

WEEKLY UPDATE SPECIAL

27 November 2009

SERVICE ● IMPROVEMENT ● RESPECT ● PEOPLE



A Once in a Thousand Year Event



Cumbria Floods: November 2009

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

Message from Chief Fire Officer

The unprecedented events of the last week or so have again shown that Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service can work with our partners to ensure the safety of our communities.

I would like to personally thank those who have been involved in dealing with this huge operation. It has involved many staff from across the service both operationally and from those who provide support services. The professionalism, ingenuity, cooperation and teamwork displayed has been exemplary and has served the people of Cumbria well.

Working successfully with our colleagues from the other agencies involved in this protracted incident has been recognised and I have received messages of thanks for the cooperation given by all staff.

I have also received many thanks from members of the public about the assistance, help and kindness given by staff.

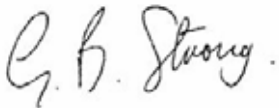
Once again my thanks and appreciation to all those involved.



Dominic Harrison Corporate Director Safer and Stronger Communities / Chief Fire Officer

Message From Gary Strong Portfolio Holder

On behalf of the Fire authority I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to everyone who has been involved in the catastrophic events that have taken place since last Thursday. The community spirit shown by everyone involved has been truly inspirational and everyone should be proud of what they have done for the people of Cumbria



Gary Strong Portfolio Holder

PC Bill Barker

I have just returned from the funeral of Bill Barker and have been extremely proud to represent the service, at what was a very humbling occasion. It is only at times like these that we truly realise the dangers that all emergency service workers potentially face when they set off to join their shift.

I have passed condolences on behalf of the service to the family.

Dominic Harrison
Corporate Director, Safer and Stronger Communities/Chief Fire Officer



Staff across the service observed one minutes silence at 1300 hours today as a mark of respect for our colleague PC Bill Barker.



As events started to unfold on Thursday 19 November no one could have imagined the ferocity and impact this latest deluge would have on the County. The Met Office had issued severe weather warnings and on Wednesday 18 November Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service set up a Critical Incident Room and started preparing for the expected spate conditions. This included the strategic relocation of assets including the four wheel drive vehicles.



By 0900 hours on Thursday incidents of widespread flooding were being reported especially in the Ambleside, Coniston and Keswick areas. The Critical Incident Room reconvened to provide an appropriate response. Evacuation of parts of Keswick was underway as the floodwaters rose quickly. At 1030 parts of Windermere were now beginning to flood.

At 1200 hours a severe flood warning was issued for Cockermouth and by 1400 hours the first calls were being received for flooding in the town. It was at this point that the Multi Agency Gold Command, based at Police HQ at Carleton Hall, declared a Major Incident. Major flooding was also been dealt with around the Barepot area of Workington.

The Mountain Rescue Team (MRT) base at Cockermouth became the base for Silver Command, but this was later transferred to Fire Service HQ as the power was intermittent at the MRT. It was from this point that all rescues and evacuations were coordinated by Silver Command.

Service HQ then became the focal point for all the agencies involved in the escalating incident. Agencies attending over the period included:

- Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service
- North West Ambulance Service
- RAF Air Sea Rescue
- Maritime Coastguard Agency
- Allerdale Borough Council
- RSPCA
- St Johns Ambulance
- Bay Rescue
- AA
- Sellafield Police

- Cumbria Police
- Cockermouth Mountain Rescue Team
- Environment Agency
- RNLI
- United Utilities
- British Red Cross
- Maryport Inshore Rescue
- Army
- International Rescue Corps

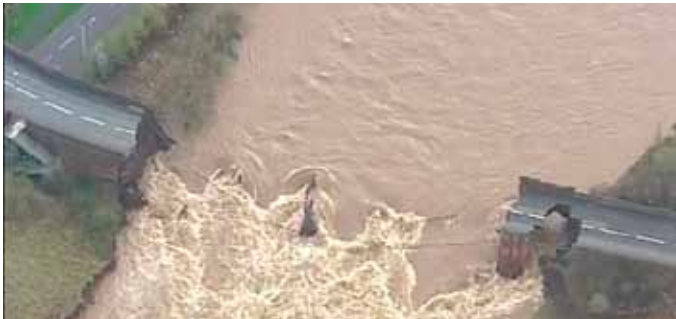




In addition Water Rescue Units from Greater Manchester, Merseyside and West Midlands Fire and Rescue Services were in attendance as well as four HVPs coordinated by the National Flood Coordination Centre.

The area around SHQ was described as 'like a scene from a disaster movie', with appliances, boats, incident command units and an array of other vehicles covering all the car parks and access roads. This was made even more spectacular by the searchlights from the Air Sea Rescue Helicopters constantly landing in the field nearby with people they had rescued.

Dealing with the incident in the Workington area was made even more difficult with the collapse of the Northside Road bridge with the tragic loss of PC Barker from Cumbria Police who was on the bridge at the time of the collapse. His body was found later that day at Allonby.



Fire Service staff based at SHQ worked through the night to provide a rest centre, and those essential cups of tea and coffee for staff as well as admin support for those agencies requiring such help.

As dawn broke on Friday morning the rescue efforts continued in the affected areas with the main focus of attention around Cockermouth. Much of SHQ had been taken over by the agencies involved in the ongoing incident, including the PCT who were coordinating with the emergency services to ensure that vulnerable people were able to access medical services and medication.

The search and rescue phase of the operation continued through Friday with all the agencies cooperating in the rescues and searching of property. Cumbria Police were coordinating the location of displaced persons to ensure their safety.

Service HQ became the focal point for those affected looking for information and again HQ staff helped in this process. It also became obvious, despite the valiant efforts of those HQ staff who had managed to get in, that the feeding of up to 100 people at anyone time was beyond the available resources and the School Meals Service stepped in and a feeding station was set up for all the emergency services in the Fire Station in Cockermouth.

Over the next 36 hours over one thousand properties across the county had been evacuated and checked where possible by multi-agency resources.

Over 400 people (plus their pets) had been either rescued or assisted to safety and around 200 premises were given assistance in pumping out flood water



On Saturday the operation to search properties continued hampered by further heavy rain. It was at that time that The Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, arrived in Cockermouth to give support and thanks to those involved in the rescue as well as to visit those directly affected. The Prime Minister was accompanied by Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Tony Cunningham MP for Workington.

Gordon Brown said: "The way the emergency services have come together has given the whole country pride in what you do,"

"You have got great emergency services. People around the country are very proud how the community here has come together."



Later on Saturday further problems were encountered when a decision was made to close the A595 at the Papcastle Bridge effectively cutting off Cockermouth from the north and west of the county.



Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service and Cumbria Police coordinated the pre recovery response through Sunday night. The County and Allerdale Council ensured that by 0700 hours on Monday morning the streets of Cockermouth, Workington and Keswick were clear of debris and the contaminated mud and silt to enable phased access to the affected properties to begin. Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service Water Rescue teams assisted the Environment Agency and Council officials with the removal of large items of debris from bridges and buildings close to water and as the water began to subside, pumps were deployed to pump out basements of properties across the county.



Service HQ continued to be a point of contact for the public until the County Council's Flood Centre was established in Christ Church. Many requests for information and offers of help were dealt with and passed on to the relevant agencies.

During the continuing operations on Monday Rosie Winterton, Minister of State for Regional Economic Development and Co-ordination, also visited Service HQ to offer her thanks and support for the work carried out by the emergency services.



The Leader of the Opposition, David Cameron visited SHQ on Tuesday to thank the emergency services. During his visit he talked to staff, including the Control Room, about the Service's response to the incident and took the opportunity to thank everyone for the incredible efforts that had been put into protecting the people of Cumbria. He said: "The emergency services and volunteers have been fantastic. The councils will now have to work really hard with the clean-up, it will take a long time but you need everyone to play their part."

"Everybody has rightly praised the emergency services, who have done fantastic work. But don't forget the volunteer bodies, the mountain rescue and others in our society who have come together in an incredible way, showing that small towns may be small but they can do very big things."

The multi agency presence was based at Service HQ until Tuesday evening when the Police finally scaled down their operation and Silver Command handed over responsibility to the Council.

The Emergency Services have had incredible support from the local community both with their thanks for our assistance but with donations of food and other essentials for staff based at Service HQ and in all the affected areas.



There will be a series of debriefs both internally and amongst the agencies over the coming weeks to see if any lessons can be learned.

The aftermath of this will be felt for months to come. Transport links across the county are affecting our normal response arrangements and staff continue to experience difficulties in getting to and from work.

Over the coming weeks and months there will be more stories that will unfold about how Cumbria responded to another huge incident. If any member of the Service has any further photographs or stories of what happened across the county they should send them to Corporate Resources at Service HQ. What has been written here is a snapshot of what went on and cannot truly reflect the work put into dealing with this 'once in a thousand year event'



Some Statistics

Between Thursday 19 November and Tuesday 24 November the Service dealt with over **600** flood related calls

Over **400** people were either rescued or escorted to safety

Approximately **500** Cumbria Fire and Rescue Staff were deployed during the period.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

Thank you Letter from Roger Bingham

Dear Dominic

Firstly, may I say how enormously impressed I have been over the last few tragic days at the professionalism shown by the Fire and Rescue Service and other organisations belonging to the County along with the innumerable supporting agencies. All of these including the magnificent help provided by the voluntary sector has inevitably been largely coordinated by your Directorate.

I, and I am sure, all other Cumbrians will be grateful for your efforts provided at this time.

I do hope that you and other personnel will find time to have some rest and relaxation because as you will be well aware our task has only gone through the first phase.

If I can help in any way I would be honoured to do so.

Secondly, may I thank you and your staff for the courtesy and care they provided for me in the tour which you organised for me on Friday, which has provided me with a lasting impression?

Please also convey my personal thanks to the excellent driver Catherine Binny who took me round and to the ladies who provided me with refreshments at Cockermouth.

With best wishes and continual gratitude.

Yours sincerely



Roger K Bingham
Chairman, Cumbria County Council



Freephone Support Helpline

We appreciate that some employees and their families may be facing an extended period of disruption and uncertainty so please remember you can contact the Freephone Support Help Line on

0800 282193

The Help Line offers information, advice and support on a whole range of practical and emotional subjects – specialist legal and debt advice are also available.

The service is completely confidential and is available 24 hours a day 365 days per year to you and your immediate family. The telephone staff will understand the different ways you may be affected as an individual whether you have been directly involved or are providing support to others.

www.PPCworldwide.com User Name: Cumbria Password: Council



Counselling

It may be that those directly affected by recent incidents may wish to have face to face confidential counselling in the future. You are reminded of the Confidential Counselling Service for FRS employees.

The numbers of the counsellors are as follows:

Kay Cook	(Kendal)	01539 724182
Stephanie Daly	(Cockermouth)	01900 828607 or 07877 444478
Lis Heath	(Penrith)	01768 899941
Eunice Mortimer	(nr Barrow)	01229 586762
Stewart Pollard	(Cockermouth)	01900 822533
Annie Ballingall	(Penrith)	01768 892086
Geraldine Royale	(Barrow)	01229 812554 (only works until 5:00pm)
Linda Dawson	(Carlisle)	07871 165300



PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING



The Firefighters Charity Helpline

The Firefighters Charity has a helpline number as another source of help for those who have been affected by the floods personally within the service.

The number is 0800 398 88200 and is open Monday - Friday 9:00 - 5:00

More information can be found on their website <http://www.firefighterscharity.org.uk/>



BBC Inside Out

At 7.30 pm on Monday 30th BBC North East will be broadcasting a 30 minute documentary based on the Flooding in Cumbria .



Photographs courtesy of The Times and Star, New and Star, BBC News, Mike Todhunter

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

If you have anything to be included in the next edition please e mail:-
corporateresources.fire@cumbriacc.gov.uk
or telephone ext 252/257/253