

Article

Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG)

Introduction

FIRE magazine has a keen interest to give regular exposure to key technical areas within the UK Fire Service and over the next 18 months will devote a regular page to cover national and regional MIRG information.

This will include articles from each of the 15 MIRG Fire and Rescue Services, a Maritime Rescue Coordinating Centre (MRCC) and the Aeronautical Rescue Coordinating Centre (ARCC) at Kinloss.

As previously reported in FIRE MAGAZINE the United Kingdom MIRG is funded by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) and is comprised of teams from Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) strategically located around the coast.

There are around 50 fire fighters in each team, equipped and specially trained to tackle Fire, HAZMAT and Industrial Accident incidents at sea.

Teams are equipped with the lighter, more compact equipment required when travelling by helicopter to the scene of an incident. Some of this equipment has been specifically designed for MIRG use.

MIRG Structure

The Fire and Rescue Services involved are –

Highland & Islands, East Sussex, Jersey, Guernsey Lothian and Borders, Hampshire, Northumberland, Cornwall, Humberside, Mid and West Wales, Lincolnshire, North Wales, Suffolk, Strathclyde and Kent.

Maritime Incident Response Group



Department for
Transport



The UK manager for the MIRG is Area Commander Craig Cook from Strathclyde Fire and Rescue who is currently seconded to the MCA as Fire Liaison Manager (FLM).

Craig explained that the arrangements in place to deliver the national strategy vary in each FRS. For example Guernsey and Jersey form a joint team whilst Highlands and Islands have a total of four teams located in Shetland, Orkney, Stornoway and Invergordon. Some FRS use Firefighters working the wholetime system of duty from one or two stations. Others use a mixture of personnel working wholetime and retained duties from a number of stations within the FRS.

All equipment, training and procedures are standardized to allow teams from any part of the UK to work safely with any other team.

Interagency

The UK MIRG is designed to be an integrated interagency response. Ideally a MIRG team would comprise of the required number of Firefighters, a Coastguard Liaison Officer (CLGO) and a Paramedic.

Although at present only available in limited numbers, the value of the CLGO role is now regularly highlighted in every exercise and incident attended. The person performing this role acts as the main communications function between the casualty vessel and the MRCC.

The ability to delegate this function to a maritime communications expert greatly assists the on board Operations Commander. The MCA are currently working on a national procedure that will include Coastguard Liaison Officers (CGLO) in MIRG teams wherever possible.

Photo- Operations Commander, Coastguard Liaison Officer and Ships Captain working on the Bridge of the Commodore Clipper.

(Photo to follow)

The Ambulance Service Association (ASA) also continues its efforts to include Paramedics in MIRG teams

Training

All partner organizations participating in the national strategy are also trained to the same national standards. MIRG training consists of 15 elements made up of 51 units. This includes Helicopter Underwater Escape and Sea Survival Training.

Photo of FF being winched to follow

In addition to this training the MCA also fund 5 major “at sea” exercises per year. Each exercise can involve a number of teams. A good example of this was the Condex20.

The exercise was carried out onboard the Commodore Clipper on the 28th September 2007, involving the Hampshire, Jersey and Guernsey MIRG teams, coordinated by the Solent MRCC in Hampshire. Condor ferries allowed the use of their Ro-ro ferry, the “Condor Clipper”.

A Hampshire MIRG team was airlifted by the MCA helicopter, (“Whisky Bravo”), from Lee-on-the-Solent, in Hampshire, to the vessel after it had left Portsmouth and was heading south. A second MIRG team took off from Guernsey aboard the Portland MCA helicopter (“India Juliet”).

A third team was transported by support vessel (the Jersey States tug “Duke of Normandy”) to join the ferry as it approached St. Peter Port, Guernsey.

Photo. A Mirg team member being winched on board to follow

Further details on MIRG training can be found on our website, www.mirg.org.uk

The site has been attracting up to 46,000 hits each month over the last few months. Requests for information and assistance have been dealt with by the FLM from as far away as Australia, Finland, Hong Kong, The United Arab Emirates, Iceland, Holland and Ireland.

Future Development

A number of MIRG working groups have been set up from the participating FRS.

The FLM, using the expertise available in all 15 MIRG Fire and Rescue Services will coordinate the activities of the groups to continue to develop the Operational procedures, equipment and training necessary to maintain the standards that have been set. Those standards have helped the UK MIRG to be recognised as one of the most effective at sea response capabilities in the world.

The MIRG national strategy is a part of the MCA Search and Rescue capability and over the next 18 months or so we will expand on the local arrangements in place in each of the participating FRS and our partners in the MCA and Ministry of Defence (MOD).

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

Professional Biography



Craig Cook is an Area Commander currently seconded from Strathclyde Fire and Rescue to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. His duties include responsibility for the management of the United Kingdom Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG). Until his secondment to the MCA he was working in SFR Strategic Planning Directorate. He supervised the team that produced Strathclyde's first Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). He was also the Project Manager for the services restructure aligning SFR 113 Fire Stations from 4 Commands to 10 Areas that are now coterminous with the LA boundaries.