



Ensuring a coordinated, cast iron response to a major incident

Country
United Kingdom

Number of locations
10

Number of employees
15,000+

Services included
> Incident and emergency management

Client

A leading integrated highway engineering provider.

Challenge

Our client is a highways specialist with responsibility for maintaining, designing and constructing the UK's major motorways and trunk roads. Its remit includes two long road tunnels that present a unique risk to UK road users. The implications of an incident, particularly one involving fire, are extremely serious and quickly become life threatening. Confined space, a lack of ventilation and the build-up of smoke and toxins represent major hazards to both road users and emergency responders. As a responsible contractor, our client wished to stress-test its multi-agency response plan, to reassure Highways England and the public at large, that the tunnels are safe.

Approach

With specialist expertise in crisis and emergency management, Berwicks were the obvious choice to test the proposed incident response plans. As part of the process, we devised and delivered exercises based on specific tunnel risks. Participants from the local councils, local resilience forums, police, fire and ambulance services, Highways England and our client, were all involved and worked closely together. The gathering of all the agencies was an opportunity to update them on ongoing maintenance and repairs, review the tunnel's risks and safety systems, and introduced them to the plans.

This was followed by a desk-based exercise that played out emergency scenarios and required each agency to consider how they would respond, with particular focus on areas such as joint decision-making and communication. Critically, the role of the network's central control unit was demonstrated – with CCTV throughout the tunnel, its role was found to be essential for assimilating information across the teams.

Results

The exercises notably improved confidence. Participants reported that they had particularly benefited from improved situational awareness and decision-making skills, as well as the new relationships they had built across the agencies involved. They collectively felt ready to respond robustly to the challenges of a major incident.

Following the exercises our client had full confidence in the response plan which was later approved by the Highways Agency. They have since commissioned Berwicks to stress-test additional incident and emergency plans relating to its other long road tunnel and roads across their network.

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