



Department for Culture, Media and Sport

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**HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN EMERGENCIES:
GUIDANCE ON ESTABLISHING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE CENTRES**

I am writing to let you know that this guidance has now been placed on the UK Resilience website (<http://www.ukresilience.info/preparedness/ukgovernment/humanitarian.shtm>). This final document supersedes interim guidance published last year, and seeks to build on and improve that version, so that you have a document that better meets your needs.

This letter is being sent to all Category One and Two responders and voluntary sector partners and is intended to be read by all those organisations who are working in partnership to deliver co-ordinated multi-agency humanitarian response plans. Within Local Authorities, it should be read by Social Services Departments as well as by emergency planners. It should also be read by Regional Resilience Teams, Government Departments, relevant voluntary organisations and Coroners.

This letter is being sent from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) because for the past year we have led the work across central government to try to improve the way that victims' needs are met – in the response both to emergencies in the UK and to those involving Britons overseas. Since August, DCMS has been the lead Department for the new humanitarian assistance workstream in the Cabinet Office's cross-government Capabilities Programme and we have worked very closely with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) to update this guidance. We are also grateful to the Local Government Association (LGA) and Disaster Action for the support they have offered.

We are focused on three areas of work:

- **Providing aftercare for victims of recent emergencies** – offering a direct point of contact within government, organising memorial and commemorative events, learning lessons from victims' experiences, funding the 7 July Assistance Centre;
- **Assisting emergency planning ahead of future incidents** – working with other parts of central government and alongside local responders to find ways to improve existing services;
- **Supporting local responders in the response to an emergency** - providing a link for local responders to advice and support from central government.

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Assistance Unit**

The work on Humanitarian Assistance Centres falls into the second of these categories. If the right plans are put in place well in advance of an emergency occurring, then bereaved families, friends and survivors will receive the help they need when they so desperately need it – in the hours and days immediately after an emergency.

This guidance is intended to support local responders through the planning process. In particular it provides greater context about where Humanitarian Assistance Centres (HACs) fit into the wider humanitarian response. It explains what preparation should be done now, through multi-agency planning. It offers a guide to the decisions that responders will need to take during an emergency response about whether to establish a HAC and how to get one up and running quickly. It explains the vital importance of publicity and managing communications and clarifies some misconceptions about the legal limitations on sharing victims' contact details between agencies (this is to be supported by more detailed guidance to be published shortly by the Cabinet Office). Finally it offers a guide to the roles and responsibilities of all the organisations that may be involved in the humanitarian response to an emergency.

The guidance should be used as a prompt to review, update and improve your multi-agency plans. DCMS is determined to do everything we can to help you with that process. We will therefore follow up the publication of this guidance by visiting each Region in the first part of 2007 to explain our work and the key messages from this document. In the meantime, please get in touch with us direct if there is any aspect of this work that you would like to discuss – ring me on the number above or my colleague Anna Payne on 020 7211 6933.

You will probably also be aware that the Emergency Planning College offer training on establishing and managing Assistance Centres (see <http://www.epcollege.gov.uk>) – this new guidance will become the basic text for those courses. Originally those courses, and the interim guidance, referred to 'Family Assistance Centres'. In the past year, we have learned that use of the term 'family' can be unhelpful in alienating the injured and survivors – that is why we have re-named the concept as that of the Humanitarian Assistance Centre.

As the guidance itself explains, this is a document that should be read alongside a number of others – in particular the core guidance on emergency preparedness and emergency response and recovery, the literature review on humanitarian needs that was commissioned by DCMS, and a template/checklist on establishing a HAC that was produced by ACPO in collaboration with the Emergency Planning College. All of these documents are available on the UK Resilience website. And you should feel free to share this letter and any of these documents with anyone you think might find them helpful – our aim is to connect with the full range of those who might be involved in the humanitarian response to any emergency.

I hope you find this document helpful. Please do get in touch direct with any questions.

Alex Towers
Head of Humanitarian Assistance

Local Response Gateway: preparing together