

Accident Response Group
Exercise Dimming Sun
June 2003

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Emergency Public Information Working Group

Accident Response Group Exercise Dimming Sun June 2003



- “A nuclear accident has taken place near Norwich today,” reported the Norwich Evening News in mid-June, 2003.
- The English community, located two hours northeast of London, played host to “Dimming Sun,” an emergency response exercise.
- The exercise involved more than 2000 British and American military and civilian players for a week.

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- The exercise scenario involved the crash of a U.S. Air Force C-17 aircraft that carried multiple nuclear weapons under transport from Germany to New Mexico.
- Several of the weapons were severely damaged in a fire that resulted from the crash.
- Contamination spread to the nearby village of Tottington as a result of the fire.

NNSA Accident Response Group



- ARG exists to provide response to accidents or significant incidents involving American nuclear weapons.
- ARG is composed of a cadre of senior scientific advisors, weapons engineers and technicians, experts in nuclear safety and high explosive safety, health physicists, radiation control technicians, industrial hygienists, physical scientists, packaging and transportation specialists, and other specialists from the weapons complex.
- ARG members represent, Lawrence Livermore, Los Alamos and Sandia national laboratories, the Pantex Plant, the Bechtel/Nevada Remote Sensing Laboratory and the Oak Ridge Radiation Emergency Assistance Center/Training Site.

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- ARG members worked with their British and U.S. Air Force counterparts to assess the damage to American weapons in the mock accident,
- render the surviving units safe,
- and transport them and the recovered debris back to the U.S. for disposition.

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- British and American mock media reporters converged on the “gold” site at the Norfolk police constabulary in Wymondham, which headquartered the response effort.
- Norfolk Constabulary senior officers and public affairs officers conducted news conferences with Royal Air Force personnel.
- The Senior Energy Official supported all news conferences, usually sitting in the audience.

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- Senior science advisers for the ARG participated in technical briefings for the media.
- They answered questions about the damaged weapons,
- contamination around the crash site.

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- The exercise also featured a Norfolk County Council-hosted conference on how to remediate contaminated areas caused by the accident.
- The conference also tackled how to overcome damage to the economy and to the public image of the county.
- Representatives of the County Council's departments of education, social services, communications and emergency planning led the conference.

PA Lessons Learned: Exercise Dimming Sun



- Be sure to stay in the same hotel as the senior exercise planners.
- But seriously folks....

PA Lessons Learned: Exercise Dimming Sun



- Immediate communication must occur with local police and military counterparts about NNSA and ARG missions and assets.
- Ideally, sufficient PA personnel will be available to provide one or more people to work day and night shifts in a joint information center operated by civilian law enforcement or the defense ministry.
- Senior PA representatives should be available to work night and day shifts with the senior energy officials.

PA Lessons Learned: Exercise Dimming Sun



- “Smart books” that contain fact sheets on all relevant facilities and assets are indispensable.
- Fact sheets are not only useful for news media handouts, but they are also very helpful in educating other agencies about missions and responsibilities.
- Smart books should also be available on CD or online, if possible.



- Exercising a community public meeting adds additional realism to a scenario.
- Health, environmental, social, housing, infrastructure, agricultural and business impacts are primary concerns of government officials and citizens.
- Environmental remediation planning is a priority.

PA Lessons Learned: Exercise Dimming Sun



“There is virtually no correlation between the ranking of a threat or hazard by experts and the ranking of those same threats or hazards by the public.”
--Dr. Vincent Covello