

# eMIRG

#1 SUMMER 2012

THE MAKING OF MIRG EU



MIRG EU



Maritime  
Incident  
Response  
Groups

THIS ISSUE: MARITIME INCIDENT RESPONSE  
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# MARITIME INCIDENT RESPONSE GROUPS

PROJECT COMBINES INTERNATIONAL  
KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS  
TO EFFECTIVELY FIGHT MARITIME INCIDENTS



The Channel, the North Sea and the River Scheldt are notorious for their busy shipping lanes. Every day, hundreds of vessels navigate through these, sometimes tricky, waters. With radar and excellent communication tools, this traffic is guided safely along the coasts. But recent accidents, eg with the Costa Concordia in Italy or the Rena in New Zealand, show that things can go wrong, with disastrous consequences.

These kinds of accidents demand specific skills and knowledge from rescuers boarding ships to fight on-board fires, and to protect the natural environment. In most countries, normally trained fire fighters are sent out to control fires on board ships. Due to lack of knowledge, skills and proper equipment their actions aren't always as effective as they could be. As a result, crew and passengers may need to be evacuated from the ship, a procedure not free from danger. Specially trained forces with dedicated equipment were set up in Kent, England to tackle these problems: Maritime Incident Response Groups (MIRG) they're called. They solve on board problems such as fires, chemical incidents and persons trapped. Their mission is to save the ship and to facilitate the safe transition to a

port for repair and handling of the incident. This way, evacuation of crew and passengers is less likely and the effects on the environment will be limited. The objective of MIRG-EU is to respond to fires, chemical incidents and persons trapped.

## IMPACT FORCE

However, one team can't make all the difference. The existing knowledge, capacity and equipment are insufficient to effectively control incidents on ships in the waters of the 2Seas region. Therefore, Dutch, Belgian, French and English fire brigades have joined forces in the Interreg IVA 2Seas project to set up a MIRG-EU. The partners will establish a specialized international group of fire fighters with knowledge, skills and procedures to effectively respond to incidents on board passenger ships and cargo vessels. On the continent each country will start its own MIRG. Together with the English team, these four teams comprise MIRG-EU and will assist each other in fighting major incidents.

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## THREE STEPS

Each partner will first make a general risk analysis followed by a detailed risk analysis for their own region: what types of ships can they expect and what are the risks of bringing a MIRG on board? Next they will select fire fighters who can and wish to participate in a MIRG and acquire all the necessary tools and equipment. An Operations Manual will be composed, describing how operations should be carried out, how the teams are to communicate with on-shore staff, etc. Using this manual, each participating region will be able to carry out its actions according to the same procedures, allowing optimum collaboration. Next, existing knowledge will be combined and condensed into uniform training and exercise programmes. All MIRGs will be trained to a consistent standard with this uniform programme using the new tools and equipment. The project will be concluded in 2014 with an international exercise, bringing all knowledge and skills together on an international level.

## PARTNERS

MIRG-EU is an Interreg IVA 2 Seas project with partners from The Netherlands, Belgium, France and England. These represent the four countries in the project area.

Safety Region Zeeland, which brings crisis management, fire services and medical assistance under the one roof, is lead partner. In the province of Zeeland, dozens of ships navigate the River Scheldt on a daily basis. With its changing tidal currents and narrow, winding shipping lanes, it is a treacherous water way. Well-trained forces are needed to protect crew, citizens and the environment. Not only on the River Scheldt, but also in its adjoining ports and on the North Sea. The Safety Region set up a partnership that uses this project to effectively and efficiently take a next step in maritime safety.

Four partners collaborate in the project. From the Netherlands the Province of Zeeland. This provincial body initiated a project to raise maritime safety on the Westernscheldt. The training of Special Forces is part of this project. From Belgium, the Fire Brigades of Antwerp, Beveren and Ghent are involved. These brigades are connected with important international ports, accommodating large chemical production plants. Being able to effectively fight fires on board of ships is simply essential.

From France the Service Départemental d'Incendie et de Secours de Pas-de-Calais participates and from England the Kent Fire and Rescue Service. Both are confronted with heavy traffic on the Channel and the North Sea. An incident may be just around the corner, but this doesn't mean it is easily reached let alone be fought. Working with similar teams on both shores, will ensure prompt and adequate help.



# FIRST STEPS ON THE WAY TO MIRG-EU



The partners came together for a first meeting in February of this year. As the project is six months further the first concrete results show at the horizon.

## OPERATIONS MANUAL

The partners agreed that the English Operations Manual will be leading for the MIRG-EU one. It will be reduced to the essentials of the MIRGs, to the core principles. Together with other existing documents the Operations Manual will form the basis of the project, describing the responsibilities and standard procedures, when to deploy a MIRG, how to embark a ship, how to communicate with other teams both on and off shore. Also the composition of a MIRG will be described in the OM. The partners agreed that in case of an incident two different MIRG teams will be deployed. The first team, the command team, will comprise an operations commander, a command support officer (for communication), two persons for boarding control, a sector commander and a command support safety officer. The second team is a regular fire-fighting team. As legislation differs, an annex is added for each partner country. The first draft of the OM will be available in September of this year.

## DEPLOYMENT OF EQUIPMENT

The working group Equipment has set up a preliminary list with all necessary items for a well prepared MIRG. 29 June the members of the group visited Kent Fire and Rescue Services. During the meeting, they checked the equipment of MIRG UK and evaluated whether their own equipment list was complete and the items were adequate to fight incidents on vessels. The working group will carry out a final check in September based on the operations manual. After this check the equipment will be purchased. The French and English MIRGs will deploy the equipment for their MIRG and make an overview of any equipment needed in addition to the existing equipment. The objective is to purchase this equipment before the end of this year in order to start with the training by the beginning of 2013.

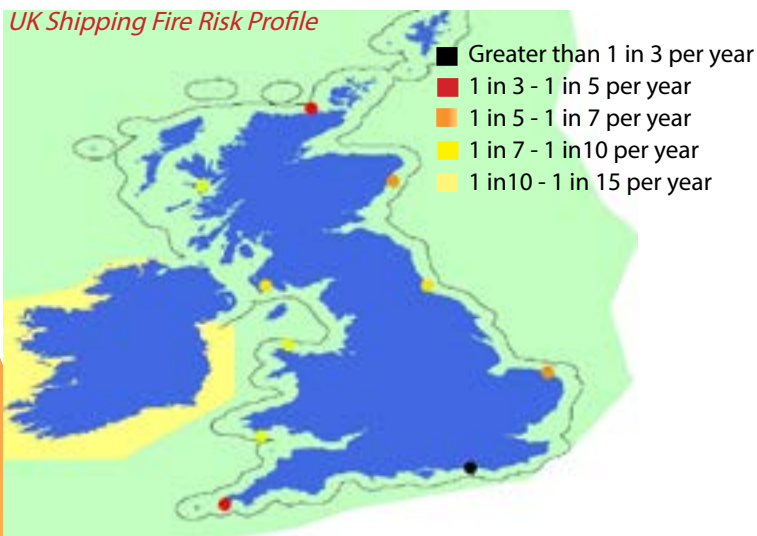


## RISK ANALYSIS

In case of an emergency, it is important to know what situations the MIRG members can expect once they're sent out to fight an on-board incident. The weather, type and size of the ship, cargo, leakage of hazardous substances, the number of people, the kind of damage... these factors must be taken into account when managing a response. Therefore, the coastguard will complete a tasking form that will help MIRGs make a quick review prior to deployment. This way the teams can take all necessary actions and bring suitable equipment along with them.

In addition, all regions will perform a risk analysis of the types of accidents that can be expected in the region. What kinds of ships navigate in the region? What cargo can be expected? How many passengers? This information will help the different teams to decide what special equipment is needed. The working group 'Equipment' has prepared a list of necessary equipment for the training and deployment of the Dutch and Belgian MIRG-teams. Once this list has been approved the teams will purchase all equipment needed. As the French and English MIRG-teams have already bought equipment, these partners will make an overview of what else is needed to control incidents on vessels.

UK Shipping Fire Risk Profile



## COMPOSING MIRGS

The partners have started a selection procedure to recruit staff for their MIRGs. This is a careful process, since working in a MIRG is a demanding job, which requires extra training. The prospect of operating in unexpected situations under rough circumstances is demanding, both physically and mentally. Nevertheless, many fire fighters have already expressed their enthusiasm to become part of such a specialised team. The partners from Flanders have developed a brochure to help both recruiters and future MIRG participants in making the right decisions. The members of the MIRG teams must be selected and recruited by the end of this year, ready to start their training in 2013.



## UNITED KINGDOM MARITIME INCIDENT RESPONSE GROUP

In the Two Seas Region, including the Channel and the North Sea, one finds one of the world's busiest shipping routes. The potential for an incident to occur within this region is significant and may well require a response to be coordinated between partner states. Therefore, this project is vital in ensuring that we are able to respond collectively in dealing with these very high-risk incidents.

The UK has experience with MIRGs since 2006 when the first UK MIRG was established as an outcome of the Sea of Change Project. It was launched by the then Secretary of State for Transport, Alistair Darling, who stated that: 'MIRG will strengthen our capability to respond to fires and other emergencies at sea with highly trained teams able to deploy by helicopter at short notice'. Since then, MIRG has been involved in seven incidents. The interventions were significant. Evidence suggests that while ships' crew have some training, their skills do not match the expertise of MIRG.

## "VALUABLE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE"

An independent review carried out by the MCA in 2010 concluded that there was a 'very high' risk of a 'significant' incident occurring at sea requiring a response (significant in that it has the potential for the loss of 10 or more lives). It has been predicted that 2-3 incidents requiring a response will occur each year, which is broadly in line with current MIRG activity with the highest risk being in the waters of the Two Seas Region. The Review also identified the Fire & Rescue Service as the most effective and efficient response capability. All the more reason to bring this concept to the continent and cooperate with teams in France, Belgium and The Netherlands!



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ENGLAND  
VLAANDEREN  
NEDERLAND



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## AGENDA

OCTOBER UK MIRG EXERCISE

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GUARDEX 2012 is an exercise developed to simulate dealing with a marine emergency occurring in the London Array area. The exercise is multi-agency and multi-national with bodies from France, Belgium, Denmark and Finland. GUARDEX 2012 falls to the responsibility of the Maritime & Coastguard Agency, specifically HM Coastguard.

In the scenario, a small cruise liner (THV Patricia) transiting close to the London Array wind farm is in collision with an accommodation ship (Wind Ambition), which is at anchor off the wind farm. This results in a fire on board both vessels. The Patricia loses power and collides with some wind turbines. Some passengers and crew from the cruise liner are missing presumed overboard and there are some casualties on board the accommodation ship. A number of engineers working on the wind turbines have sustained injuries and these will be evacuated by helicopter and lifeboat as appropriate.

OCTOBER MEETING  
25 MONITORING  
COMMITTEE

**MIRG EU**



Maritime  
Incident  
Response  
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## COLOFON

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## SMOKE ON THE MV SEA CHARENTE

2 October 2009, 17.15 hrs. The East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service receives a tasking request from the MCA to deploy an assessment team to the MV SEA CHARENTE (1638 tonnes). The vessel had earlier notified MCA of smoke coming from a ventilation hatch linked to the hold which contained 1900 tonnes of wheat pellets and had been advised to await the arrival of a specialist MIRG team prior to a decision being taken on bringing the vessel alongside.

The MIRG assessment team of four personnel were mobilised and responded with communications and temperature monitoring equipment which were transported by MCA Rescue Helicopter (Rescue 104) to the vessel. A thorough FLIR survey was carried out by the team in the helicopter which indicated an increased but uniform heating profile in the hold on the port side and an isolated hot spot in the foc'sle.

The uniform heating was linked to the position of the vessel during its passage as this quarter had been exposed to the heat of the sun during the passage. The heating in the foc'sle was linked to bow thrusters. The starboard side showed no signs of increased temperature so a decision to board the vessel was taken by the Operations Commander.

Once on board, the team established the current situation and implemented a temperature monitoring regime around the hold and bow of the vessel ensure the situation remained stable. Temperature measurements were taken at ½ hourly intervals and remained constant throughout the passage. The vessel was directed to berth at Southampton with the MIRG team remaining on board to continue supporting the Master. On arrival in Southampton the vessel was met by representatives from Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service who accepted the vessel from the MIRG team who were then repatriated back to their host FRS.