

Background and Context

In the early hours of Sunday 11 December 2005, explosions at Buncefield Oil Storage Depot, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire resulted in a large fire, which engulfed a high proportion of the site.

Over 40 people were injured; there were no fatalities. Significant damage occurred to both commercial and residential properties in the vicinity and 2,000 people were evacuated on emergency service advice.

The fire burned for several days, destroying most of the site and emitting large clouds of black smoke into the atmosphere. Over 16,000 employees within the adjacent Maylands Industrial Area were unable to access work and 92 businesses were displaced for more than one week. 17 were forced to permanently relocate.

Overall, the explosion cost local businesses more than £70 million in lost stock, lost revenue and relocation expenses.

The scale and nature of the incident ensured that the recovery process would be undertaken by a large number of agencies and would involve considerable information sharing and collaboration.

How the Topic was Handled

One of the strengths of the Recovery Group and the various sub-groups that were established was a willingness to share information, without data protection becoming an issue. The multi-agency membership of all the groups meant that the sharing of information between different agencies tended to take place as a matter of course.

In terms of the business recovery, there is one particularly good example that illustrates this point. It became apparent that organisations such as Dacorum Borough Council, Chamber of Commerce and Business Link held information on different businesses and that the information that was required (eg. details of all businesses in the Maylands Industrial Area) did not exist. Despite the fact that this information was compiled and maintained for different purposes, and also included information of a sensitive and confidential nature, there was a willingness to share it more widely in order to identify the owners of affected business premises and to build up an accurate picture of the impact on businesses.

Lessons Identified

- The incident reinforced the importance of a multi-agency approach to recovery, and ensuring that the relevant agencies, including organisations that represent the interests of businesses, are adequately reflected in the recovery structure. If this had not been the case, then the process of sharing information might have been more complicated and lengthy.
- The need to share information to undertake a common goal should not be hindered by data protection or sensitivity issues. Information can be shared effectively and confidentially in an emergency

situation as long as the process is well managed and the restrictions understood. The Recovery Group took on this role and effectively had access to a considerable amount of information that was not necessarily circulated or shared beyond the group.

Contacts for Further Information

Emergency Planning Team, Hertfordshire County Council -
emergency.planning@hertscc.gov.uk