



South West Ireland tests off-site plans for Seveso/COMAH sites

The South West region of Ireland (Cork City, County Cork and County Kerry) has just run its first major exercise testing the plans for multi-agency response to an incident with off-site impact for one of their top tier Seveso (COMAH in UK) industrial sites. To manage the exercise they used their new Training & Exercising System to provide automation of inject delivery alongside simulation of the impact of the disaster.

This first exercise was run to test the off-site plan for the Eli-Lilly site near Kinsale, County Cork and was attended by emergency response managers from the Garda, Fire Services, Health Services Executive and the site operator, with other officials travelling from as far afield as Dublin to observe the first use of this innovative technology.

The exercise involved the establishing of a joint tactical command post for the three emergency services, to build an understanding of the situation and coordinate the response, as well as discussion sessions to address some of the issues that would arise at strategic level and for other agencies.

County Cork Fire Executive Officer Donal Doolan, who ran the exercise, said: 'This was the first time we have used the Training & Exercising System to

deliver an exercise, and it did exactly what it said on the tin: its automated timeline and inject delivery allowed the whole exercise to be delivered by just one member of staff, while the dynamic simulation of the smoke plume gave the exercise a level of realism that allowed even the most hardened exercise veteran to suspend their disbelief for just long enough to engage fully in the scenario.'

There are a number of Seveso top tier sites in the region, some in urban settings and some in rural areas. The scenario pack developed for the system by VectorCommand includes simulation of generic sites in both urban and rural contexts, and includes news broadcasts specially designed to allow material relating to a specific site to be incorporated on the day.

'In the present financial climate budgets are tight, and yet the need to remain prepared for emergencies and to comply with legislation doesn't go away,' said Peter Daly, chair of the Regional Emergency Management committee. 'This technology will allow us to deliver high quality exercises over and over again - and with far less resource required to do so.'

This may be only the first in an annual programme of exercises of this type, but already officials are seeing the potential for this approach to be taken in the testing of off-site plans for Seveso sites in other regions of Ireland, as well as to support exercising of other hazard types - not least pandemic influenza.

'The real challenge of preparing for a pandemic is finding a way of realistically exercising your plans against the whole lifecycle of a pandemic which might stretch over weeks and months,' said Rod Stafford, Director of Command Development for VectorCommand, during a presentation requested by the exercise delegates on the potential for wider use of this technology. 'The Training and Exercising System has already been used to deliver numerous pandemic exercises in the UK and Australia and is an extremely cost-effective way of testing plans against a complex scenario.'

'Regardless of whether other agencies take up this system in Ireland, there is no doubt that the work being done in SW Ireland will raise the bar for the exercising of plans developed under the Seveso regulations. It will be interesting to see whether responders in the UK are willing to adopt a similarly innovative approach when dealing with the UK's many top tier COMAH sites.'

'The Training and Exercising System... did exactly what it said on the tin: its automated timeline and inject delivery allowed the whole exercise to be delivered by just one member of staff.'

Donal Doolan, Executive Officer, County Cork Fire.



Far left/left/bottom: Toxic chemical release, Seveso, Italy 1976. Seveso II is the term used to describe safety protocols for chemical releases (in UK COMAH).

Below: A young girl with skin damage caused by Seveso chemical release.

