

**DO YOU REMEMBER...?**

**Here's a simple test to check your memory of some of the disasters – most associated with flooding – that have occurred around the planet in the past six years. The answers are on the next page.**

1. Which European countries were affected by summer floods in 2002?
2. How many people were evacuated from Santa Fe, Argentina, in April 2003?
3. What event exacerbated the effects of South Asia's annual monsoon flooding in 2004, leaving millions homeless?
4. What were the estimated direct economic losses attributable to floods and flood-induced calamities in south and east China in June 2005?
5. What saved Germany and the Czech Republic from more extensive damage in the southeastern European floods of 2006?
6. The UK floods of June and July 2007 did an estimated £2 billion worth of damage and took 11 lives. But at around the same time, two other countries were suffering from even more devastating floods. Which countries were they?



# Dealing with disaster

**Changing climate, rising seas, drought and storms are all blamed for devastating floods. Should the security industry play a more responsive role?**

**T**he media tells us about natural disasters when they happen. We are horrified by the scale of damage and human suffering. We hope everything possible is being done to restore normality to the victims' lives. And then we forget.

At least, we forget much of the detail, unless we or people we know were caught up in the event. Or perhaps the disaster received such global media coverage, like the Indian Ocean tsunami or Hurricane Katrina and the breaching of New Orleans' levees, that the images have stayed with us.

You can test your memory of recent disasters by answering the

questions in the panel on this page.

Of all natural threats to our existence, it is widespread flooding that is currently causing the experts most concern. And their findings are posing an important question: should the security industry be asked to play a more active role when large areas of a country are under water?

This is particularly true for nations where flooding has not been experienced on such a scale previously. This is true of much of Europe, where a report published in 2003 revealed that over one million square miles had been affected by floods during the five previous years. →

Since then, there have been many more floods and the potential for flooding in the UK is now said to be as great a threat as terrorism or an influenza pandemic.

That's not the view of an ill-informed alarmist, but the considered opinion of Sir Michael Pitt. He was appointed by the UK government to head an independent review of the flooding that devastated much of the country in June and July last year.

In his interim report, published in December 2007, he makes 87 recommendations and 15 urgent proposals to help Britain cope with future flooding which, he says, is inevitable. The 2007 floods were a "wake-up call", he argues, and "flood risk management should be right up there" with the fight against terrorism or preventative measures against a pandemic.

"The changing natures of floods means we need to improve our flood warnings," Sir Michael added. "Flood risk and events of this sort are here to stay."

His is not a lone voice. A report produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2007 warned that billions of people face shortages of food and water and increased risk of flooding.

And Patrick McCully, executive director of the International Rivers Network and author of *Before the Deluge: Coping with Floods in a Changing Climate*, says that floods are the most destructive, frequent and costly natural disasters – and they are getting worse. In 2007, he points out, 14 African countries have experienced their worst

floods in decades.

His advice is that we all must learn to live with the increased frequency of such events and manage them as best we can.

But how?

In the UK, the Audit Commission report on the 2007 floods found that, while government quickly made additional resources available, on the whole the assistance was poorly targeted and unlikely to provide value for money. It concluded that the government needed to provide more certainty about funding for future emergencies which were inevitable nationally, but impossible to predict geographically.

G4S in the UK is a leading voice in the debate about increasing the role of the private security industry in planning and responding to natural and man-made emergencies.

Floods were high on the agenda of the Public Service Events' Civil Protection 07 conference, held in London in December. Government security adviser Patrick Mercer opened the conference with a warning to politicians and professionals to "get real over dealing with disaster".

Tristan Forster, managing director of G4S Gurkha Services, told the conference he believed the private sector also had untapped capability that could assist in such events.

He reminded the delegates that security officers were an integral part of the City of London's Project Griffin – an anti-terrorism initiative with the security industry aimed at increasing awareness of

terrorist risks and involving them in emergency continuity planning with the emergency services.

David Taylor-Smith, CEO of G4S Security Services (UK & Ireland), has already given his views on protecting critical national infrastructure (CNI) (*G4S International*, September 07, pages 11–13).

Since Sir Michael Pitt's interim report on the UK floods, David Taylor-Smith has been active in discussions with key government figures and at conferences to discuss the role of the private sector. Speaking at the recent International Security National Resilience conference in London, he observed that while the threat posed by floods is clear, "the way to tackle these events before, during and after the occurrence is less obvious".

He added: "Traditionally, the UK has relied on its emergency services and the armed forces to work together to restore normal conditions after flooding and other large-scale events that impact CNI.

"While this has worked in the past, last summer's floods revealed a new reality for the UK. With the military heavily committed in Iraq and Afghanistan and the emergency services stretched by counter terrorist priorities, the UK faced a considerable challenge trying to cope."

Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt, spoke of his concerns that commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan had left too few soldiers to cope with unexpected events at

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home. Similarly, fire and rescue crews were drawn from across the country in the battle to bail out flooded towns across Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Yorkshire.

A new approach is needed to provide the surge of skilled people and specialist equipment to supplement the efforts of the emergency and armed services, David Taylor-Smith argues, adding:

“Much of the critical national infrastructure in the UK is owned and operated by the private sector, so it is only logical to involve us in the planning and response to emergencies.

“The private sector has much to offer in this area and for years has played a key role, at both an official and unofficial or philanthropic level, in helping communities struck by natural and man-made disasters to recover.

“This is certainly G4S’s experience of working in more than 110 countries. We contributed to the US Government efforts in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and evacuated individuals from Lebanon in the 2006 Israel/Lebanon border conflict.

“G4S has also established a business consisting mainly of recently retired British Army personnel to assist the British military with its training commitments for Iraq and Afghanistan and to provide specialist disaster management skills to businesses and to the UK Government.

“And we run G4S Police Recruit which maintains an active database of over 10,000 individuals. This provides every police force in the UK with temporary to permanent officers with specialist policing skills, freeing up resources for front-line

policing at periods of high demand, such as during floods.

“In effect, this business provides the UK with a cost efficient national police reserve which can be called upon when police forces are stretched.”

The way in which the UK, the rest of Europe and many other countries handle the need for flood management and response will be watched closely by the millions of people whose homes and livelihoods are affected by these increasing natural disasters.

Greater involvement under the leadership and co-ordination of the police, fire and medical services, which will remain paramount, can only help support their efforts.

Faced with the effects of global warming, nations throughout the world will need as much help as they can get. And the sooner the better. ■

## FLOOD ANSWERS

1. Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Switzerland, Slovakia, United Kingdom. More than 600,000 people were affected and 80 died when 11 countries were affected by widespread flooding. It resulted in huge economic losses (at least €15 billion), and the severe disruption of road and rail transport. There was also extensive damage to some of these countries’ cultural heritage when floodwater invaded cities such as Prague and Dresden.
2. After several days of heavy rainfall at the end of April 2003, 100,000 people (one-third of its inhabitants) had to be evacuated from Argentina’s fifth most populated city. 24 people died and 28,000 houses were damaged or destroyed.
3. Swollen Himalayan rivers flooded large areas in eastern India, Nepal and Bangladesh in July 2004. The worst-affected area was the tea-growing region of Assam where a hydro-power dam on Tsatistu Lake was breached. This resulted in thousands of homes on Majuli Island – said to be the world’s largest river island with 150,000 inhabitants – being submerged. Millions of people in the region were left homeless and many people died in the three countries affected.
4. £803,852 million (US\$ 1.6 billion). The floods had an impact on the lives of 18.85 million people, with Guangxi, Fujian and Guangdong worst affected. There were 567 deaths and a further 165 people reported missing. Some 2.46 million people required emergency relocation.
5. In the four years that had elapsed since the devastating European floods of 2002 (see question 1), the German state of Saxony and the neighbouring Czech Republic had both learned important lessons and had built a stronger levee system along the Elbe. So, although the Elbe rose 13 centimetres higher than in the 2002 floods in some areas – creating a 150-year record high – both countries largely escaped serious damage. Other European countries were not so lucky, with Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia all being badly affected by the 2006 floods.
6. Bangladesh and China. The Bangladesh flood began on 30 July and resulted in almost 1,000 deaths. Of these, 837 were caused by drowning, 94 by snakebite, 29 of diarrhoea and 24 from respiratory diseases. Over 13.3 million people in 46 of the country’s 64 districts were affected by the floods and over one million houses were completely destroyed or damaged. 61,510 people required temporary refuge during the disaster.