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PLUS: On the frontline during Paris terrorist attacks; Nepal earthquake report; Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction; Refugees & Migrants; Satellite technology | Pakistan storm | Women in Civil Contingencies



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Recycled Lives





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Cover image: 123RF

comment

Why does true collaboration with people and communities – before, during and after a disaster – sometimes seem to be so difficult?



On p22 Arjun Katoch outlines early lessons from the response to the Nepal earthquake: “The humanitarian community lived in a self-created psychological, professional and physical bubble,” he says. “... Whether UN agencies, NGOs or donors, they are most comfortable in their own little world of clusters, meetings and jargon. They are not comfortable interacting with affected governments, the military, police, civil society and vernacular NGOs, but these are the very entities that actually do the most work among the communities.”

On p42 Mostafa Mohaghegh calls for better understanding of the social environment: “Traditionally, people and communities have been considered more as targets or beneficiaries of disaster risk management programmes, with little or no role in the entire DRM process.”

Dr Jemilah Mahmood, Head of the World Humanitarian Summit 2016, says that working in the most disaster and conflict-affected parts of the world has taught her the importance of listening to the affected people and local organisations as they know their needs best (p86).

Communities can defy the narrow categorisations that some organisations like to work with. This is because communities are made up of people, with all their attendant flaws: they can be messy, contradictory, partisan, truculent, cynical, disorganised... But people can also be visionary, passionate, caring and inspirational; and are indisputably the foremost experts on the areas in which they live and work.

As *CRJ* has cautioned before, community engagement means avoiding giving prominence to those who shout the loudest – marginalised groups, including women, youth and the elderly, are vitally important and must also be heard. People are not ‘targets’ or ‘beneficiaries’. They are part of the whole resilience process.

It takes boldness to step out of carefully constructed comfort zones, to abandon the cult of insularity, to eschew stage-managed discussions and to venture forth, unscripted, to talk to people. It takes even greater courage and humility to listen to what they have to say.

Emily Hough

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Preparing for the unthinkable

Roger Gomm looks at British guidance for civilians who might find themselves caught up in a terrorist attack involving single or multiple shooters, emphasising that civil protection communities should also be aware of this advice

Consider this: you are reading this article when you hear several loud cracks (gunshots?) and see several people running towards you... People are screaming and running, smoke can be seen...

So what do you do? What is the situation? What are your priorities? Where are your plans? Have you mentally rehearsed your action? You have the same amount of time to consider these vital questions as you have had to read this paragraph.

In August 2014, the threat level in the UK from international terrorism was raised to 'Severe', meaning that: "An attack is highly likely." Consider the incidents in Australia, Denmark and Paris. What if such an incident occurred near to your work premises; the shooter(s) could enter to evade the police. Have you considered the threat?

In November 2014 the British police provided rail passengers with new guidelines in the event of a Mumbai-style terrorist attack on stations, following official statements that the threat of Islamist terrorism was 'greater than ever.' The guidance *Firearms – Stay Safe* aims to raise awareness of incidents involving firearms and weapons and to help you to consider your action at an incident. It is called: *Run, Hide, Call*.

Since this campaign was launched we have seen several Mumbai-style terrorist attacks. Perhaps the worst scenarios were in France (see page 28), starting with the murders at *Charlie Hebdo*'s editorial offices and ending with a huge police operation and two sieges, that left several people dead.

Members of the public, including those in the civil protection community, should consider what they would do and how they should respond. If you imagine the situational awareness required in such an incident, in other words, understanding what is going on around you, before you make decisions, potentially this could stop you from 'freezing' and this could save your life.

To help you think through your actions: consider the *Run, Hide, Call* advice.

■ **Run:** In the event of a firearms or weapons attack, escape if you can. Consider the safest option – is there a safe route? Can you reach the safe route without exposing yourself to greater danger? If so, run (if not, hide, see below); insist others leave with you and leave belongings behind.

■ **Hide:** If you can't run, you need to hide and find cover from gunfire. If you can see the attacker, they may be able to see you, but cover from view does not mean you are safe: bullets go through glass, brick, wood and metal. So seek cover from gunfire, such as substantial brickwork and heavy or reinforced metal walls. Be aware of your exits and try not to get trapped. Also, be quiet, silence your phone, and lock or barricade yourself in, moving away from the door.

■ **Tell:** Call the emergency number. Police need to know: Your location – where you are, and where the suspects are; Direction – where you last saw the suspects; Description – their features, clothing and weapons; and further information – weapons, building, location of entrances, exits, numbers involved, injuries and hostages.

Be aware that the police may point guns at you, treat you firmly and question you. They might be unable to distinguish you from the attackers. You will be evacuated when it is safe to do so: follow their instructions and remain calm. Avoid any sudden movement or actions that may be considered a threat and keep your hands in view.

Remember, in an emergency the situation will be chaotic, it will be unpredictable and is likely to evolve extremely quickly. Information will be sparse at best and there is likely to be surprise and panic: events will often outpace the response.

There will be little time to develop your personal safety plan from scratch, but there is an urgent need for rapid decision-making. **CR**

Potentially, this could stop you from 'freezing' and this could save your life



Author



Roger Gomm, QPM, retired from his successful 34-year career with the London Metropolitan Police Service, UK, in 2012. He has a unique background in operational command, having been pivotal in all major events in London for more than 14 years. He is now an advisor, trainer and consultant, and is a Member of CRJ's Editorial Advisory Panel