

ALISTAIR DARLING LAUNCHES WORLD FIRST IN UK FIRE & RESCUE AT SEA

(Extracts from MCA press release 20.4.06)

Secretary of State for Transport, Alistair Darling, has welcomed the launch of the UK's Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG), the first specialised fire and rescue service for dealing with incidents at sea.

The official launch took place at Dover on 20th April 2006.



(Seen above: John Astbury, Chief Executive MCA with Alistair Darling, Secretary of State for Transport and Peter Dymond, Chief Coastguard)

MIRG will form an integral part of the UK's search and rescue response.

MIRG comprises 15 Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) teams strategically located around the country, with about 50 fire fighters in each team. Each team has been specially trained to respond to fires 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 have an improved capability to fight fires but also deal with chemical hazards and assist with 'industrial' accidents.

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

This new service, one of the first of its kind in the world, is the result of a major cross-governmental project involving some of the principal organisations behind the UK's civil resilience, supported by almost £3m of funding from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and the Department for Transport.

Mr Darling said: 'The professionalism, skill and bravery of the UK's Emergency Services are second to none. We need to continue to do all we can to help them deal with the difficult and often unpredictable situations they face day after day.'

The New Maritime Incident Response Group will strengthen our capability to respond to fires and other emergencies that occur at sea, with highly-trained teams able to be deployed by helicopter at short notice.

But this new arrangement also has the potential to benefit the whole of the UK by transporting Fire and Rescue teams quickly to emergencies anywhere in the country, not just to those at sea. It will further improve the UK's standing as one of the best co-ordinated response systems anywhere in the world'.

NOTE:

1. The Maritime Incident Response Group is a cross-government project which includes the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), the Fire & Rescue Services (FRS), the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), and the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

2. The Sea of Change project was launched by the MCA at the request of the Secretary of State for Transport in January 2003. A project manager was seconded to the MCA from Cornwall County Fire Brigade, with support from a technical officer recently retired from Kent Fire Brigade.

The Project Team worked closely with coastal Fire Services, as well as other interested parties including HM Fire Service Inspectorate's; the Fire Service College and Fire Policy Division, the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), and the MoD. The project has made considerable progress in a number of areas, principally:

- the establishment of the MIRG.

- the provision of specialist training and enhanced safety standards for the safe deployment of firefighters at sea

- the development and provision of equipment required for the safety of firefighters operating in the maritime environment.

3. Following recent agreement with the NHS, paramedics will soon be able to join the MIRG units following similar appropriate training.

4. MIRG comprises 15 Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) teams strategically located around the country. They are:

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

It was extremely pleasing to note that all the MIRG fire authorities were represented by a number of Chief Fire Officers/Chairpersons and other Principal Officers.



(Seen above: Peter Pearce, Project Team Technical Officer, Keith Boswell & Nigel Bruty, Project Team Training Officers and Project Manager, Mervyn Kettle at the 'launch').

NEW 'MIRG' DVD

The MCA Project Team has now produced a 12 minute DVD that encapsulates the introduction of the UKFRS MIRG. You can view the promotional version on the internet by going to: www.1mage.co.uk/mirgPromo

(You will need a Broadband connection and Macromedia 'Flash' player installed to view the video which will be removed from the internet at the end of May 2006).

If you would like to obtain a copy of the DVD then please send a suitable stamp addressed 'large reinforced' envelope to the Project Manager and we will send you one by return post - no additional charge!

EQUIPMENT

All MIRG teams have now been supplied with 'Iridium' satellite phones, one for each MIRG team, which will ensure any team mobilised to an 'at sea' incident will have good communications with the shore.

GUIDANCE TO ALL COASTAL FRS

The recent CFOA Circular (2005/1095) specifying the proposed arrangements with coastal FRSs in dealing with incidents at sea has now been drafted into a Fire Service Circular and submitted to ODPM for publication.

Within this draft is reference to the role of the HM Coastguard/FRS Fire Liaison Officer (FLO). Based on information received from a number of coastal FRS a SOP has been produced in relation to the role of the 'FLO' and circulated to lead officers in all coastal FRS that form the CFOA Marine Operations Group.

TRAINING

ROLE OF THE MIRG MANAGER

Recently appointed to the role of MCA/Fire Liaison Manager, Craig Cook from Strathclyde FRS will now commence the development of 'general MIRG training and equipment management' required to maintain the coordinated response on behalf of the MCA and coastal FRS's.

NEW INTERACTIVE TRAINING PRESENTATION

Transportation Protective Equipment (TPE) training familiarisation is now available in Macromedia 'Breeze' format. This identifies all the relevant equipment in relation to the transportation of MIRG personnel to incidents at sea and is supported with video and the associated supporting word documents. This supercedes the previous PowerPoint version issued in 2005. Copies on CD-ROM are available from the Project Manager.

HAMPSHIRE WEB SITE

Power Point training packages are still available to view on the HFRS website: www.hantsfire.gov.uk

MARITIME INCIDENT RESPONSE GROUP (MIRG) MEETING

The next meeting for MIRG and NHS lead officers will be held on the 28th & 29th June 2006 at Staffordshire FRS Headquarters.

Minutes of the meeting will be placed on the members' area of our MCA web pages.