



SAR HELICOPTERS ASSISTANCE TO THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

To date in 2007, the UK Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre (UKARCC) has provided assistance to the emergency services, including the FRS, at 3 major incidents, the Grayrigg derailment and the flooding around Sheffield and Gloucester. Additionally, SAR helicopters have attended over 1800 other emergencies. Of these a significant number have been at the request of the FRS, including evacuation of casualties from RTAs and, closer to home, lift of 18 fire fighters from a forest fire near Capel Curig. In 2006, ARCC co-ordinated 2416 operations resulting in assistance being provided to 1447 casualties. Of note, more than 50% of these incidents occurred on land and only 15% were maritime. But how is this assistance provided and what is the cost?

SAR helicopters are based at 12 locations around the UK, such that a helicopter can usually be at the scene of an incident within 60 minutes of tasking. Two helicopters are maintained at high readiness at each of 8 military locations; by the RAF at Chivenor, Valley, Lossiemouth, Boulmer, Leconfield and Wattisham and by the RN at Culdrose and Prestwick. These aircraft are the well-known yellow Sea Kings, equipped with a 300ft winch cable, thermal imaging camera and night vision equipment. Most RAF winchman are now qualified as NHS accredited Paramedics.

The RAF also maintains 4 Mountain Rescue Teams at Valley, Leeming, Leuchars and Kinloss, each team comprising 25-35 volunteers. Team members are trained in all aspects of SAR but specifically in aircraft post crash management; they are frequently called upon to assist in civilian land rescues. The teams are equipped to operate as self-sustaining units, including provision of extremely capable command, control and communications facilities.

These assets are provided to cover military operations but it is MoD policy to render assistance whenever possible to other persons in distress. Interim Joint Doctrine Publication 02 (IJDPO2) – Operations in the UK: The Defence Contribution to Resilience defines the provision of unarmed military assistance in time of emergency such as major emergencies; Search and Rescue is quoted as a specific example of this role. IJDPO2 also makes clear that **no costs are charged to the civil authority in situations where life is at risk**, this includes responding to a road traffic accident or lifting rescue teams, such as civilian mountain rescue teams and FRS teams, to the site of an incident where life is at risk.

The UKARCC exists to co-ordinate the deployment of these SAR helicopters and MRTs in operations to assist in the preservation of life. UKARCC has direct control of the RN and RAF SAR helicopters and RAF MRTs and, under an agreement with the MCA, can request the assistance of the 4 MCA contracted helicopters at Lee-on-Solent, Portland, Sumburgh and Stornoway. Thus UKARCC provides a common tasking procedure for all UK SAR helicopters, allowing the most appropriate asset to be identified and tasked in minimum time.

UKARCC is not a 999 agency but responds to requests for advice or assistance from the emergency services. During major incidents UKARCC functions as a national air GOLD control, able to concentrate and coordinate air assets to meet the task. For incidents on land it can also provide an aviation component for SILVER control, by the deployment of SAR aviation specialists and communications to the scene. It is also well placed to offer specialist aviation advice. Of note, during the Gloucester flooding UKARCC received many requests for assistance through Silver Control but also processed an equal number from other emergency service units.

UKARCC assistance is not necessarily limited to direct assistance to the casualty; in a recent incident 4 members of Grampian Fire Brigade were airlifted to the top of the Cairngorms where they used their specialist knowledge and equipment to release a pilot from the wreckage of his crashed glider. This incident, which involved the full range of capabilities represents a shining example of emergency services working in harmony for the benefit of the casualty.

UKARCC welcomes visitors and members of staff regularly give presentations on UKARCC and SARF capabilities. For further information contact Sqn Ldr Barrie Neilson on 01309 678302, or at UKARCC, RAF Kinloss, Forres, Moray, IV36 3UH.

