

## *Operations Planning Watch Manager Neill Forbes provides an insight to Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service provision of resources as a member of the UK Maritime Incident Response Group*

Following Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service (LBFRS) formal declaration of their resources to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) in January 2008, the United Kingdom coastline network of fifteen strategically located Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG) Teams is now complete. Having a full range of resources available will maximise the arrangements for delivering the MIRG National Integrated Response Strategy for attending incidents on vessels at sea.

### **LBFRS 'Local' MIRG Area**

LBFRS has an extensive coastline running from its east coast border with Northumberland FRS at Berwick to its shoreline border with Central Scotland FRS at Blackness on the Firth of Forth.

Shipping lanes within the Firth of Forth are busy with vessels sailing to either one of three large ports positioned at Leith (Container Ships / Passenger Liners), Rosyth (Naval Vessels / Passenger Ferries) and Grangemouth (Petrochemical Tankers / container ships) or to Hound Point Marine Oil Terminal (Oil Tankers) at South Queensferry.

The Maritime Rescue Co-ordinating Centre (MRCC) Forth at Fifeness, manages shipping emergencies in the Firth of Forth in its entirety and the area extending outwards into the North Sea to a distance of approximately fifty miles.

As the MRCC Forth is situated in Fife Authority's area, procedures are in place for a Fife FRS flexible duty Officer to perform the role of Fire Liaison Officer for a 'local' area MIRG incident.

In addition to having detailed preparations for 'local' area incidents, incorporated within LBFRS MIRG Operational Plan are specific arrangements for responding to any coastal location around the UK in support of the Integrated Response strategy.

### **LBFRS MIRG Structure**

Existing LBFRS Statutory Authority duties, as a member of the Marine Operations Group (MOG) includes attending incidents on vessels brought alongside at Leith Docks and Hound Point Marine Oil Terminal. Planning and exercising for such situations has provided personnel with a wide range of marine firefighting skills, competencies and experience. It is from those personnel that LBFRS MIRG team have been drawn.

LBFRS have a team of fifty-six fully trained and equipped personnel able to respond to fire / explosion, industrial accident or chemical release type incidents on board vessels at sea.

The team consists of eight Flexible duty Group Managers, two Training Officers and forty-six wholtime Operational personnel. The Operational personnel are mainly based on four Watches at McDonald Road Fire Station in Edinburgh.

### **Embarkation and Transportation Resources**

LBFRS air transportation to an incident is by Search and Rescue Sea – King helicopter from either Royal Navy (RN) Gannet at Prestwick in Ayrshire or Royal Air Force (RAF) Boulmer in Northumberland. This type of helicopter is suitably equipped to transport a Strike or Support team of between six and nine personnel and two equipment load bags. Flight times from base locations to Edinburgh are approximately sixty minutes. Currently, these helicopters are coordinated from the Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre (ARCC) situated at RAF Kinloss in Scotland.

Through partnership working, a helicopter Embarkation site has been established at Lothian and Borders Police Headquarters in Edinburgh with a contingency helicopter-landing zone identified at Edinburgh Airport.

Similarly, two 'local' area sites at Leith Docks in Edinburgh and Rosyth Docks in Fife have been identified for embarkation onto a Support vessel.

### **Training and exercises**

To ensure that team members have the necessary technical knowledge and practical skills a specialised MIRG training programme has been developed. It covers fifteen elements e.g. ship construction, stability, marine firefighting, helicopter transfer, ship to ship transfer, sea survival training, etc.

The in-house training undertaken by LBFRS at their Training Unit 'The Ship' and the external training provided by the Royal Navy and Fleetwood Offshore Survival Training Centre are all delivered to requisite National Standards. These are essential requirements and are designed to ensure combinations of MIRG teams from any part of the UK can work safely and effectively together.

Training delivery is achieved using a variety of methods including lectures, interactive presentations, practical demonstrations and exercises.

LBFRS Command Officers and Operational personnel have already undergone formal training assessment during four large-scale live 'Embarkation' exercises conducted between Spring and Autumn of 2007. The exercises also included the participation of LBFRS partner Services and Agencies i.e. the MRCC Forth at Fifeness, Fife FRS and Lothian and Borders Police.

These exercises were designed to test a variety of procedures for a MIRG incident including, notification and incident tasking by the MCA, the decision making / risk assessment process by the Principal Officer, equipment preparation and embarkation by strike team members onto a helicopter.



**LBFRS Strike Team Leader directs MIRG Personnel  
during a helicopter embarkation exercise**

**Future Developments**

Having established the requisite skills, provisions and procedures to safely and effectively attend an incident on a vessel at sea it is the aims of LBFRS to develop the knowledge and skills of its personnel and further improve arrangements through collaboration and close working with partner MIRG Teams and identified Services and Agencies.

Further information on the UK Maritime Incident Response Group can be found at: [www.mirg.org.uk](http://www.mirg.org.uk)

**About the Author:**

Operations Planning Watch Manager Neill Forbes has been LBFRS MIRG project assistant for the past two years.

During this period, Neill has been responsible for the planning and production of LBFRS MIRG Operational Plan and has established, through extensive collaboration with local Services and Agencies, the requisite resources and arrangements to allow the safe and effective mobilisation of LBFRS personnel as part of the UK MIRG.