



Simon Webb: Crisis! How to avoid an Incident resulting in Bad Regulation

Key message: Disproportionate regulation often follows a high profile incident, such as a major accident, disease outbreak, terrorist attack or natural disaster. Being pressed into kneejerk responses (and the associated loss of reputation for a Government or Board) is avoidable, by training for crisis management that recognises the realities of modern media and social networks.

From studying how crises over the last 20 years were handled, Simon Webb observed new features: actions in the early hours are made more critical by continuous news and social networks; and individuals have higher expectations of getting information and support, even when overseas. Therefore, a Government or Corporate Board needs to set a new risk in proportion - or be outpaced in the public information space.

There are two ways that momentum frequently gathers for extra regulation:

- Hesitant management and poor public handling in early stages leads to public pressure for action to prevent a recurrence, and more regulation is promised without proper assessment
- Follow-up investigations or inquiries are commissioned in ways that lead inexorably to proposals for additional regulation.

Simon suggested some practical ways in which these paths to poor regulation and reputation loss can be avoided. His conclusion, picked up in the final session, was that after an incident:

A Government or Board must create space and time for itself to get the right answers

Simon drew conclusions from 29 episodes ranging from the stadium disasters of 1988 to industrial accidents and the H1N1 outbreak in 2009-10 while he was a UK Government Servant. For further information and check-lists on crisis management, please feel free to contact him at the Nichols Group on simon.webb@nichols.uk.com. The Nichols Group is a London-based company that partners UK and international clients through major change and infrastructure programmes.