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Edition 6

Welcome to the sixth edition of the GDS Newsletter

Our Mission:

The UK Government Decontamination Service increases resilience by providing advice and guidance to those responsible for dealing with decontamination following a CBRN or major HazMat incident.

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International links and the sharing of knowledge continues to be important, since the threat of CBRN attacks cross international boundaries. To strengthen ties with the USA GDS hosted a week long visit from the National Decontamination Team from the US Environmental Protection Agency. The potential for joint working, sharing of information and collaborative working were identified, all of which will be of mutual benefit to both organisations.

I can also report that the replacement of the specialist framework continues to timetable and that GDS continue to take part in exercises that have improved our procedures and increased our preparedness.

Robert Bettley-Smith
Chief Executive

Exercise Hydration

In November 2007 GDS commissioned a case study for the chemical companies on the framework based on the deliberate release of a chemical agent in a crowded place by a terrorist organisation.

A Premiership football ground was selected as the venue for the exercise and a number of GDS Framework Suppliers agreed to undertake the case study.

A scenario was a deliberate manual release of a chemical agent from water bottles during a football game. The ground was full to capacity and three different areas were identified as requiring decontamination as a result of the attack. The three areas were:-

- The concourse, which included refreshment areas, toilets, storage areas and access and egress points with the construction being mainly reinforced concrete.
- An area of seating, which included plastic seats, concrete steps, supports to elevated areas and concrete walls.
- The corner area of the pitch, which included grass, earth, advertising signage, metal access gates and an all weather surface.

A full briefing was held at the football ground and the representatives from each company were then invited to personally visit each of the affected areas to undertake surveys, measurements and assessments.

Each company submitted their case study based on their methodology for the decontamination of each area identified, together with their findings and any problematic issues that arose.

As a result of the submissions of the case studies areas for development were identified. GDS now have a number of actions and learning points to progress through appropriate channels which will ultimately lead to increasing the capability of the UK to respond to a similar incident should it occur.

The opportunity is taken to acknowledge the excellent support received from everyone involved which allowed this exercise to be undertaken in a realistic environment with a credible scenario.

Exercise Flying Swan



As part of the GDS commitment to Crown Dependent Territories we attended Exercise Flying Swan held in Jersey on Saturday 17 November 2007.

The exercise aim was to develop a wider understanding of the roles, responsibilities, procedures and decision making processes required for handling and recovering from a major incident on the Island of Jersey. This was achieved through a series of briefings and presentations that interspaced a table top style

exercise involving some 130 people. The exercise scenario was based on Jersey being targeted as part of a plan to detonate improvised explosive and radiological devices across several European cities including London. The latter location meant that exercise participants had to consider how well memorandums of understanding with the UK mainland would work under pressure and how COBR instructions might influence provision of mainland support under those circumstances.

Logistical problems were compounded by both the closure of air and sea ports in Jersey. Recovery issues included waste disposal routes on a heavily populated, small island and the deployment of specialist suppliers and personnel, off-shore when GDS and framework resources would be urgently required on the UK mainland too.

The aims of Exercise Flying Swan were achieved, with the issues and planning requirement shortfalls that the exercise revealed being taken forward by the appropriate authorities on the island. The state Authorities hope to host another exercise in 2008, where the issues and learning points will be incorporated.

Procurement Update

GDS and the Office of Government Commerce, Buying Solutions (OGCb.s.) are working to put in place a Decontamination Services Framework to replace the existing arrangements which are due to expire in October 2008. We are looking to award the new Framework in mid-September.

The advert for CBRN decontamination services was published in the Official Journal of the European Union and stated the intention to use the Competitive Dialogue procedure for this procurement exercise. Pre-qualification responses were received and the technical, operational and financial aspects of these evaluated by members of GDS and external agencies. A 'long-list' of respondents was identified at the end of this initial evaluation phase.

The Competitive Dialogue phase of the procurement is now well underway. The Competitive Dialogue meetings are helping to clarify the offers and allow for discussion around the form of any future contracts and the technical, operational and scientific specifications of the requirement.

The procurement project is being overseen by a Project Team which reports to the Programme Board. Senior managers within GDS and OGCb.s. sit on the Programme Board and report to the GDS CEO as the Senior Responsible Officer. Key stakeholders and members of the GDS Management Board and Strategic Advisory Board are kept informed of progress.

A Briefing Event for all suppliers on the new Framework is planned for November. This will set the scene for suppliers and put the work they will complete under the Framework into context. GDS will also take this opportunity to brief suppliers on their future Programme of Work under the chemical, biological and radiological work streams.

US National Decontamination Team

GDS were pleased to be able to host a week long visit by members of the US National Decontamination Team (NDT) in June. The week provided an opportunity for the two organisations to become much more aware of the other's role in CBRN decontamination and assess the potential for closer working in the future.

As well as spending time with GDS staff in Stafford, the NDT met one of the specialist suppliers involved in the Polonium incident and the Office of Government Commerce Buying Solutions who are the contracting authority for the GDS Framework. We also spent time at the Fire Service College and the Counter-Terrorism Science and Technology Unit based at Porton Down.

During the week, a number of similarities between GDS and the NDT emerged. The remit for both organisations is broadly similar: both provide advice and guidance on CBRN decontamination activities, both focus on national capability and capacities for CBRN decontamination and they support and develop CBRN-based recovery training and exercises. Neither agency decontaminates people or animals. Both agencies focus on the operation / tactics of the recovery and are a similar size in terms of technical and scientific staff. There are also differences between the two organisations: NDT are trained to conduct field operations if needed, GDS are not. GDS has a framework of qualified decontamination contractors, NDT has no framework system in place.

There is the potential for joint working in the future under the US/UK Treaty. Activities could include information sharing and collaboration on some planning and preparedness activities. We are looking at these opportunities in conjunction with the resources available and will prioritise based on the extent to which the work supports GDS' Key Performance Targets and Business Plan.