

The UK Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG) continues to go from strength to strength.

Introduction

The MIRG comprises teams from 15 Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) strategically located around the coast, with about 50 fire fighters available for each team. Each team has been equipped specially trained to tackle incidents fire in the marine environment and is equipped with the lighter, more compact equipment required when travelling by helicopter to the scene of an incident. The teams will not only fight fires but also deal with chemical hazards and free trapped personnel in vessels at sea.

In addition, the teams' specialised training, allied to a helicopter capability, provide a valuable, additional resource for the emergency services across the rest of the UK. Each team can be reinforced with paramedics who will also be trained in the unique conditions that they may face particularly in the maritime environment.

The MCA sponsored Sea of Change project which delivered the MIRG national strategy ended earlier this year. Craig Cook the MCA/Fire Liaison Manager (FLM) who manages the United Kingdom MIRG national strategy paid tribute to the work carried out by the project team over the four year lifespan of the project.

“Having been involved since my appointment as the FLM in February 2006 I have been impressed by the volume and quality of the work carried out to date. This reflects well not only on the Project Manager Mervyn Kettle and Technical Officer Peter Pearce but also the Training Officers John Webb, Keith Boswell and Nigel Bruty.”

“In addition to the efforts of the project team, the drive and leadership displayed by John Astbury who led the project Board and was Chief Coastguard throughout most of the project lifespan was crucial to the successful delivery of the project objectives. The assistance provided by MCA colleagues in areas such as purchasing, legislation and practical Search and Rescue experience have also proved invaluable.”

“It is important to note that the MCA provide the funding for UK MIRG and I am delighted to say that the current Chief Coastguard Peter Dymond has taken up the mantle as MIRG champion. Peter has also demonstrated his continuing commitment by expanding the support infrastructure available for MIRG.”

Moving from the development phase of “Sea of Change” to a predominately maintenance phase of the UK MIRG national strategy Craig carried out a review of the interaction between the 15 MIRG Fire and Rescue Services and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).

Previously the Lead Officers from each of the 15 MIRG FRS held three meetings per year. The meetings dealt with issues as diverse as the strategic disposition of national assets right through to technical and development problems with each item of equipment.

The review has led to the formation of new groups at Strategic, Tactical and Operations level.

This structure allows engagement with members of FRS staff who have responsibility and experience at each level dealing with issues appropriate to their particular role within MIRG teams.

Working parties have been set up from each of the groups in order to continue the development of policy, standard operating procedures, training and equipment.

The Fire Liaison Manager produces an annual action plan each year detailing the objectives and timescale involved for each of the issues agreed as an action point with the Chief Coastguard. This has so far resulted in the implementation of an audit programme for all MIRG Fire and Rescue Services and external training providers.

The FLM has also produced a three year training plan for all MIRG Firefighters including the 15 MIRG training modules consisting of 51 training elements. The training plan is also used for auditing and budget forecasting.

In conjunction with MIRG admin support staff a number of databases have been developed dealing with end of course critiques, training records, equipment management and operational incidents. The operational incident database is proving to be particularly useful. Historically it has been very difficult to determine exactly how many incidents occur onboard vessels around the UK.

The FLM is now informed by the MCA of every vessel fire. This information is then added to the database and will ultimately allow analysis of trends, clusters and identify peak activity periods.

The MIRG website is another significant development, attracting up to 46,000 hits each month over the last few months. Requests for information and assistance have been dealt with from as far away as Australia, Hong Kong, The United Arab Emirates, Iceland, Holland and Ireland.

A number of requests for advice have also been received from coastal non MIRG Fire and Rescue Services regarding training and equipment for dealing with fires on ships.

The Future

The Sea of Change project has not only delivered the MIRG national strategy but also delivered most of the terms of reference of the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) Marine Operations Group (MOG).

The CFOA Lead Officer for Marine Operations DCFO Mazen Khuri of Humberside Fire and Rescue Service has recognised that now would be an appropriate time to review the group's terms of reference and has called a meeting of the CFO of the 39 FRS with a significant coastal risk.

DCFO Khuri has identified the importance of maintaining effective engagement between the 15 MIRG and 24 MOG FRS particularly in the future development of issues such as working in partnership to develop a formal handover protocol between MIRG teams and coastal Fire and Rescue Services.

Using the expertise available in all 15 MIRG Fire and Rescue Services the FLM will continue to build upon the standards set by the Sea of Change project. The response provided by the United Kingdom Maritime Incident Response Group is now recognised as one of the most effective in the world.

Further information on the Maritime Incident Response Group can be found at www.mirg.org.uk