



Media release

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## **Major flooding exercise to test emergency response in Bedfordshire and Luton**

What would you do if ... there was a major flooding incident in Bedfordshire and Luton?

That is the question emergency response partners on the Bedfordshire and Luton Local Resilience Forum (BLLRF) will be asking both the public and themselves during Exercise Watermark next month.

The public can find out more about the risk in their area, and how they might protect themselves, at a Flood Awareness Day in Harpur Square, Bedford, on Friday 4 March, 9am-4pm, and a Flood Evacuation Exercise at Cedars Upper School, Leighton Buzzard, on Saturday 5 March, 10am-5pm.

Then, a large-scale multi-agency exercise to test emergency responses to severe flooding in Bedfordshire and Luton will take place on Tuesday 8 March.

A range of possible scenarios are likely to include flooded rivers, overflowing culverts, impassable roads, stranded motorists, flooded homes, evacuation and isolated communities.

The exercise will involve all local authorities, police, fire and rescue service, Environment Agency and the full range of NHS, ambulance and hospital trusts serving the county. Also taking part will be business representatives, town and parish councils, schools and volunteers.

Chairman of BLLRF, Asst Chief Constable Katherine Govier from Bedfordshire Police, said: "Recent and widespread incidents of flooding across the globe would suggest that flooding may be unavoidable in the future so we must take steps now to analyse the risk and plan ahead. Exercise Watermark will be a real test of our ability to deal with a range of issues such as flooded rivers and surface water flooding.

"The effects of flooding can be devastating so it is essential that we are all prepared to deal with the risk."

The Flood Awareness Day and Evacuation Exercise aim to offer a range of helpful information about how people across this area can take steps to reduce flood risk to their homes and businesses.

The Bedfordshire and Luton Fire & Rescue Service will be showing some of their equipment, and the Environment Agency will explain everything you need to know about the risks of a flood and preparing for it.

In Leighton Buzzard, the event will also demonstrate what an Emergency Assistance Centre would look like.

Assistant Chief Constable Govier said: "There are a range of measures people can take to protect themselves against flooding, for example installing Kitemarked flood defence products or completing a flood plan.

"Unfortunately, increasing numbers of our homes and businesses will be at risk of flooding in the future and I would encourage everyone to attend the fairs, speak to the experts about the help that will be available from local agencies in the event of a flood, and find out what they can do to mitigate the damage that can be caused."

Nationwide, Exercise Watermark has been designed by the Government to test national and regional responses to severe flooding from rivers, the sea, reservoirs, groundwater and surface water, and will involve more than 3,500 emergency responders and 31 local resilience forums.

To find out if your property or business is at risk, and to get early warnings, go to [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk) or call Floodline on 0845 988 1188

The 'What would you do if...?' campaign, supported by the BLLRF, aims to help everybody living or working within Bedfordshire and Luton to be prepared and consider what they would do if faced with an emergency. Visit [www.whatwouldyoudoif.co.uk](http://www.whatwouldyoudoif.co.uk).

#### **Notes to editors:**

Exercise Watermark is an emergency flooding exercise, led by Defra and delivered by the Environment Agency with the support of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, which will test the country's response to surface water, reservoir, river and coastal flooding. It is one of the biggest emergency exercises ever to take place in the UK.

The setting up of a national flood exercise was one of the key recommendations of Sir Michael Pitt's independent review of the 2007 floods.

One in six properties in England and Wales is at risk of flooding. It is only by working and practising together that we will be ready to protect people's lives, homes and livelihoods when flooding hits.

Partners in Exercise Watermark in Bedfordshire and Luton include: Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Luton Borough Council, Bedfordshire Police, Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service, NHS Luton and Bedford, East of England Ambulance Service, Environment Agency.

Community groups and businesses wanting to take part in Exercise Watermark are invited to visit [www.exercisewatermark.co.uk](http://www.exercisewatermark.co.uk)

BLLRF was formed in 2004, bringing together the key agencies required to respond to emergencies.

Comprising local agencies including the emergency services, local authorities, National Health Service (NHS) and the voluntary and community sector, the forum was created to ensure the best possible plans are in place should a major emergency occur.

BLLRF's vision is to make Bedfordshire and Luton the best-prepared place for any emergency. Through the '*What would you do if...?*' campaign, the forum aims to promote the importance of being prepared and ensure people living and working within the county feel safe. For more information visit [www.whatwouldyoudoif.co.uk](http://www.whatwouldyoudoif.co.uk)

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