



A SMALLPOX EXERCISE  
FOR  
THE EUROPEAN UNION

# EXERCISE NEW WATCHMAN

**Serial 5.1**  
Final Report March 2006



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

Exercise NEW WATCHMAN was conducted by the UK's Health Protection Agency (HPA) as a Command Post Exercise (CPX) over a two-day period on 19 and 20 October 2005. This exercise was the first of two European Union (EU) exercises commissioned by the European Commission to evaluate the ability and capabilities of Member States, the European Economic Area (EEA) States and Switzerland to respond to a health-related crisis; in this case an outbreak of smallpox.

### RUNNING THE EXERCISE

Running this exercise as a CPX provided scope for hundreds of players at two levels of response – national and international – to react to a series of events as they would have to in a real emergency.

### PARTICIPANTS

Players in the exercise included the European Commission, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), 24 Member States, EEA States, Switzerland, Europol, the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMA), and the World Health Organisation (WHO). The exercise was intended, amongst other objectives, to provide the players with an opportunity to explore international coordination with the European Commission's Health Emergency Operations Facility.

### ISSUES

The main issues identified during Exercise NEW WATCHMAN were:

- There was an initial tendency to focus on national responses and remediation measures, prior to addressing international issues. This could have been due to the exercise design which gave an initial opportunity to review national responses and remediation measures, before international play got underway in some states. Later, time compression made it difficult for players to consider both national and international issues fully as the scenario rapidly progressed.
- There were many instances of severe communications difficulties, both technical and procedural.
- Two information systems were used – Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) and Rapid Alert System for Biological and Chemical Agent and Threats (RAS-BICHAT). This exercise provided an opportunity to assess their effectiveness under a crisis load, and highlighted resulting problems. The EWRS was used as a decision-support tool during the exercise which it was not designed for. The system needs to be used strictly for the purpose for which it is intended under European Community law (Decision 2119) i.e. notification of cases, information, consultation and coordination of public health measures.
- The exercise showed that the roles and responsibilities of the European Commission and the ECDC need to be better understood by the Member States. There were some good



coordination efforts by the European Commission and ECDC during the exercise: the holding of audio conferences with a detailed agenda and “attention points” which helped to address immediate issues; the setting up by the ECDC of a helpful website, which provided a good overview of the situation and included reporting forms for surveillance purposes. Additionally, the European Commission provided reporting forms for the Member States to feedback on public health measures taken. These initiatives would be useful in a real crisis.

- There were a number of examples of good, coordinated cooperation on the development of media responses between Member States. But overall, it appears that most responses to media requests were provided at the national level without reference to, or consultation with, others. Although not required by Community law, there was no European Commission coordination on messages to the public. However, it is desirable that such coordination should take place. Evidence of pockets of ideal cooperation (for example, within the Baltic States; between Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Switzerland; and the UK and Ireland) was apparent in some media responses. Elsewhere, cooperation in providing common, coordinated media themes could be enhanced. It should be noted that technical response capacity and coordinated and integrated communication were hindered by the withdrawal of trained technical and communication personnel from the exercise due to unfolding world events at the time.

Expanding and improving the capability of the European Commission to coordinate a response to a crisis is highly desirable. The issues identified in Exercise NEW WATCHMAN are complex and their resolution will not be easy. However, the value of an exercise is that authorities and organisations are able to learn from their experiences and they have an opportunity to enhance their capabilities so that responses to real crises are improved.

RECOMMENDATIONS CAN BE FOUND IN PARTS 6 AND 7.



## Part 1 - Introduction

### BACKGROUND

Exercise NEW WATCHMAN was conducted as a Command Post Exercise (CPX) over a two-day period from 19 to 20 October 2005. This exercise was the first of two European Union (EU) exercises initiated by the European Commission. This activity was intended to evaluate the communication, and Member States' responses and interactions, within the EU, during a deliberate release of smallpox and the implementation of national plans by Member States.

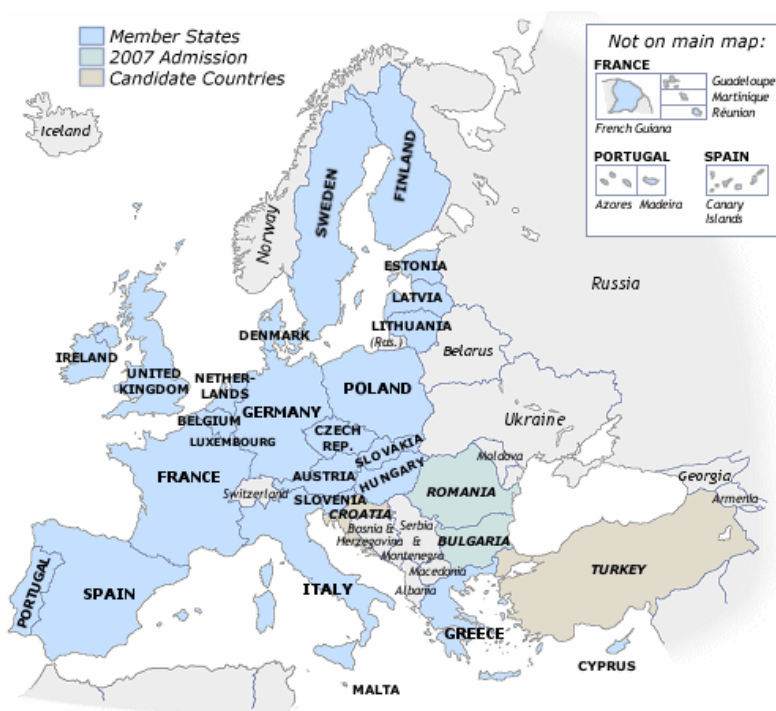
A Command Post Exercise is designed to evaluate the systems, procedures, planning and coordination capabilities of decision makers and their supporting staff.

The exercise was commissioned by the Directorate-General Health and Consumer Protection (DG-SANCO) of the European Commission (General Invitation to Tender SANCO/C3/2004/05) with the contract for delivery on behalf of the Member States being awarded to the Health Protection Agency in the UK. In addition to the 25 Member States and the European Commission, other countries and organisations were invited to take part.

Additionally, observers from the newly- formed EU Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) were invited to participate along with the EEA States, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The exercise was primarily aimed at the health departments of the Member State governments with an option to include other elements of government response. The exercise core planning team provided guidance and the Member States determined the level and extent of this involvement.

Early feedback demonstrated that Exercise NEW WATCHMAN was a successful event identifying many issues for further development. Many of the Member States' delegates have noted that they found the exercise useful and would value further development of such exercises.



### DEVELOPING AND RUNNING THE EXERCISE

The exercise process consisted of seven phases:



- Phase 1 – Planning Conference One, conducted on 20 and 21 April 2005.
- Phase 2 – Representatives of the Member States, EEA States and Switzerland engaged in a national planning process to establish national objectives and agree the participation of their respective countries.
- Phase 3 – Preparation leading to Planning Conference Two on 6 and 7 July 2005. This was used to confirm the objectives and educate Member State representatives in the methodology of running the exercise.
- Phase 4 – Final preparations for the exercise and Planning Conference Three on 4 October 2005.
- Phase 5 – Running the exercise on 19 and 20 October 2005, during the core hours of 06:00 to 21:00 (GMT) daily.
- Phase 6 – Preparation leading to the submission of the First Impressions Report to inform the European Commission of the main issues identified during the exercise.
- Phase 7 – Preparation leading to the Post-Exercise Conference on 1 and 2 February 2006 including the presentation and agreement of the draft final report.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Objectives identified and detailed in the tender document are:

- To evaluate communication between the Member States, and between the Member States and the European Commission, in response to a deliberate release incident;
- To explore the execution of the national plans of the Member States;
- To explore the restriction of movement of people;
- To examine the implementation of containment measures; and
- To determine the adequacy of resources and arrangements.

## **PLAYERS**

Player participation involved individuals from the following countries and organisations:

- European Commission
- European Commission Communications Centre (in Brussels)
- Crisis Rooms (in Brussels and Luxembourg)



- Security Office Brussels
  
- ECDC
  
- Member States
  - Austria
  - Belgium
  - Cyprus
  - Czech Republic
  - Denmark
  - Estonia
  - France
  - Germany
  - Greece
  - Hungary
  - Ireland
  - Italy
  - Latvia
  - Lithuania
  - Luxembourg
  - Malta
  - Netherlands
  - Poland
  - Portugal
  - Slovakia
  - Slovenia
  - Spain
  - Sweden
  - United Kingdom
  
- Others
  - Iceland
  - Switzerland
  - EUROPOL
  - Norway
  - EMEA
  - WHO



## Part 2 – Scenario

### INTRODUCTION

The exercise was designed to cover a notional period of 34 days. Time compression was used in the exercise to enable the development of exercise events. The incubation period of smallpox is longer than the actual period of exercise play, so it was necessary to accelerate the passage of time portrayed in the exercise. To enable the spread of smallpox to secondary and tertiary cases in Member States around Europe, 34 days were concentrated into two days of exercise play. The use of time compression is always a difficult concept. Despite the use of an exercise clock running alongside real time, confusion and the requirement to move on in a timely fashion caused some problems in exercise play.

The use of time compression (to allow for the development of the exercise fully) imposes some dramatic challenges to exercise players. This restricts the opportunity to fully analyse a situation and implement actions to deal with it before the next 'incident' occurs. This pressure is often deliberate but the results have to be judged against this limitation.



## Part 3 - Main Themes

This CPX exercise explored the response to a malicious release of biological and chemical agents, in particular smallpox, with intent to cause harm.

Within the overarching objectives outlined in the introduction, Exercise NEW WATCHMAN was intended to evaluate (General Invitation to Tender SANCO/C3/2004/05):

- the communications between Member States and the European Commission related to detection, notification and management of an incident, and the impact of competing and mounting demands on those charged with communication on high flows of messages and requests for information, including from the authorities and decision makers;
- the compatibility and inter-operability of response plans of the Member States over the whole range of relevant issues including information collection and management, procurement of scientific advice, decision taking and decision procedures, communication between competent authorities' operatives and decision makers, including the political authorities, handling of media communications, and in respect of bilateral and international obligations;
- the EU dimension of countermeasures and how this is taken into account, including restriction of movement of humans from notification to the end of the emergency; and availability, distribution, use and controls on equipment, medicines, in particular vaccine products, substances and materials;
- the quality and effectiveness of implementation of containment measures to reduce transmission risks; and
- the adequacy of resources and arrangements for the implementation of plans.



## Part 4 - Exercise Planning

### INTRODUCTION

Planning of the exercise was coordinated by the Health Protection Agency through the Emergency Response Department of the Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response under contract to the European Commission. This planning ran from the time the contract was awarded on 1 January 2005 to the exercise date (19 and 20 October 2005). During this period, three planning conferences were held at the European Commission's Jean Monnet building in Luxembourg.

### THE EXERCISE PLANNING GROUP

The Exercise Planning Group consisted of members of the Health Protection Agency, the European Commission, national delegates from each of the Member States (Finland participated in the initial planning activities but was unable to participate in the exercise), and Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. Observers from the WHO, EMEA, ECDC and Europol also attended. The smaller core planning team consisted of a dedicated Health Protection Agency exercise team plus experts in smallpox who assisted with the development of the scenario.

### DOCUMENTATION

During the planning process the Exercise Planning Group was presented with draft versions of the documentation to be used in the running of the exercise and was requested to provide feedback and input. This documentation included the scenario, master events list and injects.

A number of different versions were produced during the planning period and the final version of the exercise documentation was approved at Planning Conference Three on 4 October 2005 and at subsequent teleconferences.

At the three planning conferences, briefings on the exercise process were provided and additional documentation was supplied to planners and players describing the roles and functions of players, controllers and evaluators,.

### DOCUMENTATION SHARING

A secure web space enabled the Health Protection Agency core planning staff to present the different versions of the exercise documentation in a manner that permitted the wider planning group to review and comment on the documentation. This system proved invaluable, in that all planners were able to access drafts at their convenience.

The use of document-sharing software should be further explored in future exercises.



## Part 5 - Exercise Evaluation

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Health Protection Agency developed an Evaluation Methodology to be used to measure the exercise components.

### **EVALUATION CHECKLISTS**

During the planning process, an evaluation collection plan was designed comprising a series of checklists, which encompassed the following:

- External Communications
  - Timeliness
  - Correctness
  - Clarity of Response
  - Accuracy
  - Distribution
- Internal Communications
  - Event Tracking
  - Log Maintenance
  - Handover Effectiveness
  - Assessment of the Situation
- International Aspects of National Plans
  - International Aspect
  - Effectiveness
  - Contact Points
- Facilities
  - Suitability
  - Space
  - Tools
  - Staff

### **EVALUATION STAFF**

Each of the participating countries and organisations appointed an individual to fulfil the role of evaluator. Additionally, a controller was nominated to assist with local delivery of the exercise. In some instances, these roles were fulfilled by the same individual. As part of the exercise, planning process controllers and evaluators were fully briefed on their roles and the reporting

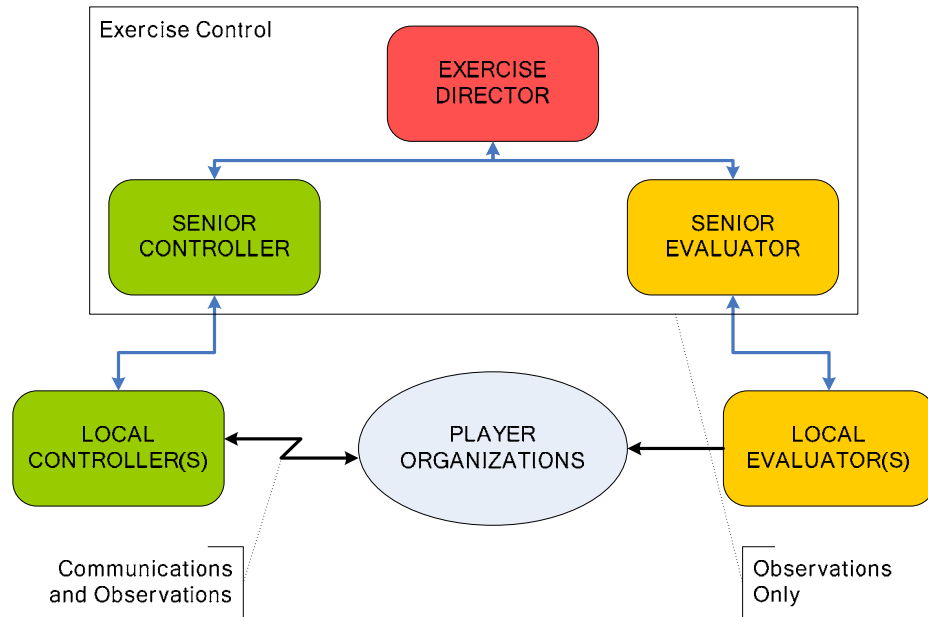


structure.



### EXERCISE CONTROL STRUCTURE

It was important that, in addition to the evaluation used to inform the exercise report, a continuous evaluation occurred during the exercise. To this effect, the evaluators reported to Exercise Control (EXCON) at regular intervals during the exercise to provide the Exercise Director with a greater awareness of the progress of the exercise and the accomplishment of its objectives.



### COMMUNICATIONS

During the course of the exercise, EXCON's media staff developed a series of media injects which were directed, as though by the real media, towards particular countries or organisations and which were relevant to that particular point in time and to the scenario. . These injects were used to evaluate the response of communications teams.

### CONCLUSION

At the end of the exercise and following 'hot wash-ups', evaluator checklists and controller reports were collated as input to this report. Their comments identified issues including, "what went well", "what did not go so well", and "learning points".



## Part 6 - Objectives, Lessons Identified and Recommendations

### **OBJECTIVE 1 - TO EVALUATE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE MEMBER STATES, AND BETWEEN THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, IN RESPONSE TO A DELIBERATE RELEASE INCIDENT.**

*“In the event of an emergency it will be necessary for the Public Health Authorities in the Member States to communicate rapidly, reliably and effectively in order to coordinate their activities.” (Source: Specifications attached to the Invitation to Tender Document, SANCO/C3/2004/05)*

Exercise NEW WATCHMAN showed that the establishment and maintenance of all forms of communications during a crisis was more challenging than anticipated prior to the exercise.

#### **Information Systems**

The players in this exercise used a number of bespoke communications tools designed and managed by the Health Threats Unit of DG-SANCO. These included the Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) and RAS-BICHAT, in addition to other more conventional forms of communication such as teleconferencing, emails and fax. A small number of key individuals in each Member State and the European Commission have access to RAS-BICHAT and EWRS. Depending on the Member State, these individuals may be different for each of the two systems. The two systems fulfil different purposes and have potentially overlapping functions.

Both RAS-BICHAT and EWRS were used extensively during the exercise to enable communication between European Commission bodies and Member States. EWRS was available to all Member States plus Norway, Iceland and Switzerland; RAS-BICHAT was available to EEA States but not Switzerland. The misunderstanding by the players of the purposes and functions of these two communications tools during a bioterrorism event caused some confusion as to which system was appropriate to use and when. There was considerable overloading and heavy traffic on both systems. In the early stages of the exercise these two communications tools performed effectively. However, as the exercise progressed, both rapidly became congested. The resulting criticism from players was that excessive time and resources were expended searching for and extracting relevant information. Navigation and identification of relevant information on EWRS was particularly time consuming. One reason for this is that Member States, EEA States and Switzerland used the system for wide ranging information exchange when it was developed specifically for official notification of cases and measures, and coordination of the latter (as laid down in decision no 2119/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council). However, Member States, EEA States and Switzerland players did not have alternatives available to them, so naturally migrated to using EWRS.

#### **Emails and Document Management**

The use of emails as a means of information dissemination and sharing also had technical and procedural constraints.

There were thousands of emails generated in this exercise. Receiving, handling and responding to such a large volume proved to be difficult. On Day 2 of the exercise the European Commission attempted to establish a protocol for the distribution of messages by advising Member States to copy all other Member States on all emails. This step enhanced the sharing of information but dramatically increased the volume of messages.



## **Teleconferences**

Teleconferencing was also used as a tool for multilateral communication with all Member States and other organisations. Several teleconferences were arranged throughout Day 1 but were unsuccessful, mainly because of the difficulty in running such conferences with large numbers of participants. It was at times unclear as to what was being discussed at the teleconferences.

It appears that there is a wide variety of telecommunications equipment being used in the EU and the protocols for teleconference calls are not fully understood or practised. Despite the difficulties experienced with these lines of communication, several Member States and others communicated effectively in a bilateral way, using email and telephone. This is likely to reflect reality where longstanding agreements and arrangements are in place and are likely to be used in a crisis. Positive feedback was received on the ECDC website, which was established quickly to give its overview of the situation.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 1***

The functionality of EWRS and RAS-BICHAT (the purposes of which are outlined in Community texts) should be revised to provide an additional operational capability and the role of each system clarified. Regular training for users should be provided. Member States should ensure that they have sufficient access to both these systems to provide resilience.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 2***

A visual system accessible by all member states to provide situational awareness allowing a more efficient display of relevant information should be considered and a functional analysis of a full display system should be undertaken.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 3***

A document-management system that categorises and distributes incoming emails to the correct responder be instituted within the alert systems and in particular for use in the European Health Emergency Operations Facility ("Crisis Room") operated by the European Commission. Consideration should be given to a message prioritisation system that identifies critical events.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 4***

The European Commission establish minimum standards for the equipment to be used for teleconferences and insist on its use during a crisis. In addition, the European Commission should publish and test, on a regular basis, a communication etiquette for teleconferences that involve crisis managers from a large number of Member States, EEA States and Switzerland. The European Commission should also consider investing in a conference tool which gives an overview of who is in the conference and for the control of the speaking rights of the participants.

To improve the effectiveness of teleconferences, the specific purpose and topics for consideration at each teleconference should be circulated and agreed with participants beforehand.



### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

Implement a procedure for assisting with the coordination and sharing of the key European Community-wide responses to media queries during a crisis. Additionally, set up a network of media personnel in the press offices of the Member States' health ministries (and other relevant institutions) and increase the opportunities for this group to meet, interact and build-up relationships. EEA states and Switzerland may also wish to engage in this process.

### **OBJECTIVE 2 - TO EXPLORE THE EXECUTION OF NATIONAL PLANS OF THE MEMBER STATES.**

*"In a community like the EU, free of internal borders and with many common activities and free movement of people and goods, any countermeasures taken in one Member State will be bound to affect at least some, if not all, the other Member States." (Source: Specifications attached to the Invitation to Tender Document SANCO/C3/2004/05)*

The design of the exercise allowed the majority of Member States, EEA states and Switzerland the time to concentrate initially on their internal responses before addressing any international issues. Hence, players took full advantage of the opportunity the exercise provided to review their plans and operating procedures. However, once countries became fully engaged by the exercise scenario, they felt that the time compression did not allow them sufficient time to consider both national and international issues as fully as they would have liked.

Whilst the exercise was primarily intended to examine the responses to health issues, it was identified that there was an issue with the exchange of data which is personal or confidential in nature between Member States and other organisations.

A number of participants suggested that an EU smallpox plan is required and that this plan would be used by Member States to review and inform their own plans. It should be noted that an European Commission plan can only recommend what measures can be taken. The European Commission cannot take responsibility for decisions made by the Member States but any decisions taken must be compatible with European Community law.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

The use of a secure system, with limited, clearly defined access, such as RAS-BICHAT, is, by definition, not available to all. A solution needs to be found to share information, including personal information if applicable, between those people and organisations within the EU that need to have access to that information in the context of a terrorism event or any other Public Health event where the need is identified.

### **RECOMMENDATION 7**

Member States should be encouraged to review their national plans to ensure commonality of alert level definitions. This could be coordinated through the European Commission.

### **OBJECTIVE 3 - TO EXPLORE THE RESTRICTION OF MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE.**

*"It is important to identify the EU dimension of countermeasures which include the restriction of movement of individuals from notification to the end of the emergency." (Source: Specifications attached to the Invitation to Tender Document SANCO/C3/2004/05)*



A general comment amongst many Member States concerned the apparent confusion on where they stand with reference to European Community law with regards to the implementation of travel restrictions between countries. This, on occasion, caused issues to be resolved internally and without proper focus. Mitigating actions were taken following information from other Member States and DG-SANCO, but many countries did not respond to the European Commission questionnaire regarding proposed measures.

Another issue, which caused some significant discussion, was raised by those Member States that are members of the Schengen Convention. It was considered that there was confusion amongst those playing, and that issues of freedom of mobility of people may have to be handled differently according to their nationality (Schengen/European Community citizen or not). Member States could be helped by seminars organised by the European Commission to get a better understanding of the legal basis of the provisions regarding travel restrictions.

Whilst the mandates of the European Commission, ECDC and WHO are clear, there was a lack of clarity amongst players at the exercise (who were predominantly from health departments) as to the roles and responsibilities of these organisations with regard to recommendations on travel restrictions. Further explanation of roles is required.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 8**

The roles and responsibilities of the European Commission, ECDC, WHO Europe and WHO Headquarters need to be better understood by health-related staff within Member States to enable them to make coordinated and informed decisions concerning the movement of individuals. In addition, the apparent perceived disparity in freedom of movement between those countries that are signatories to the Schengen Convention and those who are not should be explained in the context of potential border closures.

#### **OBJECTIVE 4 - TO EXAMINE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CONTAINMENT MEASURES**

*“The quality and effectiveness of implementation of containment measures to reduce transmission risks – principally involving personal protection equipment, quarantine measures and availability of vaccines.” (Source: Specifications attached to the Invitation to Tender Document SANCO/C3/2004/05)*

There was a lack of clarity among the players over containment measures such as quarantine. It was felt that the European Commission should assist interested Member States to manage such measures, and in particular the ECDC should have a larger role as regards the scientific assessment of such measures.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 9**

It would be beneficial if the European Commission and ECDC could develop further protocols (or Standard Operating Procedures), including those relating to containment measures, as part of their mandate and responsibilities in agreement with the Member States.

#### **OBJECTIVE 5 - TO DETERMINE THE ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES AND ARRANGEMENTS.**

*“Member States are to be provided with an opportunity to examine and implement their plans and to explore the adequacy of their resources both in terms of adequately trained personnel and appropriate facilities.” (Source: Specifications attached to the DG-SANCO Invitation to Tender Document SANCO/C3/2004/05)*



Member States, EEA States and Switzerland identified a great range of internal issues during the exercise, which ranged from gaps in internal communications to shortages of appropriately skilled staff and adequate resources.

***RECOMMENDATION 10***

The European Commission, ECDC, Member States, EEA States and Switzerland should ensure that any issues regarding resources and arrangements which were identified during the exercise process are addressed with some priority. This should include the resilience of computer and communications systems.



## Part 7 - Conclusion

Exercises attempt to simulate reality but cannot realistically replicate real events. They provide assurance that if or when a real crisis occurs, people, plans and facilities have been tried and tested. Such exercises allow for lessons to be learned and remedial measures to be implemented as a result. Member States, EEA States and Switzerland, without exception, identified the need for similar exercises to be carried out as a routine training measure.

The overall impression left by Exercise NEW WATCHMAN was that, not surprisingly, communication is a vital tool in enabling effective coordination across the EU. The exercise highlighted that systems (hardware, software, protocols and resilience) currently available to facilitate connectivity across the EU in a crisis need to be improved to make them more effective or, if this is not possible, replaced.

(There was a consensus that considerable improvements were made in the month between Exercise NEW WATCHMAN and Exercise COMMON GROUND, reflecting the willingness of the European Commission and Member States, EEA States and Switzerland to act rapidly to make improvements once identified.)

Finally, a great deal of effort was expended in assembling expert representatives from all the 25 Member States plus EEA and Switzerland to attend the planning meetings. Now that this planning group has been assembled and has experience of planning for and involvement in exercises it has a unique insight. In future, this group could be useful for sharing good practice and lessons identified both nationally and internationally as well as in the planning of future exercises.

### ***RECOMMENDATION 11***

The European Commission should establish the need for, and should run, similar exercises as a routine training measure. These exercises should allow sufficient time to pass between them to allow recommendations to be implemented. Objectives for future exercises should be designed to reflect the requirements, but also consider the limitations, of different exercise delivery methods.

The recommendations presented within this report will need to be considered in the light of availability of resources and technical constraints.