



***GUIDELINES FOR COORDINATING
A NATIONAL-LEVEL
EMERGENCY/CRISIS RESPONSE***



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1. INTRODUCTION

This guidance document sets out the various steps involved in coordinating a national-level response for emergencies/ crises. It sets out the triggers and activation procedures for convening a meeting of a National Coordination Group and the role of this Group. It clarifies the responsibilities of the lead government department and the roles and working relationships of all other departments/ agencies, which are required to contribute and undertake their roles in the context of the national emergency/ crisis management effort.

Most emergency situations are responded to and managed by the Principal Response Agencies (An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive and the relevant local authority) in accordance with the arrangements set out in the “Framework for Major Emergency Management (2006)”. Where a major emergency is declared a lead government department will be nominated to lead the national level coordination in order to bring “whole of government” support to bear on the situation, to manage the national level issues (including political interface) and to ensure that information is provided to the public.

2. IDENTIFICATION OF LEAD GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

As outlined in the “Strategic Emergency Planning Guidance”, each government department is responsible for emergency planning within the sectors under its remit. When an emergency/ crisis occurs within a sector, it is that department’s responsibility to coordinate and lead the State’s response to the emergency/ crisis.

Most emergencies/ crisis will involve cross-departmental issues, and all government departments (and the agencies under their remit) remain responsible for their own functions in the emergency/ crisis situation. They are also required to support the lead government department, to participate in the national coordination structures and to exercise their functions in light of the objectives and decisions of the National Coordination Group.

It is the role of the lead government department to initiate the relevant national emergency/ crisis response and to provide the mechanism for appropriate coordination of national level response, and to link with the local response as appropriate.

The revised Annex “A” to the Strategic Emergency Planning Guidance Document, which is approved by Government, identifies the lead department in more than 40 emergency scenarios. An abbreviated version of the Roles and Responsibilities document identifying lead departments is contained at **Annex A**.

3. TRIGGERS FOR CALLING A MEETING OF A NATIONAL COORDINATION GROUP

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

The decision to convene a National Coordination Group (or not) rests with the lead government department. A meeting of the National Coordination Group would be expected to convene in the event of an emergency/ crisis occurring that poses a threat to public safety or health, social and economic functioning, damage to infrastructure, property or to the environment on a scale that requires a coordinated national-level response. During such emergencies/ crises, those departments with lead responsibilities must consider the possible triggers that may result in a situation developing beyond the local/regional response capacity.

The lead government department will request the Office of Emergency Planning to convene a meeting of the National Coordination Group when the triggers have occurred. Meetings will be held at the National Emergency Coordination Center, Agriculture House, Kildare Street, Dublin 2, unless otherwise notified.

Meetings will be chaired and supported by the lead government department, and their purpose is to manage a coordinated national-level response to an emergency/ crisis. Such meetings will be called meetings of the “**title of emergency**” **National Coordination Group**.

The following are the indicative **triggers** for calling a National Coordination Group meeting:-

- ❑ An emergency occurring that poses a threat to public safety or health, social and economic functioning, damage to infrastructure, property or to the environment on a scale that requires a coordinated multi-agency national-level response.
- ❑ An emergency requiring inter-departmental coordination facilities to be activated in accordance with the provisions of the Framework for Major Emergency Management.
- ❑ Where the public interest demands national-level coordination of a response effort.
- ❑ Where resources/advice/support is required from a number of sources that are outside the remit of the lead department or the principal response agencies.
- ❑ Where the Government believes that there is an imperative to raise the response to the national-level.
- ❑ In certain circumstances where international assistance is required from another jurisdiction or is sought by another jurisdiction in response to an emergency.
- ❑ Where an emergency is not deemed to have occurred, but is expected or anticipated
- ❑ Other such circumstances as may be identified by the lead government department.

In the case of a “slow-burn” or evolving situation, it may be appropriate for the lead government department to engage in monitoring the situation and to participate in bilateral meetings with other relevant departments, before moving to a decision to convene a National Coordination Group meeting.

If an emergency has occurred but the lead government department is in doubt as to whether these triggers have occurred, that department should request the Office of Emergency Planning to convene a meeting of the National Coordination Group. In other words, err on the side of caution.

The diagram at **Annex B** demonstrates the structures and linkages for national level coordination in an emergency.

4. ACTIVATION OF NATIONAL COORDINATION GROUP

The activation process requires the lead government department to request the Office of Emergency Planning (OEP) to convene a meeting of a National Coordination Group. The OEP maintains an up-to date register of contacts and has automated mobilization systems in place.

In the event of a difficulty in deciding if a national level response is required, or in identifying a lead government department, the Minister for Defence, as Chairman of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, would consult with the parties involved. If the lead government department issue were still not resolved, the matter would be referred to the Taoiseach for direction.

5. ROLE OF THE LEAD GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

The primary role of the lead government department is to ensure the coordination of effort across the full range of departments and agencies that have a role to play. As soon as it is satisfied that the trigger(s) for convening a meeting of the National Coordination Group have occurred, it will request the Office of Emergency Planning to convene such a meeting. The lead government department will chair the NCG meetings. It will decide on the frequency of meetings, prepare the agendas; provide papers as appropriate and record decisions and recommendations made. The representatives of the lead government department will report to political (Ministerial/Government) level as required.

If an urgent national warning or advisory message is required, the lead government department will follow the procedures as set out in the “Guidelines for Broadcasting of an Emergency Warning/ Advisory Message”.

In addition, the lead government department, in cooperation with the Government Press Secretary and the Government Information Service and other members of the National Coordination Group, will ensure that the public is updated and kept advised as the emergency situation evolves. The lead government department 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 in accordance with the public information strategy developed by the Group. Other Departments/ agencies are required to

participate in arranged press briefings etc as well as to maintain their own individual efforts in the public information sphere.

See Checklist at **Annex C**

6. NATIONAL COORDINATION GROUP REPRESENTATIVES

All government departments will be required to attend the first meeting of the National Coordination Group so that cross-sectoral issues, dependencies and vulnerabilities can be identified as comprehensively as possible. Departments should arrange to have relevant agencies under their remit to be on standby or to attend, if required. A department/agency should only stand down from attending meeting of the Group after agreement with the lead government department.

Where possible, government department/ agency representatives will be at the level of the first point of contact on the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning. Other specialists may be invited to attend depending on the emergency.

Sub-groups of the National Coordination Group may be established to research particular issues and bring information/ proposals back to the main Group, and may be tasked to manage the implementation of agreed actions/ solutions.

7. ROLE OF THE NATIONAL COORDINATION GROUP

The role of the National Coordination Group is to coordinate and manage the national-level response to an emergency/ crisis situation.

Its functions will include the following:-

- ❑ Gathering reports and information, evaluating the emergency/ crisis situation from a national perspective and identifying key issues;
- ❑ Coordinating the national level response, and linking with the frontline response services 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 and GPO);
- ❑ Agreeing post-emergency review of the response arrangements;
- ❑ Other such functions as deemed necessary by the Group.

See checklist at **Annex C**

Decisions will be made by consensus. However, if consensus cannot be reached, the chair of the Group will refer the matter to the appropriate Ministers for decision. Individual departments/ agencies are responsible for implementing decisions in their own areas of competence. One of the key roles of the NCG representative is to inform his/ her own department/ agency of the decisions regarding response, to ensure that decisions internal to that department take full cognizance of and to liaise and report back on implementation.

8. ROLE OF THE OFFICE OF EMERGENCY PLANNING

The Office of Emergency Planning (OEP) will provide support to the lead government department and the National Coordination Group as required. When the triggers for calling a meeting of the National Coordination Group are present, at the request of the lead government department, the OEP will convene such a meeting.

The OEP will make the necessary arrangements to activate the National Emergency Coordination Centre (NECC). It will liaise closely with the lead government department in support of its functions. It will facilitate, advise and provide any necessary support to the lead department and the National Coordination Group. It will also provide technical support to the lead department for operation of the NECC facilities and, if requested, make arrangements for additional facilities.

9. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

The lead government department should establish an information management system and if deemed necessary appoint an Information Management Officer. This will ensure that decision-makers are presented with information processed from the available data, in a timely way. Consideration should be given to the means of communication and technology required in collating information.

Five streams of information flow should be examined:

- Within the Department/ 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

10. PUBLIC INFORMATION

The National Coordination Group will be responsible for developing a public information strategy (in consultation with the GIS and GPO) to ensure that the public is updated and kept advised as the emergency situation evolves. Each department should actively manage and update its website and provide the appropriate links. See checklist at **Annex C**.

11. STAND-DOWN PROCEDURE

The Lead Government Department having consulted with the National Coordination Group may decide to meet less frequently after the initial emergency period has passed and will decide when to stand down its activities.

12. REVIEW ARRANGEMENTS

The lead government department will coordinate the review process and arrange for presentation of a final report to the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning, and where appropriate, arrange to bring the report/ recommendations to Government. Each relevant department and agency will review its response under the headings

listed on the template document at **Annex D** or similar as decided in the circumstances, and feed this into the coordinated review of the LGD. The Government Task Force will oversee the delivery of inter-sectoral recommendations, while each department/ agency will be responsible for agreed actions within its own sector.

When completing the review template all ten areas outlined should be covered. 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 reviewing and updating existing emergency plans at all levels, local regional and departmental.

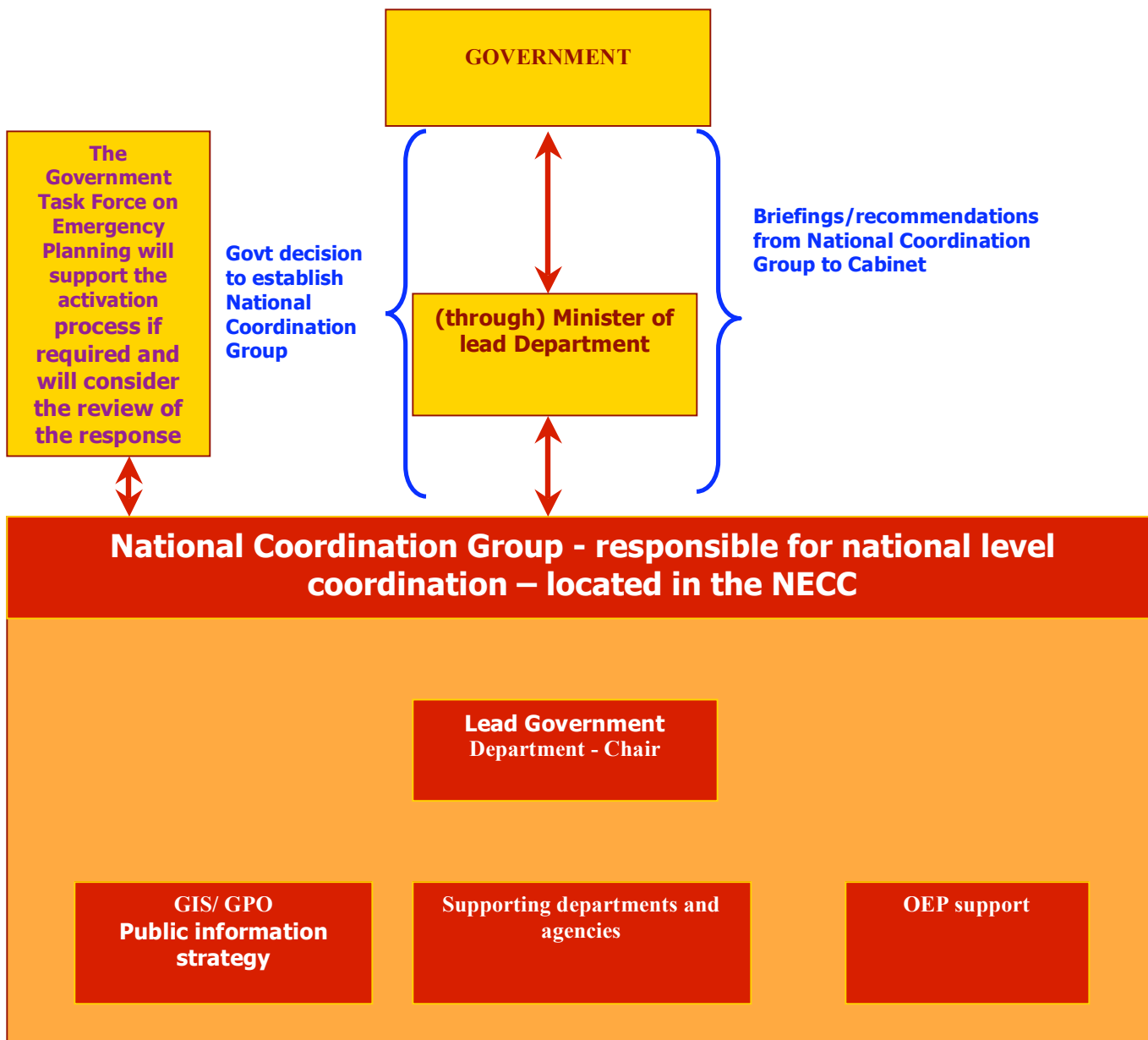
13. CONTACT DETAILS

Emergency Planning contact details for all government departments and the User Guide for the National Emergency Coordination Centre are available on the secure pages of the emergency planning website www.emergencyplanning.ie. Alternatively the Office of Emergency Planning can forward these details to departments and agencies if so required. The OEP will issue a text alert to members of the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning and the Interdepartmental Working Group or other specified groups on behalf of the lead department if requested to do so.

Annex A - Roles and Responsibilities (abbreviated list)

Emergency/Incident Type	Lead Government Department	Emergency/Incident Type	Lead Government Department
Infectious Diseases (Animal) e.g. Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Avian Influenza, other 'exotic' diseases	Department Agriculture, Marine & Food (DAMF)	Financial Systems Emergencies	Department of Finance
Contamination of Animal Feedstuffs	DAMF	Any Emergency Overseas, affecting Irish citizens.	Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT)
Food safety incidents in food processing plants (dairy and meat)	DAMF	Emergency Incidents requiring humanitarian assistance in disaster management (Outwards)	DFAT
Tsunami - Monitoring & Warning	Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources (DCENR)	Emergency Incidents requiring humanitarian assistance in disaster management (Inwards)	Incident Dependent
Earthquake –Monitoring & Warning	DCENR	Biological Incident	Department Health (DH)
Communications Services Emergency	DCENR	Pandemic Influenza and Other Public Health Emergencies	DH
ICT Infrastructure – Cyber Attacks or Failures	DCENR	Emergencies Involving Explosive Ordnance (Conventional or otherwise and regardless of provenance)	Department of Justice & Equality (DJE)
Broadcasting Services Emergency	DCENR	National Security Related Incidents (Including terrorism)	DJE
Energy Services Emergency (Electricity/ Gas)	DCENR	Incidents Requiring Water Rescue Inland	DJE
Oil Supply Emergency	DCENR	Public Order/Crowd Events (including sports grounds emergencies)	DJE
Nuclear Accidents/Incidents/ Events Abroad (as described in NEPNA)	Department of Environment, Community & Local Government (DECLG)	Emergencies Abroad with the result of mass inward population displacement	DJE
Incidents Involving Hazardous Materials (Including in transit)	DECLG	All Major Emergencies requiring Cabinet or Cabinet Committee and central media /communications response	Department of the Taoiseach
Radioactive Contamination – Local e.g. spillages, dispersal of material including in transit	DECLG	Aircraft Accident	Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport (DTTS)
Environmental Pollution	DECLG	Emergency Incident at Airports	DTTS
Severe Weather	DECLG	Aviation Security/ Terrorist Incident (Actual or attempted hijacking or other terrorist activity at an Irish airport, in Irish airspace.)	DTTS
Flooding Response	DECLG	Railway Accident	DTTS
Coastal erosion	DECLG	Major accident on national & non-national roads and/or infrastructure (incl. bridges, tunnels etc)	DTTS
Major impacts on water services, quality infrastructure or supplies	DECLG	Incidents Requiring Marine Search and Rescue	DTTS
Fire	DECLG	Ferry and Other Shipping Disasters	DTTS
Landslide Response	DECLG	Marine and Coastal Pollution	DTTS
Building Collapse/Accidental Explosions	DECLG	Marine Emergency Impacting On-shore	DTTS

Structures and linkages for national level coordination in an emergency/ crisis



Annex C - Checklist

Checklist for the Lead Government Department and the National Coordination Group	
Tick (x)	Action
	The lead government department (LGD) will monitor the emergency situation and will determine if the triggers for convening a meeting of the National Coordination Group (NCG) have occurred.
	If an urgent national warning or advisory message is required, the LGD will follow the procedures as set out in the Guidelines for Broadcasting of an Emergency Warning/Advisory Message.
	The LGD will request the Office of Emergency Planning to convene a meeting of the NCG at the earliest possible opportunity at the National Emergency Coordination Centre. All departments will be required to attend the first meeting.
	The LGD will chair meetings of the NCG and provide administrative support. The purpose of the meetings will be to manage a coordinated national-level response.
	The LGD, in cooperation with the Government Press Secretary and the Government Information Service and other members of the NCG will implement the public information strategy.
	The NCG will decide on a strategy for public information and media management, in cooperation with the Government Information Service and the Government Press Office. It will consider the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What is the key information/message to be provided to the public? <input type="checkbox"/> What media can reach the right audience at the right time? <input type="checkbox"/> When and how often should the media be briefed? <input type="checkbox"/> Where should briefings occur? <input type="checkbox"/> 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 public) <input type="checkbox"/> What are the varying requirements of different areas? (e.g. local vs national)
	The NCG will evaluate the emergency situation and will determine the hierarchy of priorities and clarify the most important decisions to be made.
	The NCG will agree arrangements for information management/sharing. It will identify the key information that will be required including relevant records and stats.
	The NCG will identify and agree arrangements for mobilising the appropriate resources.
	The NCG will ensure that all relevant departments and agencies keep their websites up-to-date and will appoint a specific person in each organisation to manage this function.
	The NCG will consider whether special arrangements are needed for vulnerable persons/groups in terms of response and channels of communication.
	The NCG will consider whether a public emergency help-line should be established.
	The NCG will consider whether specialist advice is needed.
	The composition of the NCG will be reviewed on an on-going basis to ensure that key decision makers are present including those responsible for supplying critical resources, authorising financial support, providing legal advice etc.
	The NCG will consider the support that can be provided by voluntary organisations, community groups and the private sector.
	The NCG 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.
	The LGD/ NCG will make arrangements for briefing/reporting to the Minister, Government, Oireachtas etc.
	The NCG will consider arrangements for liaison and information sharing with other jurisdictions, international organisations and with other (non-government) stakeholders.
	The LGD having consulted with the NCG will decide on stand-down arrangements.
	Each member of the NCG will review its response and feed this into the coordinated review of the LGD.

Annex D - Template for Reviews

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	RECOMMENDATIONS	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)				
PLEASE COMMENT ON ANY OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE RESPONSE NOT COVERED ABOVE				

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) 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 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 recommendation 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?

Annex E - References

DOCUMENT	MANAGED/PUBLISHED BY	TO LOCATE
Strategic Emergency Planning Guidance	Office of Emergency Planning	www.emergencyplanning.ie/publications
A Framework for Major Emergency Management	Department of Environment, Community & Local Government	www.emergencyplanning.ie/publications
Revised Annex “A” to the SEPG Roles & Responsibilities in Emergency Planning	Office of Emergency Planning	www.emergencyplanning.ie/publications
Government Emergency Planning – First Points of Contact	Office of Emergency Planning	www.emergencyplanning.ie Secure page area
National Emergency Coordination Centre User Guide	Office of Emergency Planning	www.emergencyplanning.ie Secure page area
Guidelines for Lead Departments for the Broadcasting of an Emergency Warning/Advisory Message through the Government Information Service	Government Information Service	www.emergencyplanning.ie Secure page area

Please note that some of the above are live documents and are updated on a regular basis. This applies particularly to information such as contact details. In order to be sure of obtaining the most updated information, it is best advised to access directly from the secure pages of the emergency planning website when required.