



Interagency Coordination: Lessons Learned From the 2005 London Train Bombings

by Kevin J. Strom, Ph.D., and Joe Eyerman, Ph.D.

Editor's Note: This is the second in a two-part series on interagency coordination that examines the response to the 2005 London bombings. In Issue 260 of the *NIJ Journal*, the authors identified promising practices in London's multiagency response. In this article, they discuss in more detail the challenges faced by British agencies in responding to the attacks and lessons that may be learned from them.

In July 2005, terrorists carried out the first suicide attacks in modern Western Europe. At 8:50 a.m., bombs went off on three London Underground trains. A fourth bomb was detonated a short time later on a double-decker bus. The attacks were the deadliest in London since World War II, killing 52 people and injuring more than 700 others.

London agencies responding to the bombings faced a number of challenges, which were, in part, driven by the virtually simultaneous nature of the attacks. Initial reports about the source of the explosions ranged from a train derailment to a body on the tracks to a power surge in the London Underground system.¹ Passengers fled

from multiple station exits, causing further confusion about the number of attack sites.

As part of a National Institute of Justice-funded study, we interviewed officials directly involved in responding to the July 2005 bombings, including law enforcement, fire and medical services, and public health authorities. We found that although protocols followed by the multiple agencies that responded to the attacks largely minimized major problems, communication, leadership and legal difficulties did affect the coordination efforts.²

The primary issues reported to us during our interviews related to communication and leadership.

Coordination Challenges

One of the biggest challenges faced by the London agencies was how to communicate with the victims' families.³ Family members and friends found it difficult to get information on the status and location of injured or deceased loved ones — so the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) set up a family assistance center on the day following the bombings.

Responders also encountered problems with radio communications. Although the radio systems used by the British Transport Police and London Underground staff worked in the subway tunnels, the radios of other responding agencies, including MPS, did not. The interoperability of radios — the ability of radio systems to work in all settings and across all agencies — is technically a communications problem; however, leadership is crucial in developing and testing cross-agency systems prior to an emergency. According to the authorities we interviewed, solutions to the radio interoperability problems were being worked on at the time of the bombings; they had not, however, been fully implemented. (For more information on NIJ's interoperability portfolio, see page 32.)

Failures in leadership can also contribute to coordination-related problems, especially when attacks occur in three different police jurisdictions, as was the case with the London bombings. Shortly after the attacks, the City of London Police, which is responsible for the Square Mile in the center of London, restricted cell phone network access to specific users to reduce network traffic and improve first responder access. This had the unintended consequence, however, of cutting off access for many responding agencies, including the London Ambulance Service. The London Ambulance Service was able to communicate using alternate means, and no major harm resulted from the restriction. Nonetheless, this example underscores the need for planning among agencies.

Legal issues further complicated the multiagency response. Concerns over

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privacy laws initially kept authorities from sharing information with bombing survivors and their families. The United Kingdom's Data Protection Act prohibits sharing personal data without the consent of those concerned, thus limiting what information officials could give agencies and families on the identity and status of victims. American public health offices have raised similar concerns about our Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and how these regulations could affect communication and information sharing with other agencies, including law enforcement.⁴

Applying Lessons Learned

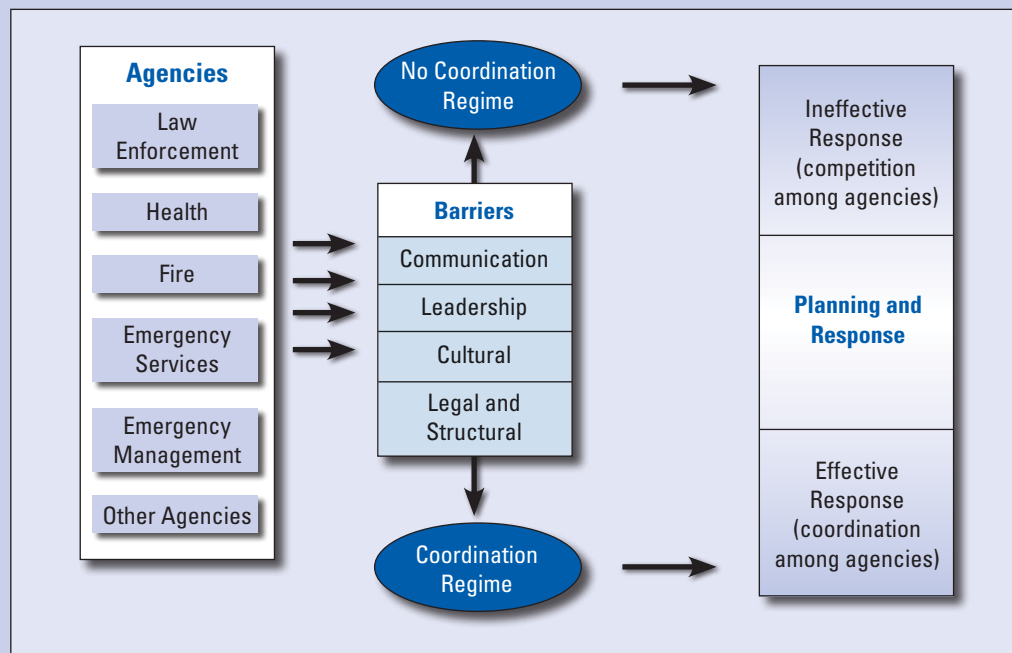
London officials learned valuable lessons regarding the multiagency response to the July 2005 bombings. We found that the flexibility of London's protocols for interagency coordination helped minimize major problems in emergency coordination. London officials had established relationships with one another and had practiced agreed-upon procedures. Consequently, a command and control system was up and running quickly, there was limited confusion about agencies' roles and responsibilities, and a unified message was delivered to the media.⁵

According to British expert Peter Simpson, a participant in our study, the city continues to improve its procedures for interagency command and control, communication and planning across agencies, and joint training (see sidebar, "Analyzing Multiagency Activities in the U.K.," on page 31). British legislation, such as the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998 and the Civil Contingencies Act, provide a foundation for multiagency partnerships. The Crime and Disorder Act requires local agencies, including the police and public health authorities, to work together to

IMPROVING MULTIAGENCY RESPONSE

When analyzing London’s response to the 2005 bombings (see main story), we used a general coordination model that we developed in previous research.⁶ The model provides a conceptual summary of the process, depicting benefits of multiagency coordination and common barriers encountered. It offers a first step in developing evidence-based solutions to improve coordination, including the development of performance metrics.

Agencies can minimize the common barriers to effective coordination by developing self-regulating, long-term processes — or “coordination regimes” — that facilitate working together in preparation and response activities. Failure to develop effective processes for working across agencies prior to an emergency event can result in competition across agencies, which, in turn, can lead to an ineffective joint response.



Future work would continue to define this model and apply it to multiagency-based systems that exist currently in U.S. jurisdictions. This could include, for example, evaluating which types of barriers are most common within and across jurisdictions as well as the most effective solutions used for solving these problems.

develop crime prevention strategies; the Civil Contingencies Act establishes clear roles and responsibilities for agencies involved in emergency preparation and response. To further improve response, a review of the Civil Contingencies Act currently under way will define a set of performance standards for local responders; create a performance management agreement, which includes capturing and sharing performance data; and devise an intervention strategy for poorly performing organizations.

The experience in London offers important guidance to U.S. agencies. But before we attempt to apply any lessons learned to the U.S., there are certain factors that should be considered. First, we must recognize the long history of disaster response in which London’s coordination approach is rooted. This includes extensive bombings of the city during World War II and the Irish Republican Army’s campaign of violence in the 1970s and 1980s. In both cases, incidents were too extensive to be addressed by a single agency.

ANALYZING MULTIAGENCY ACTIVITIES IN THE U.K.

by Peter Simpson

To analyze gaps in multiagency coordination, agencies in the U.K. are using an approach that maps actual and desired responses to a range of threats across agencies. This approach — which has been used for the 2004 Olympics, security for the Caribbean Community and U.K. terrorism response planning activities — provides a broad framework for risk assessment that can help inform future response efforts.

Each agency's response strategies are captured and recorded — or mapped — simultaneously. The subsequent "map" provides data that can be used to develop agreed-upon policies and procedures, such as triggers for mutual aid and areas of "tolerable" risk. Agencies can identify roles and best practices and develop performance benchmarks. Perhaps most significant, agencies can also collectively identify gaps or redundancies in activities, which they can then address.

The process provides a high-level analysis and evaluation of multiagency response systems across civilian and military, local and national levels.

About the Author

Peter Simpson spent 30 years as a senior officer in the London Fire Brigade, his last three years seconded to the Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command. He is a visiting fellow of Cranfield University's Defence College of Management and Technology and the U.K.'s leading expert in multiagency activity analysis. Simpson was an active participant in RTI International's London project discussed in the main article.

The size of a jurisdiction and the number and type of agencies within that jurisdiction are also critical. For example, the U.K. has 43 local police agencies, compared to more than 17,000 in this country. Cross-agency responses in the United States may also need to be coordinated at federal, state and local levels. The public safety and research communities must work together to better understand how the characteristics of local jurisdictions affect response capacity and to identify and implement protocols that contribute to successful coordination.

Next Steps

Based on our research and lessons learned from the multiagency response to the London bombings, we believe that the first step in preparedness planning involves evaluating how well agencies coordinate with one another. To begin the evaluation, we should develop baseline measures in every community. The measurements will help policymakers identify which communities need to improve their coordination before a crisis occurs.

Terrorism — like the 2005 bombings in London — is a complex problem that requires multiagency solutions. Failure to communicate among agencies and plan in advance can lead to an inferior response. Working together regularly can help agencies understand each other's roles, sustaining long-term partnerships and improving future response to emergency situations.

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About the Authors

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Notes

1. U.K. Home Office, *Addressing Lessons From the Emergency Response to the 7 July 2005 London Bombings*, 2006, available at <http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-publications/publication-search/general/lessons-learned?view=Binary>.
2. See Strom, K.J., and J. Eyerman, "Interagency Coordination: A Case Study of the 2005 London Train Bombings," *NIJ Journal* 260 (July 2008): 8-11.
3. U.K. Home Office, *Addressing Lessons; 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>.
4. 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, DC: February 2006 (NCJ 212868), available at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/212868.pdf>.
5. Strom, "Interagency Coordination."
6. Eyerman, *A Cross-National Comparison*.

Resources for Practitioners

Bridging the Communications Gap

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) is working to help public safety officials communicate seamlessly across agencies and jurisdictions so they can effectively coordinate and respond to emergency situations.

NIJ competitively selected four Centers of Excellence to join the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) system. The Communications Technologies Center of Excellence is one of these centers. For more information, see http://www.justnet.org/coe_commtech/Pages/home.aspx.

Here is a brief summary of some of NIJ's communications technology projects:

- **Research and development.** Ongoing research in cognitive radio for public safety applications; evaluation of Voice over Internet Protocol in a real-world setting; and prototype development of software defined, multiband conventional

emergency radio that complies with public safety communication standards.

- **Technology assistance.** Assistance, advice and support of tactical operations on communications technology-related issues through the NLECTC system.
- **Software Defined Radio Forum.** Work with the Software Defined Radio Forum's Public Safety Special Interest Group.

The Forum published a 2007 report on how software defined and cognitive radio could be used in situations like the 2005 London train bombings. For more information, see <http://www.sdrforum.org>.

- **Standards.** Supporting the development of standards to facilitate the introduction of software defined and cognitive radio technology into the market.
- **InShort series.** Fact sheets on public safety communications interoperability topics.

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij>

