



An Roinn Cosanta
Department of Defence

Strategic Emergency Management

Guideline 1 - National Emergency
Coordination Group

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Lead Government Department	1
Triggers for convening a meeting of a National Emergency Coordination Group	1
Activation of National Emergency Coordination Group	2
Role of the Lead Government Department	3
National Emergency Coordination Group Representatives	3
Role of the National Emergency Coordination Group	4
Decision-Making by the NECG	4
Information Management	4
Public Information	5
Stand-Down Procedure	5
Review Arrangements	5
APPENDIX A-1: Structures and linkages for national-level coordination in an emergency	6
APPENDIX A-2: Linking National Plans with MEM Plans and other plans	7
APPENDIX B – NECG Meeting Checklist	8
APPENDIX C - Template for Reviews and Guidance	9
REFERENCES:	13

Introduction

1. These Guidelines set out the various steps involved in coordinating a national-level response to emergencies, when required. The triggers and activation procedures for convening a meeting of a **National Emergency Coordination Group (NECG)** are outlined, along with the role of the Group.

2. In the event of parallel emergencies under different leads, there may be a need to convene separate NECG sessions.

3. These Guidelines contain practical advice for the Lead Government Departments and support Departments/Agencies regarding the coordination of a national-level response to an emergency, and should be read in conjunction with Chapter 6 of **“Strategic Emergency Management (SEM): National Structures and Framework”**.

4. This guideline document should be read in conjunction with current public health guideline documents.

The Lead Government Department

5. **ANNEX A** to the **SEM** document, published at <https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/5ef65-publications/>, identifies the “Roles and Responsibilities of Lead and Support Government departments/agencies” as approved by Government. It identifies the Lead Government Department (LGD) in 50 emergency/incident types.

6. It is the role of the LGD to initiate the national level emergency response and to provide the mechanism for appropriate coordination of the national level response, and to link with the regional and/or local responses as appropriate.

7. Most emergencies will involve cross-departmental issues, and each government department (and the agencies under their remit) remains responsible for their own functions in an emergency situation.

8. Government Departments are also required to:

- support the LGD,
- participate in the national coordination structures, and
- exercise their functions in light of the objectives and decisions of the NECG.

Triggers for convening a meeting of a National Emergency Coordination Group

9. Each large-scale emergency will prompt its own unique response, but some aspects of emergency management will underpin practically all situations. As well as managing the specific issues that arise, the response to certain categories of emergencies will almost always warrant political direction/support, as well as enhanced provision of information for the public.

10. The decision to convene a NECG rests with the LGD. The types of emergencies that may require the convening of a meeting of the NECG are outlined in para 12 and referenced in ANNEX A of the SEM document.

11. In the case of a “slow-burn” or evolving situation, it may be appropriate for the LGD to engage in monitoring the situation and to participate in bilateral meetings with other relevant departments, before deciding to convene a NECG meeting.

12. The following emergencies scenarios may require national coordination/intervention and are indicative triggers for calling a NECG meeting¹:

- An emergency that poses a threat to public safety or health, social and economic functioning, damage to infrastructure, property or the environment, and which is on a scale that requires a coordinated multi-agency national-level response. ²

¹Strategic Emergency Management; National Structures and Framework, Para 6.6

²An emergency which has caused significant degradation or damage to the local and regional response capability of a Principal Emergency Service (PES) or Principal Response Agency (PRA) will usually require national coordination

- An emergency requiring inter-departmental coordination facilities to be activated in accordance with the provisions of the SEM and/or the Framework for Major Emergency Management (MEM).
- Where the public interest demands national-level coordination of a response effort.
- Where the Government believes that there is an imperative to raise the response to the national level.
- Where national support (possibly including international assistance) is needed from sources that are outside the remit of the LGD and/or the principal response agencies.
- In certain circumstances where international assistance is sought by another jurisdiction in response to an emergency.
- Where an emergency is expected or anticipated, and where an LGD is of the view that the matter is of such gravity as to require national coordination.
- Other such circumstances as may be identified by the LGD.

13. Good situational awareness³ will enable a LGD to make a timely and informed decision on convening a NECG and allow for this decision to be communicated via the Office of Emergency Planning to GTF Stakeholders.

14. If an emergency has occurred but the LGD is in doubt as to whether emergency scenarios which trigger an NECG have occurred, that department should request the Office of Emergency Planning to convene a meeting of the NECG. In other words, err on the side of caution.

15. The roles and responsibilities of the Office of Emergency Planning are outlined in paragraphs 1.10 - 1.16 of the SEM document. The Office of Emergency Planning will provide support and advice to the LGD in the conduct of the business of the NECG and the use of the NECC.

16. The diagram in APPENDIX A-1 illustrates the structures and linkages for national level coordination in an emergency.

Activation of National Emergency Coordination Group

17. The LGD will request the Office of Emergency Planning to convene a meeting of the NECG when relevant triggers have occurred.

18. NECG Meetings will normally be held at the **National Emergency Coordination Centre (NECC)**, Agriculture House, Kildare Street, Dublin 2, unless otherwise notified. It may be required for some or all persons to access the meeting remotely using video conferencing due to public health restrictions, environmental conditions or to facilitate rapid activation of the NECG.

19. The Office of Emergency Planning maintains an up-to-date register of contacts and has automated notification systems in place. Arrangements are in place to facilitate a meeting of the NECG within a one hour time-frame (SEM paragraph 6.7). This applies to virtual meetings also.

20. The Office of Emergency Planning will issue a SMS text alert and email to members of the GTF convening the NECG (normally within a one-hour timeframe). This may include video conferencing links, technical advice and meeting protocol.

21. The Office of Emergency Planning will make the necessary arrangements to activate the NECC and will also provide technical support to the LGD for operation of the NECC facilities including video conferencing options.

³Situational Awareness is the ability to identify, process, and comprehend the critical elements of information in order to facilitate timely decision making.

Role of the Lead Government Department

22. The primary role of the LGD is to ensure the coordination of effort across the full range of departments and agencies that have a role to play.

23. The LGD will chair the NECG meetings. It will decide on the frequency of meetings, prepare the agendas; provide papers as appropriate and record the main decisions and recommendations made. The representatives of the LGD will report to the political (Ministerial / Government / Oireachtas) level as required.

24. If an urgent national warning or advisory message is required, the LGD will follow the procedures as set out in **Strategic Emergency Management Guideline 2 - Emergency Communications (SEM2)** and, where deemed necessary, utilise the procedures under the National Broadcasting Protocols.

25. If the NECG meeting is being held virtually, the LGD will ensure that arrangements are in place to have a substitute chair take over in the event of the chair losing contact with the meeting.

26. In addition, the LGD, in cooperation with the Government Information Service (GIS) and other members of the NECG, will ensure that the public is updated and kept advised as the emergency situation evolves.

27. The LGD is responsible for coordinating the ongoing dissemination of accurate up-to-date information to the public / media via news releases, press briefings and internet updates, social media and other tools in accordance with the public information strategy developed by the NECG. The distribution of public information leaflets may also be required. Other Departments/Agencies are required to support and participate in arranged press briefings etc. as well as to maintain their own individual efforts in the public information sphere.

National Emergency Coordination Group Representatives

28. All government departments and some designated agencies on the Government Task Force (GTF) on Emergency Planning are required to be represented at the first meeting of the NECG, so that cross-sectoral issues, dependencies and vulnerabilities can be identified as comprehensively as possible.

29. Departments should arrange for relevant agencies and operators under their remit to be on standby or to attend the NECG meetings, either physically or virtually. A department / agency should only stand down from attending the NECG after prior agreement with the LGD.

30. Where possible, department / agency representatives will be at the level of the “first point of contact” on the GTF, i.e. those in a decision making capacity. In order to ensure the resilience of national level coordination, each department / agency will ensure that arrangements are in place to have a substitute representative take over in the event of the primary representative losing contact with the meeting. Other specialists may be invited to attend depending on the emergency scenario.

31. The LGD may require a limited number of NECG members to attend physically and the remainder of NECG members virtually. Arrangements for such a blended meeting will be outlined in the protocol as issued by the Office of Emergency Planning.

32. The Chair may establish sub-groups to consider particular issues and bring information/proposals back to the main group. These sub-groups may be tasked to manage the implementation of agreed actions or solutions.

33. Representatives should inform their departments / agencies as soon as possible of the decisions taken at the NECG to ensure that internal departmental actions are in conformity with the NECG approach. Representatives should update the NECG regarding the actions taken by their departments / agencies.

34. Following a change of Government, it is incumbent upon Government departments, within

three months of their establishment, to inform the Office of Emergency Planning as who its NECG representatives are.

Role of the National Emergency Coordination Group

35. The role of the NECG is to coordinate and manage the national-level response to an emergency situation, on a “whole of government”, cross-sector basis. Its functions will include the following:-

- Gathering reports and information, evaluating the emergency situation from a national perspective and identifying key issues.
- Coordinating the national level response, and linking with the Primary Response Agencies and other frontline support services at a regional or local level, as appropriate.
- Ensuring the dissemination / sharing of information (inter-department and agency).
- Setting objectives and identifying priorities in support of the objectives.
- Deciding the efficient allocation of available resources, and seeking additional resources (including international assistance) if required.
- Making decisions in relation to operational cross-cutting issues arising, where appropriate.
- Developing and making recommendations in relation to any longer-term policy issues arising.
- Developing a public information strategy (in consultation with the GIS), particularly on public safety.
- Agreeing post-emergency review and reporting of the response arrangements.
- Other such functions as deemed necessary by the NECG or the LGD.

See checklist in Appendix B.

Decision-Making by the NECG

36. Fulfillment of the NECG role encompasses establishing issues, trends or patterns which may need to be addressed elsewhere, considering Strategic Emergency Management Guideline 1 – National Emergency Coordination Group

expert opinion and formulating and agreeing national priorities. In some cases, the NECG may have to act as a decision-making forum as follows:

- The NECG cannot take a decision which is vested by statute in another government department or agency or other public authority, without agreement of that department or agency.
- Where required, the Chair may mandate an appropriate sub-group of the NECG to consider a specific issue and develop proposals for consideration by the full NECG.
- In coming to decisions, the NECG will be guided by the advice from relevant experts.
- The NECG Chair is to ensure that appropriate decisions are made in a timely fashion. In bringing the Group to a decision, the Chair will try to establish a consensus among the NECG members present.
- Where there is serious disagreement about an issue, the Chair may, when time allows, have to defer reaching a conclusion.
- When an issue must be decided urgently, having heard the views of the NECG members, the Chair is mandated to refer requests for such decisions to the appropriate Ministers or the Government, having regard to any statutory procedures or constraints, for an immediate decision.
- A record will be kept by the LGD of the main decisions made at a NECG, or those mandated by Ministers or Government.

Information Management

37. The LGD should establish an information management system and, if necessary, appoint an Information Management Officer. This will ensure, as far as possible, that decision-makers are presented with appropriate information processed from the available data.

38. Consideration should be given to the means of communication and technology required in

collating such information for both physical and virtual meetings.

39. Five streams of information flow should be examined and are as follows:

- Within the LGD and with the agencies under its remit.
- Between departments and other organisations involved in the response.
- From the public to the department/agency.
- From the department / agency to the public.
- The international dimension.

40. The communications related activities of the LGD and support departments should be in line with Departments' **Generic Emergency Plans**, as referred to in the SEM Chapter 5 and associated Emergency Communications Strategy/Plans, guided by the **SEM 2**.

Public Information

41. The LGD and the NECG, in consultation with the GIS, will be responsible for developing a public information strategy to ensure as far as possible that the public is updated and kept advised as the emergency situation evolves.

42. The LGD and the NECG, in consultation with the GIS, will be responsible for coordinating the requirements and modalities for holding a Press Conference and for the necessary liaison with the media to facilitate their access to such Press Conferences whether physically or virtually.

Stand-Down Procedure

43. After the initial emergency period has passed the LGD, having consulted with the NECG, may decide to meet less frequently and will decide when to stand down NECG activities.

44. Standing down the NECG must take account of any requirements to put in place structures, as outlined in Chapter 7 of the SEM, to manage any necessary aspects of the Recovery phase.

Review Arrangements

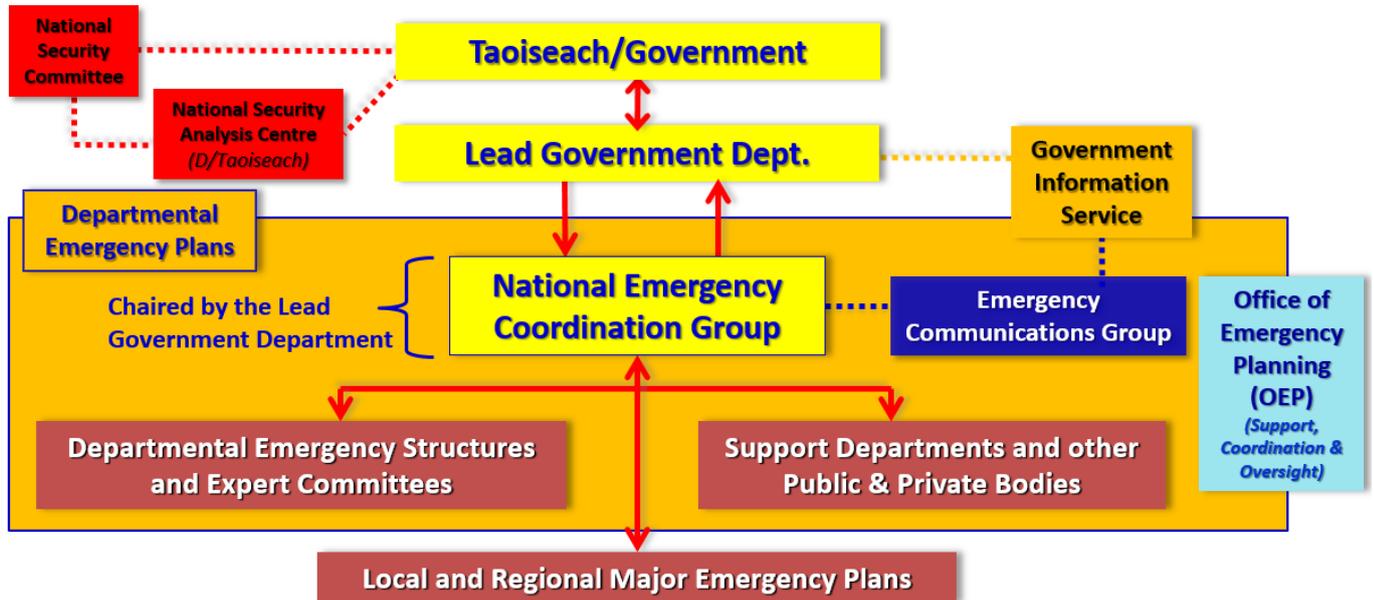
45. In line with Paras 6.15 and 6.16 of the SEM document, the LGD will coordinate the review process. Each relevant department and agency will review its response under the headings listed on the template document in APPENDIX C and feed this into the LGD's review and associated reports. The LGD will present the final report, including any recommendations, to the GTF.

46. Following approval by the GTF, the LGD may arrange to bring the final report to Government. The GTF will oversee the delivery of inter-sectoral recommendations, while each department / agency will be responsible for agreed actions within their own sector.

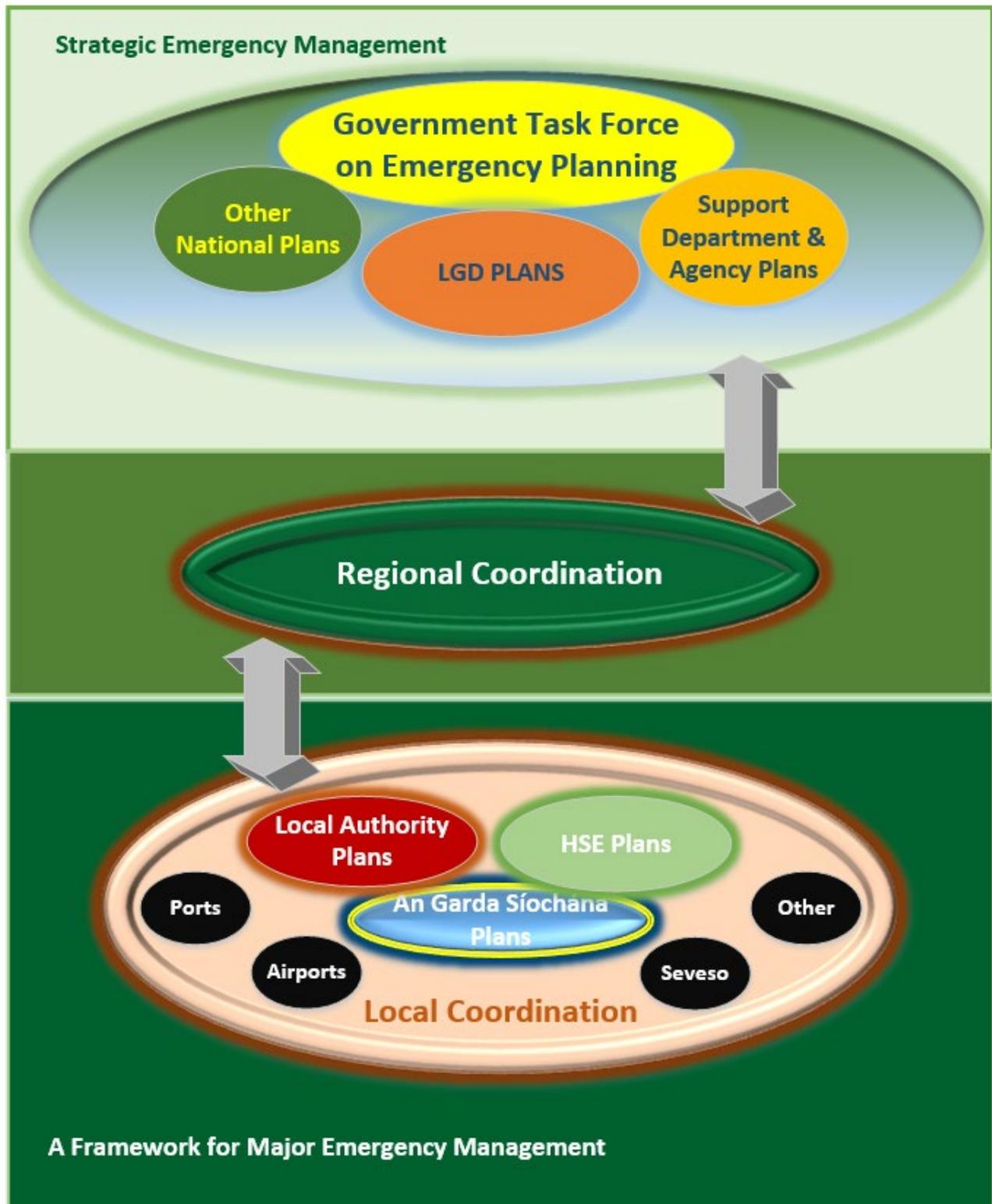
47. When completing the review template, departments should cover all ten areas outlined. In addition, a list of recommendations and an action list should be compiled. As well as forming part of the lessons learned process, the recommendations and actions should feed into review process and updating existing emergency plans at all levels including local, regional and departmental.

APPENDIX A-1: Structures and linkages for national-level coordination in an emergency

National Strategic Structures and Linkages in an Emergency



APPENDIX A-2: Linking National Plans with MEM Plans and other plans



APPENDIX B – NECG Meeting Checklist

Checklist for the Lead Government Department and the National Emergency Co-ordination Group	
Tick (x)	Action
	1. The Lead Government Department (LGD) will monitor the emergency situation and will determine if the triggers for convening a meeting of the National Emergency Co-ordination Group (NECG) have occurred.
	2. If an urgent national warning or advisory message is required, the LGD will follow the procedures as set out in Strategic Emergency Management Guideline 2 - Emergency Communications (SEM 2) and the procedures outlined in the National Broadcasting Protocols.
	3. The LGD will request the Office of Emergency Planning to convene a meeting of the NECG at the National Emergency Coordination Centre (NECC) and/or through video conferencing. All Departments and some designated agencies on the Government Task Force (GTF) on Emergency Planning will be required to attend the first meeting.
	4. The LGD will chair meetings of the NECG and provide administrative support. The purpose of the meetings will be to manage a coordinated national-level response.
	5. The NECG will decide on a strategy for public information and media management in line with the SEM 2 and in cooperation with the Government Information Service and the Government Press Office. It will consider the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the key information/message to be provided to the public? • What media, including social media, can reach the right audience at the right time? • When and how often should the media be briefed? • Where and how should briefings occur? • Who should provide the media briefings? (Consider the value in having people of substance and authority who thoroughly understand their roles and who can communicate easily with the media and the public) • What are the varying requirements of different areas? (e.g. local vs national) • Whether a public emergency help-line should be established?
	6. The NECG will evaluate the emergency situation and will determine the hierarchy of priorities and clarify the most important decisions to be made.
	7. The NECG will agree arrangements for information management/sharing. It will identify the key information that will be required including relevant records and stats.
	8. The NECG will identify and agree arrangements for mobilising the appropriate resources.
	9. The NECG will ensure that all relevant departments and agencies keep their websites and social media platforms up-to-date.
	10. The NECG will consider whether special arrangements are needed for vulnerable persons/groups in terms of response and channels of communication.
	11. The NECG will consider whether specialist advice is needed.
	12. The composition of the NECG will be reviewed on an on-going basis to ensure that key decision makers and specialists are present including those responsible for supplying critical resources, authorising financial support, providing legal advice etc.
	13. The NECG will consider the support that can be provided by voluntary organisations, community groups and the private sector, and how this support will be utilised.
	14. The NECG will consider whether the emergency situation has implications for citizens abroad and if the Department of Foreign Affairs should be consulted regarding activation of the Consular Crisis Management Centre.
	15. The LGD/NECG will make arrangements for briefing/reporting to Ministers, Government, Oireachtas etc.
	16. The NECG will consider arrangements for liaison and information sharing with other jurisdictions, international organisations and with other (non-government) stakeholders.
	17. The LGD, having consulted with the NECG, will decide on stand-down arrangements.
	18. Each member of the NECG will review its response and feed into the coordinated review of the LGD.

APPENDIX C - Template for Reviews and Guidance

NATIONAL LEVEL RESPONSE			
REVIEW PREPARED BY DEPARTMENT/AGENCY _____			
NATURE OF EMERGENCY:		PREPARED BY (Provide names):	
PERIOD COVERED (provide dates):		DATE SUBMITTED:	
AREAS TO BE COVERED		EVALUATION OF REPOSE	ACTIONS REQUIRED
1. Demands placed on the department / agency			
2. Completion of generic emergency management functions (if applicable)			
3. Mobilisation of personnel and resources			
4. Task delegation and division of labour			
5. Information management			
6. Decision making			
7. Coordination			
8. Working relationships			
9. Communication with the public			
10. National Emergency Coordination Centre (NECC)			

GUIDANCE NOTE TO ASSIST WITH COMPLETION OF REVIEW

1. DEMANDS PLACED ON THE DEPARTMENT/AGENCY

- Identify and document the demands placed on the day to day running of the department/agency as result of the emergency.
- Identify and document the demands placed on the department / agency as result of the need to provide a response to the emergency.

2. COMPLETION OF GENERIC EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS

Review the efficiency and effectiveness of generic emergency response functions (such as warnings, evacuations, sheltering, emergency medical care, search and rescue, protection of property, mobilisation of emergency personnel and resources, assessing the damage, coordinating emergency management activities, and restoring essential services).

In order to answer this question the department / agency could ask/answer the following questions:

- Was the need for the function recognised early?
- Was the function carried out without too many problems?
- Were the recipients satisfied with the functions provided?

3. MOBILISATION OF PERSONNEL AND RESOURCES

The department / agency should review the effectiveness with which personnel and resources were mobilised.

- Did they mobilise personnel and resources in an effective manner (in this context effective means the desired and intended result was produced)?
- Did the department / agency identify the appropriate personnel and resources?
- Were these resources located quickly and brought to bear correctly?
- Were they appropriate to the problems generated by the emergency?

4. TASK DELEGATION AND DIVISION OF LABOUR

- What tasks “usually” undertaken by the department / agency during an emergency response were executed as part of the response to this emergency?
- Were these tasks carried out relatively quickly and with few problems?
- What “new/novel” tasks did the department / agency undertake during the response to this emergency? Were these tasks carried out relatively quickly and with few problems?

5. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

When reviewing the information management element of the response the department / agency should consider the means of communication (how well the technology worked, including the use of social media and other web-based methods of communication) and the content of what was communicated. Five streams of information flow should be examined:

- (i) Within the department / agency and with the agencies under its remit;
- (ii) Between departments and other organisations involved in the response;
- (iii) From the public to the department / agency;
- (iv) From the department / agency to the public.
- (v) The international dimension

6. EXECUTION OF DECISION MAKING

The department / agency should provide an overview of decision making during the emergency. Was decision making exercised in a proper manner? Decision making within the department / agency and across Departments/organisation involved should be examined.

7. CO-ORDINATION

The department / agency should comment on the coordination of the response both within the National Emergency Coordination Group and within the department / agency. The focus should be on coordination (agreement on how to carry out particular tasks) and not on Command and Control.

8. WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

The department / agency should comment on interaction with other departments, other agencies and organisations such as community groups, voluntary emergency services, and volunteers.

9. COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC

The department / agency should provide a review of the interaction between the department / agency and the media. Did citizens receive an accurate picture of what was happening? How was the response portrayed across all types of mass media?

10. NATIONAL EMERGENCY CO-ORDINATION CENTRE (NECC)

Each Department/Agency should review their role in the NECC – consider the NECC as a place, a function and a social structure (level, type, experience etc. of those in attendance).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Does the report include a list of recommendations that identify how a future response could be improved?

ACTION LIST

Based on the recommendations put forth, does the department / agency identify actions that must be taken within the department / agency?

Does the department / agency identify actions that must be taken across Departments?

REFERENCES:

DOCUMENT	MANAGED/PUBLISHED BY	TO LOCATE
Strategic Emergency Management: National Structures and Framework	Office of Emergency Planning, Department of Defence	https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/5ef65-publications/
ANNEX A: Lead Roles and Responsibilities in Emergency Planning to Strategic Emergency Planning: National Structures and Framework	Office of Emergency Planning, Department of Defence	https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/5ef65-publications/
Strategic Emergency Management Guidelines.	Office of Emergency Planning Department of Defence	https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/5ef65-publications/
A Framework for Major Emergency Management, associated appendices, guidelines and protocols.	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government	www.mem.ie
<p>Please note that some of the above are live documents and are updated on a regular basis. Readers are advised to access the most updated version on https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/5ef65-publications/</p>		

Title:	Strategic Emergency Management Guideline 1: National Emergency Coordination Group	
Prepared by:	Office of Emergency Planning, Department of Defence	
Adopted by:	Government Task Force on Emergency Planning	
Version:	1.0	Date of Approval: 14/07/2021

Published: 20 July, 2021 Version 1.0

<p>An Oifig um Pleanáil Éigeandála An tIonad Náisiúnta Comhordaithe Éigeandála Teach Talmaíochta (2 Thoir) Sr. Chill Dara Baile Átha Cliath 2</p> <p>R-Phost: oepe@defence.ie Teileafón: 00353 1 237 3800 Láithreán Gréasáin: https://www.gov.ie/ga/feachtais/624e4-emergency-planning/</p>	<p>Office of Emergency Planning National Emergency Co-ordination Centre Agriculture House Kildare Street Dublin 2</p> <p>Email: oepe@defence.ie Telephone: 00353 1 237 3800 Web Site: https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/624e4-emergency-planning/</p>
---	---



Printed by Defence Forces Printing Press



An Roinn Cosanta
Department of Defence