



Interagency Coordination: A Case Study of the 2005 London Train Bombings

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Editor's Note: This is the first in a two-part series on interagency coordination that looks, in particular, at the response to the 2005 London bombings. In the next issue of the *NIJ Journal*, we will look further at challenges faced by British agencies in responding to the attacks and lessons that may be learned from them.

On July 7, 2005, at approximately 8:50 a.m., a series of bombs exploded on three London Underground trains. One hour later, a fourth bomb exploded on the upper deck of a bus in Tavistock Square. The attacks — the work of four suicide bombers — marked the deadliest bombings in London since World War II and the first suicide attacks in modern Western Europe.

The response of London's emergency services and transportation system to the bombings is considered the city's most comprehensive and complex response ever to a terrorist attack.¹ Responding agencies faced challenges during and immediately after the attacks, but major problems in emergency

coordination were minimized because London officials had established relationships with one another and had practiced agreed-upon procedures. Consequently, everyone knew their roles and responsibilities; a command and control system was up and running quickly; and mutual aid agreements — planned out in advance — were successfully initiated and applied.

This article is based on our research regarding the multiagency response to the London attacks, including barriers and ways to overcome them. As part of that National Institute of Justice-funded study, we interviewed officials from law enforcement, fire and medical services, and public health agencies who were directly involved in the July 2005

London response.² We asked about their role during the response, the strategies for coordination that facilitated it, the barriers they encountered and possible strategies for improving coordination among agencies responding to emergencies.

Why Do Emergency Coordination Efforts Fail?

Like the U.K., the United States faces a range of potential threats that would require a quick and coordinated response by many agencies. Our nation's capacity to prepare for and respond to terrorist attacks, natural disasters and other large-scale emergencies — especially ones involving simultaneous attacks at different locations — hinges on the ability of agencies to communicate with one another, share resources, and coordinate and execute a joint effort.

Researchers who study coordinated emergency response have identified both barriers and promising practices to help law enforcement and public health agencies improve interagency support during such situations. First and foremost, we know that multiagency coordination is a challenge at all levels. Even small problems can be exacerbated when crises occur in several places simultaneously or when reports by the media heighten public panic. Overlapping jurisdictions and responsibilities in emergency response can compound budget concerns, interagency friction and miscommunication.

In our own research, we found four general barriers to interagency coordination:

- **Communication.** Agencies tend to develop their own jargon based on their areas of focus and internal workings. The subsequent lack of a common language often impedes cross-agency communication.
- **Leadership.** Coordinated planning and response require an ongoing commitment from agency leaders. Response can fail when a leader of a critical partner agency is unwilling to commit qualified staff and resources because he or she is unconvinced of the benefits to the agency.

LESSONS LEARNED IN OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

Our research has helped us identify several promising practices for overcoming barriers and successfully coordinating with other agencies during an emergency. These include up-front planning and ongoing collaboration and training, such as:

- Creating and instituting standing procedures for rapidly recognizing and declaring a major multiagency incident.
- Having a standardized process for multiagency preparation and response that is rehearsed and used regularly for major events — and, therefore, becomes familiar to all emergency response agencies.
- Using a “liaison” model, in which personnel from one agency are assigned to work at other agencies for periods of time; sharing staff in this way facilitates communication and on-site consultation across agencies.
- Developing relationships to facilitate cooperation among agencies by holding joint trainings, planning sessions and informal social events (such as off-site dinners).
- Encouraging participation of all relevant agencies' senior and junior staff in joint training and planning sessions to foster relationship building, communication, trust and appreciation for each other's roles.
- Providing continued reinforcement from senior management through ongoing support for annual trainings and interactions and dedicating resources to joint initiatives.
- Implementing procedures to coordinate and send joint messages to the news media to forestall panic and exaggerated public perceptions.

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- **Cultural differences.** Although public safety and health officials share the common goal of saving lives, each agency develops its own cultural standards of behavior that reflect the educational and social backgrounds of its staff, organizational hierarchy, leadership style and core mission.
- **Legal and structural differences.** Each agency has a unique internal hierarchy, different processes for working through the chain of command, legal limitations, and varying geographical and topical jurisdictions. These differences can discourage, delay or prohibit joint planning initiatives.

To identify promising practices that can be used to resolve coordination barriers in the United States and elsewhere, we examined London's response in relation to a general coordination model. Applying this model — just one coordination model among many — to the 2005 bombings response provides an interesting look at some of the following interagency coordination promising practices.

The London Bombings: Declaring a 'Major' Incident

London's public safety agencies have been collaborating for a long time. In 1973, city leaders formed the London Emergency Services Liaison Panel (LESLP), with representatives from the London Metropolitan Police Service, City of London Police, British Transport Police, London Fire Brigade, London Ambulance Service and local London authorities. LESLP developed a manual, *Major Incident Procedure Manual*,³ which is the core memorandum among the members and includes a comprehensive outline upon which London's coordination model of emergency response is founded.

The manual defines "major incident" broadly so that any emergency response agency can declare a major incident and thus increase the likelihood that multiple agencies will respond immediately. A key facet of the London bombing response was, in fact, rapid recognition and declaration of a major incident.

London's Standardized Command Structure

LESLP's manual also describes the responsibilities of each agency during any major incident and defines the general roles that relevant personnel perform on the scene. The roles are defined by three levels of leadership: Gold, Silver and Bronze.⁴ The three levels of command are used across the U.K. for all large-scale emergencies. Consequently, relevant agencies are familiar with the roles and responsibilities of each level.

In addition, all agencies have agreed that the U.K.'s law enforcement serves as the coordination lead. Thus, there is no confusion about which agency is in charge during a major incident. Because these procedures were already in place at the time of the 2005 bombings, there was limited confusion about the roles and responsibilities of responding agencies.

Joint Training and Planning

The anti-terrorism branch of the London Metropolitan Police Service hosts quarterly joint exercises, known as the Hanover Series, to practice what to do in the event of a major incident. Partner agencies and other stakeholders meet in the outskirts of London for weekend tabletop exercises that increase everyone's knowledge of roles and responsibilities. According to emergency service personnel, the practice sessions also increase familiarity with other key personnel, provide the opportunity to test procedures and rehearse the standardized LESLP command and control system, and help agencies learn how to respond and react collectively.

The exercises use the Silver and Gold components of LESLP's command and control structure and therefore help reinforce and improve multiagency coordination. Perhaps most importantly, the scenarios introduced during the Hanover Series are grounded in practical, wide-ranging incidents that require in-depth planning and response duties. These exercises usually reflect local, national and international events and address a series of issues to improve multiagency cooperation.

One Voice, One Message

Having a single media spokesperson can help ensure that consistent information is released to the public in a timely manner. It can also help avoid conflicting and confusing statements from different agencies. Shortly after the 2005 bombings, the Metropolitan Police Service assumed the lead position of a joint media "cell" and convened a group of public information officials from partnering

agencies and the central government. The group met quickly after the bombings to agree upon roles and responsibilities and to develop a joint message. It provided the public — via the media — with a constant stream of information that helped to restore calm and ultimately to identify the bombers.

Developing a National Coordination Model

Since 2001, there has been an increased emphasis on multiagency planning and response, and efforts have been taken in the United States and elsewhere to develop coordinated approaches. In public safety and homeland security, informal agreements between agencies can serve as a first step toward minimizing barriers to coordination. Informal agreements can allow agency leaders to achieve their goals through cooperation rather than direct competition and can help clarify each agency's expectations. After working relationships have been established, agencies may then decide to develop more formal agreements that describe the planning, collaboration and training elements discussed above.

The July 2005 bombings in London are just one example of a complex event that required extensive response planning and training. Other examples include public health outbreaks, serial violence like the D.C.-area sniper attacks and natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina. Identifying and developing a national coordination model — and learning from earlier cases — should greatly improve our nation's abilities to respond to terrorist attack or other major homeland security events.

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For More Information

- Eyerman, J., and K.J. Strom, *A Cross-National Comparison of Interagency Coordination Between Law Enforcement and Public Health*, final report submitted to the National Institute of Justice, Washington, D.C.: February 2006 (NCJ 212868), available at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/212868.pdf>.
- Eyerman, J., and K.J. Strom, "Multiagency Coordination and Response: Case Study of the July 2005 London Bombings," *International Journal of Comparative & Applied Criminal Justice* 32 (1) (2008): 89-110.
- Strom, K.J. and J. Eyerman, "Interagency Coordination in Response to Terrorism: Promising Practices and Barriers Identified in Four Countries," *Criminal Justice Studies: A Critical Journal of Crime, Law and Society* 20 (2) (2007): 131-147.

Notes

1. London Regional Resilience Forum, *Looking Back, Moving Forward. The Multi-Agency Debrief: Lessons Identified and Progress Since the Terrorist Events of 7 July 2005*, London: Government Office for London, 2006, available at <http://www.londonprepared.gov.uk/downloads/lookingbackmovingforward.pdf>.
2. The authors thank the London planning and response community for their candid and thoughtful participation in this study; this project would not have been possible without their support.
3. London Emergency Services Liaison Panel (LESLP), *Major Incident Procedure Manual, Sixth Edition*, London: Metropolitan Police Service, 2004.
4. These levels of command are often called "strategic," "tactical" and "operational." In London's emergency command structure, these roles are not related to rank within or across agencies.

About the Authors

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