



Exercise Green Gate Special Edition

It looked like the aftermath of a terrible catastrophe...For one day, Exercise Green Gate turned the tranquil setting of the former Bangour Village Hospital in West Lothian into a scene of devastation, with hundreds of casualties requiring emergency treatment, including radioactive decontamination.

Around 700 people took part in the exercise, drawn from the police, fire and ambulance services, and including over 200 volunteer members of the public.

Its purpose was to enable the emergency services to train together and practise with the specialist decontamination equipment they would use in the event of the release of hazardous materials; in this case – a dirty bomb in a busy city centre. The scenario included notional but realistic incidents designed to test the full range of response, so that tactical decisions had to be taken in real time.

And there was a strong element of cross-border co-operation, as Scottish emergency services personnel worked alongside colleagues from police, fire and ambulance services in England.

Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill visited the site to meet members of the emergency services and observe the exercise. He said: "It is important that we ensure that Scotland is prepared to deal with the consequences of any emergency."

Scottish Resilience staff were heavily involved in preparing for the event, and on the day. Neil Murray of Scottish Resilience was the exercise director.

"Little did we realise when we started planning the CBRN workshop which took place last February that it would be



the platform for the biggest live play exercise of its type to be held in Scotland," he said. "Green Gate was an enormous challenge and a true example of multi-agency working, including colleagues from a range of directorates in Scottish Government. We'd like to thank all the agencies and volunteers who took part.

"One of the aims of the exercise was to test national guidance and the key legacy of the exercise will be improved response arrangements across the UK, which of course we hope will never be used."



Far left: Exercise director Neil Murray briefs lead representatives from the police, fire and ambulance services at exercise control. Left: Screens provided an overview of the site and a minute-by-minute breakdown of events as they were scheduled to take place throughout the day.

What they said

Kenny MacAskill,
Justice Secretary

“It is important that we ensure that Scotland is prepared to deal with the consequences of any emergency.

“That is why the Scottish Government sponsors a number of exercises every year to allow our emergency services to test their preparedness.

“Exercise Green Gate is giving the police, fire and ambulance services the opportunity to work together to rehearse their roles in the event of an incident requiring the decontamination of a large number of people.

“The exercise has been planned for months and is part of Scotland's National Exercise Programme, which is based around the four big risks that Scotland faces—terrorism, extreme weather, pandemic flu, and utilities failure.

“It is right that we regularly test our emergency procedures to ensure we are as well prepared as possible to deal with any of these at any point in time.”

Chief Supt Graeme Dobbie, Lothian and Borders Police

“The police regularly take part in exercises to test our plans and response to major incidents. This exercise is particularly beneficial as it allows us to test our plans in a practical way while working alongside our colleagues in the other emergency services.”



Above: Police worked in pairs to put on protective clothing. Right and below: Over 200 members of the public volunteered to take part in the exercise—some as casualties. Makeup artists helped make their injuries look as realistic as possible.



Above left: Unexpected ‘injects’ meant that tactical decisions had to be made quickly: here, police deal with a collapsed colleague. Above right: a multi-agency meeting.

Right: Umpires from police, ambulance and fire services in Scotland and across the border assessed the exercise on site as events unfolded.



What they said

Mike Herriot, General Manager, National Risk and Resilience, Scottish Ambulance Service

“Exercise Green Gate allowed the Scottish Ambulance Service Special Operations Response Teams to practise and test procedures for working within the inner cordon, or ‘hot zone’, of a chemical, biological or radiological incident together with teams from the other emergency services.

“The purpose of the ambulance service in these situations is to save lives and improve health outcomes through early access to casualties, so the exercise tested overall casualty management and clinical decontamination procedures in a very challenging environment.”

Group Manager Rae Cameron of Grampian Fire and Rescue Service

“All eight Scottish fire and rescue services were represented at Exercise Green Gate, with around 100 fire fighters from five of those services directly involved.

“Green Gate gave our services an excellent opportunity to test our response to a major incident and also enhance our ability to work effectively with partner agencies, particularly the police and Scottish Ambulance Service.”



The normally peaceful former site of Bangour Village Hospital (above), was chosen to simulate some of the challenges of dealing with a release of hazardous materials in a built-up area.



Volunteers handed their clothing to the police to be bagged and logged (left), before making their way to the showers to be decontaminated (above).

Below left: The Scottish Ambulance Service’s ‘Polaris’ vehicle– a six wheel drive, all terrain vehicle for use in areas where conventional vehicles can’t reach and helicopters can’t land. Below right: working under pressure with one of the casualties.





Left: Howard Nimmo, London Fire Brigade, briefs a party from the observer programme, which included Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill.

Below: The emergency services also had to go through the decontamination process once they left the hot zone. A buddy system helped them remove their protective clothing safely.



Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill is interviewed by STV News (right). The exercise received good coverage from local and national media.

Below: some of the vehicles on site. A series of debriefs at the end of the exercise (bottom) captured initial thoughts on what had gone well, and what could be improved upon.



Fact file

More than 40 different organizations were involved either in planning or participating in Green Gate.

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The exercise used between 80,000 and 100,000 litres of water – equivalent to one Commonwealth size swimming pool – brought on site in tankers.