

Leicester Mercury

» FIRSTPERSON

Out-of-date information and poor communication could put lives at risk, says **ALLAN BONNER**



Emergency plans: We must improve

GOOGLING “Leicester, emergency plan” yields the University of Leicester’s risk, crisis and disaster management programme. This is one of the dangers of assuming putting something on the web or social media constitutes effective communication. This can cost lives.

The city does have emergency planning information a few entries down on Google and a few clicks in. But after reading 8,000 pages of emergency plans in the top 100 English-speaking cities in the world, I’m scared. There is no consistent approach.

Most are filled with jargon, acronyms, lists of civic leaders and lists of resources which don’t actually exist. Many are so old they violate the law which mandated their creation.

Some plans show real initiative. Leeds notes how many shoppers, visitors, hotels and residents there are in case this is needed during an evacuation. Kansas City has a detailed inventory of buses for the same reason, and Sacramento lists the capacity of transit. Leeds can send messages to pubs, clubs, hotels and so on.

They also use loud speakers and door-to-door communication. Conversely, some Canadian hydro companies use computers and other devices that need power to tell people their power is out.

London’s separate plans for floods, pandemics and so on are good. Bradford recommends having a whistle in a personal emergency kit. Manchester has multi-lingual information, large type, but also some unreadable maps, no date and lots of blank pages.

About one-third of all plans have small font, hard to read maps and other printing problems. Liverpool has these problems, plus reference to colours, which don’t show up on a computer screen.

Glasgow, like many cities, has aspirational and motivational language about what we should, could, ought to and would do – but little concrete indication that these things would actually come to pass.

Birmingham has a plan for pets, for which people will risk lives, but there are better such plans in Kansas City. But Birmingham does have plans for rest centres in case of evacuation – ignored in most of the world. Evacuation may kill more people than the emergency because of a lack of services, unreliable automobiles, and other challenges.

American academics have called urban emergency plans “fantasy” documents for relying on the private car when up to 56 per cent of urbanites don’t own one, not mentioning public transit, ignoring the lack of services and relying on contra-flow (all roads leading out), which has been called “life threatening”. At least in the UK there are trains and other public transit vehicles.

Some of these plans may have been updated since my study. But the message is clear. We must do better.

■ *Allan Bonner graduated from Leicester in 1999. He has combined his studies of urban planning to produce a book called **Safer Cities of the Future**.*

Auckland considered world leader for emergency plan

Alicia Burrow, National,



Auckland has a stand-out civil emergency plan that other global cities should learn from.

That's an American academic's findings after surveying 100 English-speaking cities around the globe on how realistic their planning is in the event of a civil emergency – and Auckland came out on top.

University of Toronto Crises Management Researcher Dr Allan Bonner said many cities have 'fantasy expectations' and unrealistic visions of the future documented should a disaster occur and it's becoming an increasing concern in academia.

But Dr Bonner said Auckland Council has a good grasp on how prepared residents are for an emergency because of how detailed emergency actions plans are for citizens.

For example, he said while only seven percent of Aucklanders have a 'go bag' ready for an emergency, at least the council knows how low that figure is.

He said many American cities have an 'assumptions' section in planning documents that include such guesswork as expecting people to vacate town quickly with their own vehicle. However, up to 56 percent of American urbanites do not own a car and use other forms of transport - faults that can make a natural or civil event that much more deadly.

Auckland's also one of just two cities surveyed that had worked out the impact of an outer-space event such as solar flares causing power-outages, and it doesn't stop there. Auckland's Emergency Management Group Plan 2010- 2015 not only details how prepared people are but also exactly how much a disaster would disable the economy.

If Rangitoto were to erupt it could result in a 14 percent reduction in the country's GDP - that's twice the financial dent caused by the great depression. He said specific detail like that puts Auckland at the front of the pack.

Dr Allan Bonner has previously worked for numerous US heads of government, G8 and UN delegations, the WTO and NATO.