



A 'MIRG'ING OF MINDS

A meeting was held in Staffordshire on Tuesday, 30th September 2003. This meeting was the inaugural meeting of the proposed United Kingdom Fire & Rescue Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG). The strategy currently being developed will hopefully lead to a national response by UK Fire and Rescue Services to assist in dealing with fire and rescue incidents at sea.



Representatives from the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA), Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and sixteen coastal Fire & Rescue Services attended the meeting.

Each Brigade gave an overview of their current position in relation to operations at sea. Issues including funding, insurance and contingent liability occupied much of the debate. A positive approach on the intended future outcomes was received from those who attended, but it was clearly recognised that much work still has to be done.

The next meeting of the Group will be held at Portsmouth on Wednesday, 28th January 2004.

FUNDING

The Project Board Chair/Chief Coastguard Officer confirms that £750,000 has been made available for training and equipping the proposed Group. This funding is being provided by the MCA in an effort to fully support the overall outcomes in forming a national response from Fire & Rescue Services to assist in dealing with incidents at sea.

Until now, funding in relation to Fire Service activities in this arena has been supplemented by the individual Fire Authorities who have allowed their resources to be used for this non-statutory role. This commitment by the MCA is a major step forward.

EQUIPMENT

A most recent Objective that the Project Team have been compiling is in relation to identifying equipment needs. The subject of equipment for the role of marine incidents is wide and varied, and acting on feedback received from officers in coastal Brigades it was decided that initially we would focus

on 'transportation PPE' and 'communications'. Subsequently, a report was presented to the Project Board on the 31st October.

Transportation PPE has been determined as the minimum requirement considered viable to maintain the safe person concept in relation to those personnel being conveyed across 'the sea' and large open expanses of water. The Project Board has agreed therefore, based on the outcomes of Objective 2.3.6 the minimum PPE requirements that should be provided to each member of a response team is as follows:

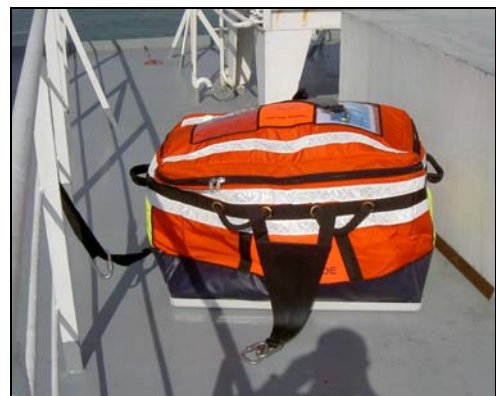
- Transit suit.
- 275 Newton Lifejacket.
- Side impact fire helmet.
- Personal Locator Beacons (PLB).
- Passenger Short Term Air Supply System (P-STASS).
- Foul weather clothing.
- Welfare packs.
- Personal tallies.



Full details of the background to this are published in Objective 2.3.6, shortly to be available on the website.

HELICOPTER LOAD BAGS

These load bags are also identified as a key piece of equipment that is required to ensure a consistent approach is presented to SAR carriers. A standard specification (already adopted by at least three Brigades) has been produced. It is anticipated that these load bags will be sourced as a matter of priority.



COMMUNICATIONS

As part of the communications research and following consultation between MCA and ODPM it has been agreed that communications equipment will be provided to each MIRG team. The equipment will essentially be similar to that being provided by the New Dimension Programme as part of the requirement for operational continuity and resilience.

This will give the Fire Service Operational Commander the ability to maintain good communications between the incident and shore using satellite communications equipment. The inclusion of data and video transfer is also being considered as part of this package.

The provision of good communications for operational use on board the casualty will also be addressed. Further research within this area will take place.

EU EXCHANGE VISIT

As part of the overall research the Project Team identified the need to assess what, if any, international measures may be in place and could impact on the work being carried out in the UK. Therefore under the EU 'Exchange of Experts Scheme' contact was made with colleagues in the Central Command for Maritime Emergencies (CCME), Germany and arrangements were made to visit Cuxhaven on the North Sea coast in August 2003.



The outcomes of this visit have identified very similar initiatives taking place in relation to developing a national strategy to deal with fire, rescue, coastal pollution and medical assistance. This clearly identifies a need to consider for the future, a pan European network in relation to the operational delivery of services to incidents that will occur at sea around our



coasts. This would need to be integrated into existing national and bi-national agreements. The full report will be available on the website.



TRAINING

Work is progressing in producing modules in line with UK Fire & Rescue Service Integrated Personal Development Systems (IPDS) for Command and Control, Stability, Transportation by air and sea and Marine Legislation.

The newly enlarged training working group met at Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Headquarters from 22nd to 25th September 2003. The workshop was very successful and all members showed a keen interest and commitment to this project.

Further information regarding this meeting will be available in the Members' Area of the website under Briefing Paper No 8.

MCA WEBSITE

The MCA have recently launched the new website, but unfortunately this has led to some technical difficulties including the temporary loss of the 'Sea of Change' Members' Area. Hopefully this will soon be rectified.

Please note the new 'Sea of Change' WebPages address at the foot of this page.

OCTOBER EXCEPTION REPORT

The current status of the Project's research will be found in the 'Project Progress' pages of the Members' Area on the MCA website.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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