DEVELOPING A CRISIS MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY

CURRAGH QUEENSLAND MINING PTY LTD MEETS THE CHALLENGE

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In November 2002 a full scale mock crisis was played out at the Curragh Queensland Mining Pty Ltd mine near Blackwater. The exercise involved not only mine personnel but representatives from all major stakeholder groups and Wesfarmers Energy. Taken in isolation, this activity would undoubtedly draw some recognition for the efforts of the organisation in undertaking this type of activity. What wouldn't have been known is that it wasn't just an exercise but rather the culmination of a number of years commitment to emergency and crisis preparedness by Curragh. This paper looks at the background and lead up to the exercise and tracks the development of a 'real' crisis and emergency capability.

Introduction

In an industry high in inherent risk there has, quite rightly, been a focus on risk and emergency response. Legislation directs it and companies commit resources to it. However in recent times there has been some recognition that just having the ability to deal with an incident from an emergency response perspective is not sufficient and in fact fails to address a key aspect of dealing with a major incident, that being management's response.

In 1998 Curragh undertook to develop a comprehensive capability in the area of emergency and crisis management. In broad terms, the situation at Curragh at that time is demonstrated by the following diagram which shows the relationship between risk assessment, risk mitigation and emergency response.

Risk Assessment	Risk mitigation	Emergency response
Identification and analysis	Controls and treatments	Procedures

The assessment at this time was as follows:

- Risk management was critical and underpinned the process
- Controls and treatments could not reduce residual risk to zero

- Emergency procedures were critical
- There were no procedures, plans or training for management in dealing with stakeholders in the event of a major incident.

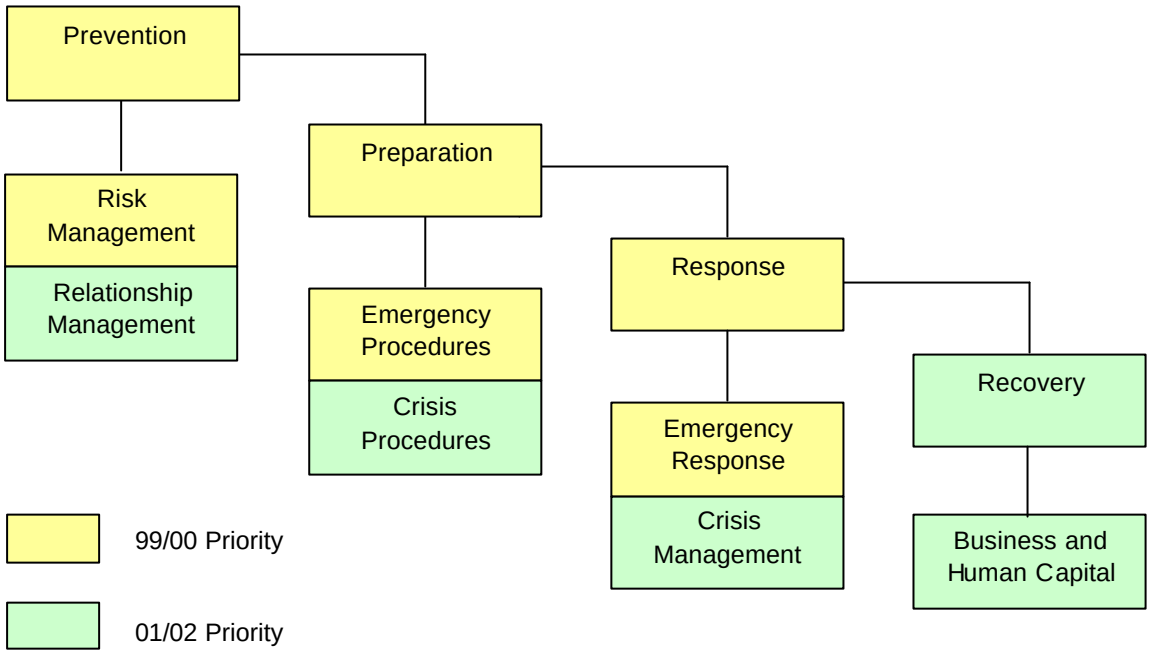
Developing the capability

Given that it is a combination of comprehensive risk management and effective emergency response capabilities that ultimately saves lives and property, Curragh made a conscious decision to assign a priority to the enhancement of it's existing emergency response capability at the mine. This was undertaken during the 1999 and 2000 and continues today.

As the emergency response capability was enhanced it became evident that the next critical area that required attention was that of crisis management. Whilst the saving of lives was of paramount importance there was also emerging recognition that a major incident could also impact upon other important company assets such as reputation, key stakeholder relationships and employee morale all of which require protection and enhancement. In short, there was recognition at management level that it was not good enough to simply call the fire/rescue team and put the "fire" out. The company needed to inform stakeholders about it's cause, it's impact and what the company was doing about it. This theory would only work if the emergency and crisis plans were integrated and provided a seamless process. Disjointed messages and inconsistencies between actual events and the content of the communication would be a critical weakness for the company.

Development of the crisis management plan gained momentum during 2001 when a relationship was formed between Curragh and Rowland Communication Group, both of whom were members of the QMC Health and Safety Committee. At the time Curragh was investigating how to develop a crisis management system that would add value to and integrate with its existing emergency procedures. Rowland, a communication management firm, was able to provide specialist advice in the area of crisis communication, stakeholder relationships, media management and crisis simulation activities. The key challenge was integrating crisis preparedness into Curragh's existing system. The following diagram shows both the 99/00 model and the 01/02 model highlighting the areas in which crisis management was to be integrated with risk and emergency procedures.

CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT FLOW CHART



Curragh's challenge was to build a multi-layered capability that was "real" and not just theoretical. The capability needed to have substance - a framework, KPIs and be reportable. Without these elements Curragh's capability would be disjointed, lack cohesion and be difficult to resource, fund, evaluate and implement – a recipe for failure. In effect what Curragh did was to breakdown it's capability into component parts so that each could be further developed and integrated with the other components. By doing this Curragh was able to achieve both vertical and horizontal integration of the capability components. This process was undertaken intuitively and based on considerable experience, knowledge and a clear vision of the desired outcome. Rowland assisted Curragh by providing the formal structure for the process with particular input into the collective training capability.

As a result of this formalisation Curragh's capability was divided into six areas:

- **P**eople
- **O**rganisation
- **S**ustainment
- **T**raining
- **E**quipment
- **D**ocumentation

The elements of Curragh's capability known as **POSTED** is based upon the concept of capability development used by the Australian Defence Force and is a key part of developing a "real" capability. It works by acknowledging that, to be effective, each component has specific requirements. The components are further explained as follows:

People - The people component requires not only having the right number of people but also having people with the appropriate skills and competencies.

Organisation - The organisation must be structured to allow the capability to be effectively implemented. The organisational structure must have the appropriate number of senior managers, workers, technical staff and administrative support personnel. The challenge is to ensure that the balance is right. An organisation that is too flat hierarchically may not support an effective command and control system during an emergency or crisis and similarly an overly hierarchical structure may not be responsive enough to deal with the immediacy of a situation.

Sustainment – A capability, particularly one that relates to the saving of lives, cannot be allowed to fall below an acceptable level at any time. Capability sustainment is obtained primarily through advanced planning. Planning for when people will be absent, up-skilling new team members and the procurement of new equipment etc will ensure that the capability is sustained. During an emergency or crisis, sustainment also refers to the ability to sustain a high level of the capability for an extended period of time. Rotations and rest of crews and team members is essential if the quality of response is to be maintained.

Training – Training is a fundamental platform for the development of capability. It is generally divided into individual and collective training. Individuals require training in skills that prepare them for being part of a larger group such as collective training which brings together individuals and prepares them to work together while utilising their individual skills. Training is expensive both in dollars and time and must be planned to ensure that the collective capability of the group

or organisation is enhanced. An annual training calendar should be developed that ensures all aspects of the skill base are addressed.

Equipment – Equipment, like training, is fundamental to capability and is not just about what is on inventory. The condition and availability of the equipment is also important. Equipment requires regular inspection, maintenance and use if it is to properly perform its role in an emergency. Regular exercises should be designed to test the capabilities of equipment as well as providing familisation to fire / rescue personnel. Exercises will assist in highlighting deficiencies and the need for additional or updated equipment.

Documentation – Documentation is often a component that is overlooked as a key capability. Without adequate and up-to-date documentation the capability can be reduced. It is important that the system follows a natural hierarchy of policy and procedures. High level documents such as legislation, workplace health and safety guidelines, codes of practice and company policy should inform and guide lower level documents such as work instructions and emergency and crisis plans. Similarly, accurate and up-to-date records of training activities, both for individuals and groups, competencies, equipment maintenance etc fulfil a key part of the capability and must be maintained as they underpin and support the other components of capability. All training should be documented to prove due diligence.

Capability is determined through the assessment of all components. This process helps to identify the impact of a deficient component on the overall capability. The implementation of this system ensures that the organisation does not suffer from what can be referred to as "hollowness". Hollowness occurs when on face value the capability exists when in fact a key component does not meet predetermined levels of performance. Hollowness is often typified by having the right number of people but who lack the necessary skills or training. Some organisations have difficulty in firstly recognising the hollowness and secondly reporting it. Acceptance of hollowness is a poor risk management strategy. It can lead to loss of life / major equipment damage / production loss / damage to the company's reputation.

The steps in implementing the process are as follows:

1. Determine what capability is required by the organisation
2. Identify POSTED component levels required to meet capability
3. Set KPIs for POSTED to meet capability requirement
4. Determine resources required to meet KPIs

5. Develop component capabilities

6. Report and monitor.

Mock exercise

Having prepared a crisis management manual, Curragh undertook a training and validation process in 2002. The aim was to validate Curragh's overall crisis management system of which the Crisis Plan was a key component. The objectives of the activity were as follows:

- Familiarise individuals with the system including the manual
- Up-skill individuals on crisis management techniques including decision making and information management
- Integrate Curragh crisis management with the Wesfarmers crisis management system
- Identify areas for improvement.

The mock exercise was preceded by:

- Crisis management training
- Media training
- Desktop exercise.

Mock scenario

At 7.40am a portion of a high wall collapsed on several vehicles containing six workers. Initial reports indicated that there was one fatality, two workers seriously injured and three workers unaccounted for presumed trapped in the vehicles. The emergency response was triggered by a radio report from the Senior Health and Safety Co-ordinator which activated both the emergency and crisis response teams.

Exercise participants

- Curragh
- Wesfarmers Energy – Perth
- Wesfarmers Curragh – Brisbane
- Curragh Coal Sales – Brisbane
- DNR&M – Rockhampton
- Police – Blackwater and Emerald
- QAS – Blackwater
- SES – Blackwater
- Industry Health and Safety Representative – Middlemount
- Blackwater Hospital

- Chubb Security – Emerald
- Blackwater Herald News
- Central Queensland News – Emerald
- Centacare counselling services – Blackwater and Emerald
- Minter Ellison – Legal firm Brisbane

Communication network

Critical path assessment

The involvement of these stakeholders was critical to the success of the activity. By involving the key players Curragh not only strengthened existing relationships but developed new ones. The involvement also allowed for the testing of what were identified as critical path activities. Three of these critical paths were:

1. **Medical evacuation and treatment.** This path was tested by ensuring the casualties were evacuated to the Blackwater Hospital for treatment. Additionally CAPCOM (Ambulance emergency communication centre) in Rockhampton provided real time information on the further medical evacuation of one of the casualties to Brisbane. This critical path tested communication, procedures, reporting and monitoring of personnel. It also required Curragh to allocate appropriate management personnel to visit the hospital to offer support.

2. **Notification of Next-Of-Kin (NOK).** One of the areas which is often paid lip service in exercises is that of the notification of the NOK. This important and sensitive event, whilst the responsibility of the Police in the instance of a fatality, requires significant attention by the company. To ensure that this part of the crisis plan was tested a NOK scenario was incorporated into the mock exercise. This involved a senior Wesfarmers manager in Brisbane to be physically in attendance, along with Police, when a NOK was notified that his son was involved with the incident and was missing. Following the notification the Brisbane office was required to provide support to the NOK and other family members in the form of arranging air line tickets, airport pick up, transport in central Queensland, accommodation and locating the NOK wife who was travelling overseas at the time.

3. **Corporate communications.** Consistency in information and the gaining of the appropriate approvals for its release was identified as a critical path which required evaluation. This was achieved by having the next two levels of crisis management play an active role in the exercise. Information was continually forwarded from Curragh to Brisbane and Perth throughout the exercise to provide awareness of the situation at the corporate level. Company policy requires that all external communication in this situation be approved by Wesfarmers Energy in Perth prior to release. The exercise controllers tracked the flow of information to ensure that only approved information was released throughout the exercise. This is a very important critical path and one that is traditionally not well tested in exercises.

Conduct of exercise

While incidents tend to eventuate from a previously identified risk, they often come with little or no warning, so it would be inappropriate to test and evaluate the system with the emergency and crisis management teams fully prepared and "in their starting blocks". To ensure that any hollowness in the initial response could be identified the timing of the exercise was kept secret from all employees except for SSE and Senior Health and Safety Co-ordinator.

The exercise was designed to test both the emergency response and crisis management capabilities and focussed attention upon the integration of these two critical elements. Key players were brought in to the activity in order to reflect, as best as possible, the reality of the situation. Importantly key representatives from the Police, QAS and DNR&M were present and interacted fully with the emergency response personnel and the crisis management team members. Media interaction was a major part of the exercise with both real and role-playing media on-site throughout the day. Unlike traditional exercises where media play is post-

processed and presented after the activity, media play in this exercise was presented in real time. This not only included hourly radio news updates but included a major TV news broadcast at around 1.30pm. By involving the media in this way the crisis management team was able to review its communication strategy and determine its effectiveness and make changes as necessary.

Debrief and lessons learnt

Exercises of this type provide tremendous benefit to the organisation. To capitalise on the investment, debriefs and reports are necessary to ensure that critical lessons are not only logged, but learnt. At the completion of the exercise a debrief with all players was conducted to capture immediate feedback on the activity. This information was subsequently combined with more formal feedback and delivered to Curragh in the form of a written report.

Recommendations contained in the report were divided into one of three areas:

- *Sustain* – Those policies, procedures, plans and actions that were deemed to be of an appropriate level
- *Improve* – Those policies, procedures, plans and actions that were deemed to require attention and enhancement if an acceptable level of competency is to be achieved in future
- *Fix* – Those policies, procedures, plans and actions that were deemed to be inadequate or absent and must be fixed if an acceptable level of competency is to be achieved in future

The exercise provided many valuable lessons for Curragh and Wesfarmers. The key lessons included:

1. The importance of having a crisis plan that is fully integrated with the emergency response plans
2. The benefit of bringing all stakeholders together in a mock exercise which allows for the transfer of information amongst stakeholders and enhances the understanding of each other capabilities, procedures and requirements
3. The importance of having a capability development model such as POSTED to provide a framework for emergency and crisis management capability development.

Participants' comments

As part of the exercise report comment was sought from external participants to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of the exercise. The following comments are indicative of the feedback.

Tom Kuzman – Managing Director Wesfarmers Curragh

Crisis management systems have been a demanding management task, but the national and international pressures have certainly moved it to a very high priority over recent times. I believe that Rowland's development and training programs have been very helpful and this has been significantly boosted by the recent mine-site mock exercise.

Bronwyn Murphy – Centacare

Inclusion in the Mock Exercise had significant learning value for Centacare. Lessons were learned by being on site and fully involved in the incident that may not have otherwise been possible if our role in the mock did not include a realistic response. Congratulations to Management for supporting the concept and to Rowland Communication Group for planning and implementing the mock exercise.

Pamela Sikora – Director of Nursing, Blackwater Hospital

To be invited to be a part of the exercise was most welcomed. It is important for the hospital to work closely with other agencies in a training situation so that should incidents like these occur we are well prepared. We don't have the luxury of second chances in our business and the mock exercise provided an excellent simulation for our team at the hospital. Both Curragh and Rowland should be congratulated for their efforts in making it happen.

Senior Constable Greg Dwyer – Blackwater Police

The exercise provided an excellent forum for Curragh personnel and other agencies to activate response procedures and genuinely interact in a simulated environment. During the exercise I noted that Curragh personnel were committed to achieving a positive outcome and responding to the requirements of other agencies and needs of affected individuals. I commend Curragh management for their commitment to developing effective crisis management procedures.

Conclusion

Over the past five years Curragh has devoted significant effort and resources to the establishment and maintenance of an effective emergency and crisis management capability. The partnership of Curragh and Rowland in developing the capability has been very successful. This success can be attributed to:

- Commitment from senior management
- Development of a clear capability definition
- An understanding of the role all elements of **POSTED** play in the capability development model
- Specialist input from Rowland Communication Group in specific areas such as exercises
- Adequate funding and resourcing fire /rescue team and modern equipment
- Adequate funding and resourcing of policy development and training
- A self imposed evaluation and exercise continuum.

The mock exercise was not the start of the capability development process nor was it the finish but rather an important part of the overall Curragh emergency and crisis management development process which is under continual review and enhancement. We hope and pray we never need to implement our processes for real!!