



## Summary Flooding Report for Blackburn with Darwen 2012

## Background

The months of June, July and August 2012 proved to be extreme in terms of rainfall for Lancashire with some areas experiencing significant problems as a result of that rainfall.

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) received an usually large number of calls during these periods and as a result had to prioritise and respond to those calls by implementing strategies that are designed and tested for just such occasions.

The prime responsibility of LFRS is to attend critical incidents which are those where life is endangered. Priority is given to incidents of this type over secondary incidents and as such a full attendance of pre-determined appliances and personnel will attend regardless of any other demands on the Service.

The above brings extreme demands on the resource base of LFRS and therefore additional emergency measures are implemented when demand dictates.

## Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

The Act states the following in respect of emergencies:

### Section 7 Fire-fighting

*(1) A fire and rescue authority must make provision for the purpose of—*

- (a) extinguishing fires in its area, and*
- (b) protecting life and property in the event of fires in its area.*

### Section 8 Road traffic accidents

*(1) A fire and rescue authority must make provision for the purpose of—*

- (a) rescuing people in the event of road traffic accidents in its area;*
- (b) protecting people from serious harm, to the extent that it considers it reasonable to do so, in the event of road traffic accidents in its area.*

### Section 9 Emergencies

*(1) The Secretary of State may by order confer on a fire and rescue authority functions relating to emergencies, other than fires and road traffic accidents in relation to which the authority has functions under section 7 or 8.*

*(2) An order under this section may require functions conferred on a fire and rescue authority under this section to be discharged outside the authority's area.*

The key words in the above sections are *may* and *must* and it should be noted that under Section 9, the word *may* is used, in other words, there is currently no statutory obligation for the FRS to neither equip in readiness for nor respond to flooding incidents. The Fire and Rescue Service will however attend such incidents when deemed appropriate to do so but on a priority basis.

### Spate Conditions and Trigger Levels

Spate conditions may occur due to natural or human events and may be planned or unplanned e.g. bonfire night or extreme ambient heat levels leading to a heightened risk of wildfires and their consequences.

The Meteorological Office (Met Office) has responsibility for providing weather warnings in the United Kingdom. They warn of severe or hazardous weather which has the potential to cause danger to life or widespread disruption of communications or transport through the National Severe Weather Warning Service. LFRS will instigate Stage 1 of the Spate Condition (Emergency) Plan when a Red Alert is received i.e. disseminate information to staff and Departments County-wide.

Spate conditions usually have the effect of significantly increasing the number of incident related calls to the Fire Service to levels that exceed those that may be safely handled by normal operating procedures and staffing levels.

To assist in call handling a secondary control room may be opened to deal specifically with the spat-related calls and planning/control which is known internally to LFRS as OPCON. The OPCON centre will also establish and maintain communications with other agencies throughout the spat period and uses remote conferencing facilities to plan and implement responses.

## LFRS Roles and Responsibilities

### *Operational Risk Management Department:*

Responsible for pre-planning and formulating procedures to be adopted/implemented when spate conditions (amongst others) arise.

### *Operational Staff:*

Respond to Critical Incidents i.e. where it has been determined that the incident is likely to endanger life or well being of an occupier or member of the public or incidents which, if left unresolved, could cause further damage or endanger life e.g. unsafe building/structure. LFRS will also advise other agencies when appropriate and safe to do so.

### *Control Room Staff:*

Responsible for call handling and use of Emergency Call Management Procedures to ascertain the severity of the incident and the likelihood of endangerment to life, in order to determine whether an attendance should be made and if so, in what capacity i.e. officer only or operational crew. Where Control are in any doubt about the nature of an incident or its consequences an officer will normally be sent to assess whether it is appropriate to send further resources.

Note: If the premises are commercial or industrial a non-fire incident may be chargeable but charges are not made for fires.

RNLI will also respond to inland flooding if: (a) there is a potential risk to life and (b) on request from LFRS although in Lancashire the first response usually falls to LFRS.

## Control Room Response Procedure

On receipt of an emergency call during spate conditions where flooding is mentioned during the call and as part of the filtering process, Control staff will initiate the following procedure in order to prioritise the calls:

STAGE ONE (Primary Questions e.g. address)
STAGE TWO (Assessment Questions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Is the flooding inside or outside the property?</li></ul>

- Is the flooding caused by a burst pipe?
- **If outside** – LFRS will not attend
- **If inside** -
- Where is the water coming from?
- How deep is the water?
- Have you contacted a plumber
- Can you isolate the water at the stop-cock? Ask a neighbour if you don't know where it is
- Is there someone else that can help you immediately such as a friend or family member?
- Can you contain the water using buckets or other vessels?

**STAGE THREE (Pre-arrival advice)**

- Callers should be re-directed to a more appropriate agency i.e. plumber, electrician or Local Authority where rescues are not required
- If caller asks about electrics, advise them NOT to disconnect electrics but to leave them alone and contact an electrician

Lancashire Figures – June 2012

From 22/06/2012 to 26/06/2012 LFRS received 496 calls. Of those, 243 were attended (146 were Special Service calls of which 136 mentioned flooding in the initial incident description).

235 of those incidents were not attended even though 'flooding' was mentioned in the initial call and the following table goes some way to demonstrating why this was the case:

Incident Number	Nature	Response
1510	Tree in road	Police informed
1512	Flooded road	Advice given
1513	Flooding in garden	Advised to call <i>floodline</i>
1517	1" of water in property from fields	Advice given
1519	Flooded field	Advice given
1520	Flooding in road	Advised to call <i>floodline</i>
1523	3cm's of water in house	Advice given

The main problems encountered by LFRS during these conditions are the perceptions of people i.e. what constitutes an emergency for LFRS balanced against the expectations of the public. As can be seen from the above table, people have differing conceptions about given situations and it is understandable that water within a property is classed as an emergency in the mind of the occupant.

When water enters a property the incident commander has to make an assessment as to whether there is anything to be achieved by deploying LFRS resources for example; if there's nowhere to pump the water to or if pumping out will exacerbate someone else's situation then it is not feasible to carry out such operations. This can often lead to frustration, anger or occasionally, violence by the owner/occupier because their expectation is that the F&RS can and should take action.

#### Other Flood Related Damage

The spate conditions in and around the above period caused structural damage to three properties in Darwen with one necessitating LFRS intervention. This was on Knott Street which was shored-up by the Urban Search and Rescue Unit (USAR) of LFRS. USAR are trained and equipped to, amongst other things, stabilise and search collapsed and unsafe buildings/structures.

The above incident is typical of what can and does happen if drains collapse or culverts are overwhelmed by the volume of rainwater which can wash away the subsoil resulting in destabilisation and ultimately, collapse of buildings.

The Environment Agency EA are working on the River Darwen culvert where it crosses the A666 Bolton Road in Darwen, clearing silt that has built up over time and strengthening the culvert itself in order to prevent another build-up of flood water which, this summer, overwhelmed the bridge/culvert, knocking down the retaining walls and allowing flood water onto and along the main road, entering properties as it did so.

#### Summary

Overall, despite the heavy rainfall across Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen in particular, there was less damage and disruption than LFRS anticipated. The Emergency

Planning arrangements appear to have worked robustly and as expected with the exception of the River Darwen culvert which is now being addressed by the EA.

The following are suggested areas for discussion to further advance the pre-planning for future spate conditions:

- Environmental visual audits of open-water courses
- Visual audits of ponds (e.g. Sunnyhurst Woods) which, during periods of heavy rainfall, can result in silt being washed from the pond into other open-water courses
- Numbers of phone calls to LFRS requesting sand bags
- Public information and advice in advance of spate conditions

Station Manager Merrick Tomlinson  
Darwen Fire Station  
Union Street  
Darwen BB3 0DA

01254 702288  
07775592778