



Going for Gold

Superintendent Alan King, CBRN(E) Co-ordinator for the UK's Metropolitan Police, tells Gwyn Winfield about the work they are doing to improve their fitness for the London Olympics

GW: As I understand it, the Metropolitan Police's (Met's) CBRN unit is getting bigger. What is the next step – have you reached capacity or what are you looking to build?

AK: To put it into context, the bit that is getting bigger is the co-ordination team that work with me to ensure we have got a joined up approach across the organisation linking in with the national picture. It hasn't got much bigger; just a handful of people. The actual number of responders is not getting bigger and we are rationalising the assets we have to ensure the right people are trained and are in the right place for effective delivery

GW: Is the capability to get down-range quicker, stay longer and get better analysis going to be improved?

AK: We already have that capability. In the past year I have been fine tuning the process to make sure that our multi agency response capability is joined up and able to deal with a

CBRNE incident. In other words that the right people turn up to deal with an incident. The worst-case scenario would be that no-one turns up because each thought someone else was dealing with the incident. That would have been a major concern but the standard operating procedures (SOP's) and the Service Level Agreements (SLA's) between the CBRN units, address this. It means that we can respond to a CBRN incident with the right people from scene assessment through to consequence management and decontamination – the whole package covering both the investigative and consequence management aspects.

GW: In the past three and a half years we have seen the demise of Multi Agency Initial Assessment Team (MAIAT), which was supposed to bring interoperability, but also the standing up of the new Police CBRN Centre (PN CBRN C) which is also supposed to bring in interoperability.

So what lessons have been taken from the two things? Has there been a net increase in interoperability?

AK: I wasn't involved in MAIAT – it was before my time. However I believe that the trial itself was a success, but it was more a question of whether or not it was the right thing for London at that particular time. I think it did set the parameters in developing the response we have today and certainly helped to build on multi agency operability.

GW: ...But interoperability has increased over the past three years; is it now worth re-trying?

AK: The MAIAT principle could be considered in the future if the need arose and it was deemed to be an appropriate response, never say never really. At present though I don't think we have a need for it as the Met police now have their own response and scene assessment. We work closely with the Fire and Ambulance Services and other agencies, both on pre-planned and

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spontaneous incidents, and they have their own capabilities. We exercise and train together and undertake operations together. We have a good relationship with PN CBRN C and work in harmony with them, although here is a subtle difference between what we do in London and what the rest of the country does because capital city policing is unique.

We are a major city and potential target – which is not to say that other cities aren't, but London will always be a major target. We have capital city policing (which Cardiff and Edinburgh also have) and more importantly we have a national responsibility for CT within the Counter Terrorism Command –. Although there are other CT units elsewhere in the country. All these additional functions require a degree of CBRN expertise over and above the Model Response, which is where the unique nature of London comes to play – and that is why sometimes we need to operate differently. At the base level the MPS dovetail perfectly with PN CBRN C. Where we need a different response we develop it and share this learning with the PN CBRN C so there is two-way flow: they support us and the rest of the country with Model Response, we support and help them with developments beyond the Model Response.

GW: How are you going to gain this model response +? Any interest in live agent training? In isolated cases it would be useful to get the experience and confidence that it brings...

AK: As a matter of routine I would not see a need for it as we are satisfied that the existing training is good enough. I am certain that would be the view held by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). That said, I can see a few isolated cases where, for individual posts, the confidence it would bring in the equipment used could be advantageous.

GW: Among of the latest pieces of kit on offer to the police forces have been the escape hoods. Far from being a national roll out this has been patchy



If you go down to the woods today... The Met police do a wide variety of training – could it include live agent in the future? ©Met Police

– what is the Met's view on them?

AK: We have looked very carefully at escape hoods and, after a lot of examination of research and expert opinion from the Health and Safety branch, we decided not to issue escape hoods. Our main concern about escape hoods – and this is nothing against the product, as in the right instances it would be a great piece of kit to have – is that they give you a short degree of protection. If you issue them to all front line responders and say this will give you 20 minutes' protection as an opportunity to get out safely, with cops being cops they will use them bravely to rescue people and that is not what they are for. If we didn't have a good CBRN response capability then they might be an option, but we do have a good capability and our message to all our responders is "Steps 1,2,3". If it says, "Step back; this is dangerous", then that is what we want them to do. We don't want them to put on an escape hood and try and rescue people, as we have the right people who can turn up very quickly and are properly equipped to effect the rescue. Consequently, the decision was made not to issue them and it was the right decision. Obviously if the intelligence profile were to change for London then

the supply and issue of Escape Hoods would be a tactical option we would consider. The safety and welfare of our staff is paramount and will always be our primary consideration

GW: One of the things that came out of your presentation in Bucharest is the fact that you have given your CBRN team part of the narcotics mission – the illicit drugs labs (IDLs). What was the history of that and how has it developed?

AK: The narcotics mission, or illicit drug labs as we refer to them, comes from the fact that we have had some incidents in the UK, and we have had some in London, where IDLs were located. We were aware about 18 months ago that this was a growing problem in the UK; it is already a large problem in the US and the Antipodes, so we looked at our capability and realised we didn't have a bespoke team to deal with it. Then we questioned whether we need a team to do that and nothing else and made the pragmatic decision that we already have a team of people that are very skilled in dealing with and working in hazardous environments. This team can and do operate where there are chemical agents that could cause extreme harm

and even death; they are trained to identify what the agents are, trained to operate in gas tight suits and the team is the dedicated CBRN unit. We looked at the skills required to undertake CBRN scene assessment and management and then looked at the skills required to do the same with IDLs and there wasn't a huge difference. A few of the team were trained at the FBI academy by their experts, and those officers have since trained the remainder of our the unit. Now we have a capability to respond to IDLs – and the team have done so very successfully on a few occasions. If it turns out to be a bomb factory, which is very similar, we have our own team of EOD officers and they would attend to mitigate any risk of explosion; once that has been done they would then withdraw and the dedicated CBRN unit would do whatever they needed to do

GW: Has it been a smooth transition?

AK: Yes, it has been. So far we have not been hit by the vast deluge of Meth labs, which it has been suggested we might be – and hopefully it will continue to be low key. They are out there and we do need to deal with them. In addition, it made sense because of the risks to individual officers' health that, where appropriate when we were dealing with large-scale cannabis farms along with all the booby traps, the explosive officers (expos) or the dedicated CBRN unit can act either as responders or advisers to the responders. We get more cannabis farms than we do IDLs at the moment, which is not to say the unit needs to turn up to all of them. We have the capability – a team of highly skilled and trained officers that can work in PPE in a contaminated environment, where there are agents that are harmful or lethal, and they do it very well. They can do CBRN and illicit drugs

GW: At Bucharest [Copies of the DVD with Alan's presentation on it can be bought from www.cbrneworld.com] you spoke on public order in a CBRN environment. One example you offered was the May Day disorder in

London, and the cordoning you developed for that. One thing that sprang to mind was what happens when you use the same tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) for a CBRN environment, where you might find contaminated people are contained with non-contaminated ones. Suddenly it becomes a legal issue, where the Met might be responsible for injuries.

AK: It certainly would be a legal issue! The May Day rulings [that stated that the form of containment used was legal] were very good from a public order perspective and very useful for us as an organisation. It was a good tactic and from that point we think it is significant that we have not had major May Day demonstrations of that order since. It was a tactic we deployed and used, and we were concerned that if we lost the Court case then those demonstrations would arise again. For CBRN it would never be our intention to contain contaminated and non-contaminated people in the same area; the whole purpose of putting cordons in place is to stop that from happening. Another reason for using cordons is protection of the population; they are all witnesses (you might well have perpetrators there as well) so it is important for the police to be able to capture any evidence from those caught up in the incident and to put them through decontamination before they go into any hospitals. If you don't and they turn up at a hospital contaminated, this will effectively shut the hospitals down. But to reiterate, we would never intentionally contain contaminated and non-contaminated persons together.

GW: Maybe not intentionally, but how do you do the speedy detection to know who is contaminated? You lack the number of assets to do it effectively on a large crowd...

AK: It would depend on the nature and location of the incident and the volume of people involved. An easy example to look at would be a chemical attack where people are giving clear signs of contamination such as runny nose, streaming eyes, etc. Cordons would be

put in place by the Territorial Support Group (TSG), which is part of the CBRN response. We have a lot of TSG units in London; they are the number one public order response and they are all CBRN trained so they can turn up and put in place cordons and contain people very quickly. With regard to scene assessment, this relates to the multi-agency training operations we do with Fire and Ambulance. While we don't have MAIAT, all three agencies do have a scene assessment capability and train together. So if we attend a scene and realise we don't have enough of our own capability to manage due to the scale, then we know that the Fire and Ambulance Services (London Ambulance Service, LAS) can attend and deliver the same capability. Additionally the LAS have triage as part of its core role – to assess people as they are coming through – and it is part and parcel of setting up emergency decontamination. It is all dependent on volume, but if the volume is so vast we couldn't cope then we couldn't contain it anyway. So within the number we can contain on a practical basis we could effectively and quickly manage the scene assessment as well.

GW: I have a problem with the civil response philosophy that there are fixed zones and that you can keep the zones separate and maintain cordons. This is suited to a static approach rather than the fluid reality. The police role is to maintain cordon, so would you be responsible for moving cordons and zones, establishing what is now contaminated, etc?

AK: This is something that we have been considering and we have exercised in preparation for it. Pre-planned operations are a good way to look at it; with these there is an appreciation that the incident is at X and assets will be at Y and Z, but it is not always pre-planned static. Sometimes it is very fluid.

GW: Yet the C2 needs the tools to be able to do the job. As the event develops and assets start being deployed "in-theatre", there is dynamism and you need to know

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where everything is, especially if the plume shifts. Do you have the hazard management, plume modelling and warning and informing (W&I) networks?

AK: To take the C2 bit, you need to know where your assets are at all times. That is why we have our special operations room which is a very effective means of managing partner agency resources. We are used to big operations in London. The special operations room is open almost every day; although not all of them are major operations, it can manage a number of operations each day. We have other ops rooms, so should one be compromised by a plume for example then we have fallback options that we can set up very quickly. In terms of W&I, it is very much part of the London Resilience package that the operational command unit that I am part of is involved with.

Emergency Planning is part of the work that our emergency procedures team is developing; and this includes W&I protocols. Nothing is perfect, but as far as one can hope the W&I systems work very well.

GW: Has the Olympics in London in 2012 been a major impetus for improvement?

AK: Probably the best way to answer that is to say we try not to look at the Olympics as the sole driver for our activity. It is better to look at the Olympics as part of "business as normal" in 2012. There will be a lot of demands placed upon us, and part of that business as usual will also include, as an extra bonus, a large sporting event in and around the capital, but mainly in Stratford. So from a CBRN perspective we are not trying to do anything special; what we are doing as a matter of routine is reviewing what we have, how we manage it in terms of equipment and expertise – PPE, DIM assets, etc – to look at what we need to do to improve year-on-year as an ongoing process that will mean we will be match fit for the Olympics.

GW: It is the sustainment and scale challenges that are different from business as usual. You'll have a high readiness for six weeks or so, rather than a normal event that would span from a day to a week...

AK: Planning for the Olympics, across all the disciplines, started in 2005 when it was announced we had won it – but we did have a small team of people already thinking about it beforehand in case we won it. Over the past 3.5 years a great deal of work has been done and we have a much broader picture and scope of all the disciplines that are going to be involved in policing the Olympics and Paralympics. CBRN is just one of those disciplines, and part and parcel of that is the requirement to look at what we need currently to deliver business as usual for the Olympics. Over and above that, what do we need for that 60-day period for 2012 Olympics? You have to keep in mind, from a financial point of view, that we can't spend vast amounts of money for a 60-day event. Whatever we might need has to be something that we will still need and require post-Olympics. So that is why we have approached this as constant review of what the Met needs to deliver for a competent and effective CBRN response capability, and in so doing embrace that 2012 challenge.



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