

UK National Tier 1 Exercise – BERR



In July, Steelhenge Consulting delivered the third of the UK government national Tier 1 simulation exercises of 2007 on behalf of the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR). The scenario chosen was a civil one based around energy and brought together the energy industries including oil, gas and electricity in an opportunity to rehearse their emergency planning alongside and in parallel with Government.

The event was designed and delivered by a Steelhenge team over nine months, utilising its in-house project management systems to ensure an integrated event was realised at the end of the extensive and extremely detailed planning process.

Stakeholders in the event included 13 Government Departments working their teams alongside BERR over the entire period of the 36 hour continuous exercise. This was an extended timescale for an event of this scale but it provided a unique opportunity to rehearse full shifts of crisis planning and policy staff - conducting hand-overs, managing time and through night working in a busy environment. The BERR staff worked to the central government crisis structure run by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat as the coordinating body.

In the run up to the exercise detailed modelling was done by many of the key industries to support the scenario and allow a realistic event. This was backed by a Steelhenge Impact Analysis team who conducted a benchmarking study around the scenario to ensure clarity and accuracy of responses and identification of dependencies. The training extended far beyond the exercise itself. Preparatory courses were run for team staff in BERR in the run up period, awareness training was delivered across Government and workshops were run in three Government Office regions and Wales to consider the strategies and impacts within a local context. This also allowed the delivery of one of the key objectives of the project – raising awareness of energy issues within a broader community.

A unique aspect of the actual simulation was the creation of a secure access website to enhance reality and provoke further media play. The site was updated hourly with news clips from the live “pseudo media” news team who worked around the clock to present a full media impression. Additionally news copy was run to allow the realistic re-creation of an online news site reporting on events as they unfolded. Journalists supported this with telephone play and two live press conferences were run, to camera with live audiences.

The exercise was rated a great success by all involved and the post exercise reporting process was detailed and led to a wide range of new areas for review and development. The training was seen as having been of enormous value at all levels and produced a better prepared and rehearsed Department.