own training programme, one of the most effective ways of building the relationship between the PRAs and the Voluntary Emergency Services is if PRA instructors become involved in delivering relevant training to volunteers. This helps build confidence in capacity, and is an effective use of existing resources.

Participation in Exercises

The Framework makes provision for a programme of developmental exercises to be undertaken, initially within each organisation and later in association with other partner organisations, in order to rehearse and test the agreed structures, processes, procedures and protocols.

It should be the policy of each PRA to ensure that its linked Voluntary Emergency Services are included in exercises so as to develop real working relationships in advance of their participation in any emergencies. In addition to exercising mobilisation, communication and co-ordination arrangements, these exercises should also exercise the roles set out for the Voluntary Emergency Services involved.

Insurance/Liability

It is essential that all Voluntary Emergency Services' activities are covered by appropriate insurances so as to protect members of the public, other services, and the volunteers of the Voluntary Emergency Services themselves, who may be affected or injured during the course of an emergency. It is vital that each PRA investigates the current forms and levels of insurance of its linked Voluntary Emergency Services.

What is important here is that there is clarity about types and levels of insurance cover under which linked Voluntary Emergency Services are operating and that no Voluntary Emergency Service is requested to become involved in a situation which is not covered by its insurance policies.

In order to offer a degree of protection to casual volunteers at the site of an emergency, the Framework provides for the Civil Defence organisation, working in conjunction with An Garda Síochána, to register and provide a temporary membership to such casual volunteers.

Communications Systems (Technical)

A Working Draft of Guidance Document 7 “**A Guide to Communications Systems (Technical)**” is available on the Major Emergency Management website at www.mem.ie. This document sets out the key communication links which will apply in the event of a major emergency and each Voluntary Emergency Service should consider the implications of this guidance for its own communications, and plan and prepare accordingly.

Both PRAs and other Voluntary Emergency Services should be aware of the existence of the Amateur Radio Emergency Network (AREN), which is a public service voluntary radio communications network, run by the Irish Radio Transmitters Society, in co-operation with the communications regulator (ComReg). AREN is a self-contained ad hoc communications resource and has the potential to assist both the Statutory and Voluntary Emergency Services in situations where normal communications links are unavailable (black spots, etc.) or overloaded (large-scale or prolonged incident).

Equipment

As with training, there is a need to ensure that equipment used by the Voluntary Emergency Services is appropriate and compatible to the greatest extent possible with that of the linked PRAs. Ideally, PRAs should inform linked Voluntary Emergency Services of the appropriate/ expected standards to use in the procurement of equipment. Joint / group purchasing schemes may offer attractions in certain sectors where bulk-buying can achieve economies that would not be open to small scale Voluntary Emergency Service purchasers.

Auditing and Appraisal

The Framework requires that appraisal of preparedness for major emergency response should be carried out on an annual basis within each PRA and also on a Regional Inter-Agency basis. Preferably, a similar situation should apply in the Voluntary Emergency Service sector and, although the introduction of appraisal for major emergency preparedness will be challenging, it offers a real opportunity for the Voluntary Emergency Services to demonstrate their abilities in a transparent manner.

Where a Voluntary Emergency Service is using externally set standards and accreditation systems for its emergency response role, the question of benchmark standards is easily resolved. However, in the bulk of situations this may not apply and the task of developing appropriate audit and appraisal procedures for a Voluntary Emergency Service is primarily one for the Voluntary Emergency Service itself, with assistance from its linked PRAs.

In this regard, it is important to note that the unilateral imposition of inappropriate standards by a PRA on a Voluntary Emergency Service, at an early stage of relationship building, could be very detrimental to the objective of harnessing their capability for major emergency response.

The issue of who carries out an appraisal also arises. While independent external evaluation would always be a preferred option, in the early stages it is probably most appropriate that any audit/ appraisal is carried out by the Voluntary Emergency Service itself. The linked PRA could participate if invited, as a quality assurance measure.

Safety, Health and Welfare

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Acts impose significant obligations on the PRAs. The provisions of these Acts, as they apply to volunteers, are a matter for the volunteer organisations and their own health and safety statements. It is appropriate for a PRA to insist that any Voluntary Emergency Service, which it may mobilise to assist in a major emergency response, will operate safely, recognising the risks and having an appropriate risk management and mitigation plan in place, and in compliance with the legislation:

The following is a list of headings/issues which could be used when considering the issue of safety in an emergency services environment:

- General Approach to Managing Safety;
- Safe Places of Work;
- Safe Systems of Work;
- Safe Person Concept;
- Training;
- Equipment;
- Health and Medical Issues; and
- Welfare and Stress Management.

ANNEX 1

RECOMMENDED HEADINGS FOR PRA/ VOLUNTARY EMERGENCY SERVICE AGREEMENT

- 1 Introduction to Agreement**
- 2 Role(s) of Voluntary Emergency Service**
- 3 Callout and Mobilisation Procedures**
- 4 Training**
- 5 Exercises**
- 6 Communications**
- 7 Equipment**
- 8 Safety Health and Welfare**
- 9 Insurance/ Liability**
- 10 Auditing and Appraisal**
- 11 Review of Agreement**