

Going for Gold - Project Gold Standard The next step forward for UK Resilience

By Keith Strickland - Gold Standard Exercise Director

On 10th May the Emergency Planning College launched Project **Gold Standard** - a cutting edge training system for Gold & major incident Silver Command Groups. Gold Standard also supports others who operate at a high strategic level (within both public and private sector) who have a role to play in ensuring UK Resilience.

Caption: The Gold Standard Team!



Gold Standard training mixes people, technology and procedures to simulate a realistic major emergency or disaster and is unique in its ability to present a scenario using customers' own risk registers, geographical information, resources and plans.

Why do you need Gold Standard training?

Emergency situations are invariably complex in nature and their response demands a high level of co-ordination. They also require you to have an effective response plan in place before they occur. The maxim that, "no plan survives first contact with the enemy" has sometimes been used as a reason for lack of detailed preparation. However, the original and unabridged quotation reads "no plan survives first contact with the enemy, completely."¹ Thus, a well constructed and co-ordinated response plan should be capable of adjustment to fit the specific circumstances of an unfolding emergency. Of course, the time to discover whether the plan is fit for purpose is *before* not during or after the emergency.

¹ Helmuth von Moltke, 19th Century Prussian Commander

Since 2000, the profile and importance of emergency management has increased significantly. Intensified by media coverage, there is greater public awareness and scrutiny of the handling of major incidents. The [World Trade Centre](#) events of 9/11, the 2004 Tsunami and the London bombings of July 2005 (among others) have served to sharpen the public appetite for timely and accurate information. They have also driven-up the public expectation for decisive and effective action from those charged with the responsibility for managing the consequences of major incidents.

In the past, the preferred way to obtain a fully objective assessment of a multi-agency response and recovery plan was to conduct a full blown live exercise. Live exercises however, are an expensive and not always effective option. They take a great deal of planning, organisation and resource, they tend to follow a scripted response with little opportunity for initiative and original thinking, and they divert large numbers of personnel and equipment away from routine but nevertheless important activity. Consequently, the appetite for conducting expensive live exercises has understandably reduced while alternative options for conducting true multi-agency training and exercising often fall short of what is actually required.

The genesis of Project Gold Standard can be traced back through the Foot & Mouth Disease outbreak (2002), the fuel crisis (2001) and severe flooding (2000) which all served as a stark warning to Government. However, the compelling need for effective *collective* training of emergency command teams was vividly brought out in the much earlier judicial inquiries into the Kings Cross underground fire (1987; Desmond Fennell QC), the Clapham rail crash (1988; Anthony Hidden QC), and the Hillsborough stadium disaster (1989; Taylor LJ). All three inquiries brought out the inevitable consequences of command teams being thrown together in the early phase of the response and the requirement for effective crisis co-ordination.

The investigation into the Kings Cross fire highlighted the essential underlying problem: "The court was left with the impression that there had been a *breakdown of communications at command level* between the emergency services. Each diligently pursued its own duty but there was a *lack of liaison between them*there ought to be joint exercises between the emergency services, because.... had (they) taken place, communications would have been better and some of the problems which presented themselves would not have proved as difficult as they did on the night."²

All three inquiry reports recommended that multi-agency command teams should train together routinely under realistic conditions.

Unfortunately, those recommendations were not taken forward at that time when responsibility for emergency preparedness rested with the Home Office. While the majority of *individual* responder organisations do train for strategic emergency management, there remains little or no training

² Desmond Fennell OBE QC, Investigation into the Kings Cross Fire (HMSO 1988)

specifically designed and delivered to meet the needs of the *multi-agency strategic co-ordination teams*.

The Inquiry recommendations were, however, taken up by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) when responsibility for emergency preparedness was transferred to the Cabinet Office - recommendations that were firmly embedded within the College's Transformation Programme initiated back in 2003.

How did we develop Project Gold Standard?

At the outset the procurement process included interviews with over 300 practitioners, subject matter experts and senior staff within the 'Gold' teams who are running major operations.

Finally, 2 national focus groups were convened and invited to critique the User Requirement Document (URD), describing the key operating criteria that must be met and the System Requirement Document (SRD), laying down key components. It was recognised that much of the expertise and technology that Project Gold Standard would require already exists with defence contractors servicing analogous military requirements. As a result, the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) has the UK's best knowledge of current 'command team training' technologies. The DPA were, therefore, the natural choice to act as agents to run the procurement process on behalf of the Cabinet Office. This approach has saved time and cost as well as allowing us to down-select the system that best meets the identified need.

The DPA ran a keenly-contested competition for what became the Gold Standard Training (GST) system contract. As a result AgustaWestland (AW) were selected on the basis of the quality of their product, the cost and the potential for application within the private and international sectors. As well as the usual DPA contractual processes, five short-listed bidders were required to demonstrate their product to a group of representatives of responder organisations as well as expert technical panels. The practitioners' view, having seen the candidates in operation, confirmed the DPA analysis - that the AW product was some way ahead of its rivals on quality.

How will Gold Standard training work?

GST will provide the multi-agency civil command team training and validation necessary for the effective management of the consequences of major emergencies and disasters. In turn, this will close the significant gap between individual and collective training that exists for those individuals charged with providing the multi-agency direction for the response to challenging events. Without this investment in collective activity, there is a significant risk that the effectiveness of any response may be degraded because key leaders and supporting staff have been unable to exercise together often enough as teams in realistic, pressurised but safe environments.

The Gold Standard initiative has therefore been designed to encompass the requirements of all organisations with a role to play in UK resilience. In the public service area GST will cater for the training and exercise needs of the Gold and major incident Silver Groups. Specifically, it will cater for:

- Local Authorities
- Emergency Services
- The NHS
- Regional co-ordination groups
- Government Departments and Agencies
- Devolved Administrations and Central Government Crisis Management Teams
- The Voluntary Sector

GST will also provide for the requirements of private sector companies and organisations that have duties to discharge as mandated by civil protection legislation. But it will also be available for companies and organisations whose products and operations require close attention to incident, emergency and business continuity management.

What does GST look like?

GST is a mixture of people, technologies and procedures brought together to work as a complete *system* that will fit around the senior decision-making team. A key and significant aspect of the system is its ability to operate alongside the customer in their own command and control facilities, using their own technologies, plans, procedures and processes. This will allow them to simultaneously gain both individual and collective training benefit, while being able to validate their own operating arrangements, processes, plans and procedures.

The system will promote a step change in the national resilience capability of the United Kingdom. Agusta Westland's resilience training support solution will deliver a flexible capability focused on providing strategic 'Gold' level participants with a safe, stimulating, challenging and an ultimately enjoyable learning environment.

The use of simulation will provide a level of fidelity and data capture which it is not possible to replicate with paper-driven table-top exercises. The objective and subjective data captured will allow the detailed analysis of outcomes to be measured against the training and learning objectives. This increase in training capability will be achieved without the significant expense of holding resource-intensive live exercises and the consequent diversion of front line resources.

As prime contractor, AgustaWestland has brought together a group of experienced specialist companies to produce the required synergy of people, process and technology. The simulation, known as the Automated Exercise System (AES), is provided by SAIC, a world leader in simulation. The AES will

be augmented by a Decision Support Model (DSM) which provides the ability to rapidly model decision outcomes and impacts of simulated events and actions. Multi-agency simulation experts, NSC, will provide the technical support while subject matter expertise will be provided by Octo and Needhams 1834. Octo are specialists in Crisis and Emergency Management and Leadership under pressure, while Needhams 1834 specialise in Business Continuity and Risk Management.

What makes Gold Standard training unique?

GST is unique because it has the ability to populate scenarios taken from the customer's own risk register and run a realistic event simulation that reflects the geography, resources and plans that exist within the responder communities as represented within the training audience.

The scenarios reflect the content of the Community Risk Registers that have been compiled by Local Resilience Forums across the UK and therefore include:

- **Fire & Explosion;** *Involving: Gas and LPG - landing, storage, processing, transmission, transport;*
- **Toxic or Radioactive or Chemical Release;** *Includes all circumstances above plus malicious release;*
- **Transportation Incidents;** *Includes: Ships, Ferries, Passenger Liners, Trains, Aircraft, and road vehicles with associated fires, explosions, toxic release etc;*
- **Weather Related Events;** *Storms, Winds, Rain, Flooding, Snow, Cold and Heat-wave;*
- **Human Disease;** *Pandemic Influenza, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Food contamination, novo virus etc;*
- **Animal Disease;** *Epidemic Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Avian Influenza etc;*
- **Disruption of Essential Supplies and Services;** *Logistic and technical disruption of essential supplies and services (Oil, Gas, Electricity, Water, Food, telecommunications including data transmission, transfer and payment);*
- **Environmental Impact.** *Any or all of the above may affect the environment and the remediation of such damage is an important component of the recovery phase of operations.*

To achieve its stated purpose, the system includes capabilities that provide:

- digital mapping imagery from 1:5,000 to 1:50,000 scale
- hazard modelling tools to calculate effects in real time
- technology interfaces for existing communication suites
- the ability to adjust scenario timelines forward or back
- decision measurement and consequence mapping
- data capture for objective critique of outcomes, and
- comprehensive take-home packs for participants to inform their post-event internal debriefs and plan reviews.

The system will also give emphasis to the collective aspects of media handling; a critical weakness in the lessons identified from recent real events. Regular use of the system will encourage the development of effective personal relationships and the establishment of trust within the senior decision-making team.

Public Launch

The Gold Standard Training system was given its public launch on the *10th of May in the presence of the EPC Customer Board.*

The first Gold Standard Exercise is scheduled to take place with the Derbyshire LRF in *June 2007*. With regular use, GST will help to close identified gaps in our resilience capabilities by providing a challenging but safe and controlled exercise environment. GST will also be a very useful indicator to participating organisations wishing to measure the effectiveness of their arrangements and capabilities for dealing with resilience challenges. Each participant will be encouraged to extend their own capacity to be able to take difficult and time-sensitive decisions, with good knowledge of the consequences that they and their responding partners will need to manage. Over time, it is quite conceivable that the confidence gained from exposure to the Gold Standard Training system will also percolate through to decision-making in the day job too!

If you enjoy a challenge or you need to validate the command, control and co-ordination arrangements surrounding resilience within your organisation (or in partnership with other responders) please get in touch and we will be pleased to offer you the opportunity to measure up to the Gold Standard!