

Amplifying voices in emergency response

Today, despite the countless ways to communicate, it seems harder than ever for voices to be truly heard, according to the Emergency Planning Society (EPS)

Recent headlines have been dominated by emergencies that cause division, from the UK Covid-19 inquiry to the Southport, UK riots. We are living in a society marked by fractures. In response, the EPS launched the Big Conversation initiative to address this issue among professionals and others involved in emergency management.

EPS Interim Chair Jeannie Barr stated: "It seems that now, more than ever, is the time for us to have that 'Big Conversation,' and its launch is incredibly timely for us as a profession and more widely. The EPS Human Aspects and Community Resilience Professional Working Group (HAG & CR PWG) has been carefully considering the challenges our communities face and has developed a series of events that seek to hear – and act upon – the voices of those at the heart of resilience across the UK.

"As the professional body, the EPS has a key role in representing the profession to the wider world. The HAG & CR PWG brings together members with a passion and deep understanding of the human aspects of emergency response. It also explores how the profession can collaborate with communities to adopt a whole-of-society approach to resilience, resulting in documents and guidance that have been adopted across the UK and beyond."

These events are designed to facilitate open and honest conversations that lead to innovations and initiatives shaping the future of resilience in the UK. Among the key areas of focus will be:

- The human aspects of resilience;
- Guidance: Expectations versus reality;
- Planning, training, and exercising and
- Responsibilities: short, medium, and long-term.

Beverley Griffiths, Emergency Planning Society Fellow and part of the sub-group developing this initiative, said: "It has never been more important for emergency preparedness in the UK to have a strong voice. Over the last decade, emergency planners have been at the forefront of responding to incidents and events that have influenced everyone's daily lives, including the pandemic. We, as a

society, read and welcomed the recently published Module 1 report by Baroness Hallett with great interest. The report highlighted the difficulties local responders faced in having their views and expertise considered during the pandemic. Many of the findings and recommendations in the report align with what the EPS has been advocating for with the central government for some time.

"This is particularly true regarding the need for a UK-wide independent statutory body for whole-system civil emergency preparedness, resilience, and response, and the importance of learning lessons and sharing that learning – in other words, listening to each other.

"Emergency planning professionals are skilled and dedicated. For their work to be truly effective, they need to be seen and heard. The profession requires a strong and unified voice, something that can be achieved through 'The Big Conversation.'

"We recognise that more needs to be done to support emergency planning and resilience professionals, and we believe 'The Big Conversation' is a vital starting point."

The creation of the Big Conversation is also timely given recent research from the US, which shows that professionals in the sector are struggling to be heard, leading to setbacks in the pursuit of professional status. This, in turn, has driven some to leave the field, taking with them invaluable experience and knowledge. Those who remain are often exhausted, but remain passionate about the profession and the communities they serve.

This series of events will gather people's thoughts, ideas, and challenges to inform the development of tools, new initiatives, and innovations aimed at influencing change. The Big Conversation is designed to reach not only the EPS membership, but also the broader field, its partners, and stakeholders.

The collected data will be analysed to identify themes that will guide the development of future guidance and influence change. The findings will be shared and explored at the spring seminar in 2025, transforming them into concrete actions for change.

■ The first of the events will be held virtually on September 5 and September 26. To register, please email info@the-eps.org

Authors

This piece was written by members of the Emergency Planning Society, including Beverley Griffiths, Fellow of the Emergency Planning Society, Human Aspects Group & CR Member, and Senior Lecturer and Researcher at Buckinghamshire New University, UK; Julie Hicks, Fellow of the Emergency Planning Society and Chair of the 'Big Conversation' sub-group; alongside sub-group members Libby Tassell, Rhys Hatton, and Tracy Navarre

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