

eMIRG

#2 WINTER 2012/2013

THE MAKING OF MIRG-EU



MIRG EU



Maritime
Incident
Response
Groups

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WELL-EQUIPPED

LUC WASSENBERG – WORKING GROUP CHAIRMAN



Luc Wassenberg's work as Chairman of the Equipment Working Group has almost come to an end. It's important that the fresh MIRG teams start with a training and exercise programme at the beginning of 2013 but that's only possible if all team members have the correct equipment to be able to deal with incidents on board ships properly and in a safe way.

Luc Wassenberg works in the modern fire station in Terneuzen. His desk is located under the chutes which ensure that the firemen and firewomen can access the changing room double-quick. "The relative peace and quiet can therefore quickly change into a commotion", says Wassenberg. "The same applies to a project like MIRG. You have to be flexible because things always go slightly differently than you imagine they will." That's also the case when compiling the equipment lists for MIRG teams. "In an ideal situation you work on the basis of an Operations Manual. For example, this describes what you're going to be doing as a MIRG team; how you are going to deal with incidents. This allows you to decide what equipment you need in order to perform the tasks. Our Operations Manual was still being developed when we had to draw up our lists but that wasn't an insurmountable problem. A number of aspects, such as a helicopter kit, are standard requirements

irrespective of what is contained in a manual and so you can add those to the list in any event. For other aspects, for example the type of hoses that you want to use on board a ship, we turned to the equipment that our English partner uses. That equipment meets the standards and this way we also ensured that the equipment used by the various teams was able to connect together.

LEGISLATION

The MIRG equipment list contains a total of around 25 items and consists of personal protective equipment, things you need for transport by helicopter and communications equipment. The requirements for every item are worked out in detail. Wassenberg: "Those requirements are the same for all of the partners and they comply with the legislation that is applicable in all four of the partner countries. It was quite a puzzle putting it all together. Legislation can vary considerably from country to country. An example of this is breathing air sets that operate using cartridges. In Belgium and France only cartridges filled with pure oxygen are allowed to be taken on board helicopters but in the Netherlands we use cartridges filled with various substances that

only produce oxygen after a chemical reaction." In the future all of the partner countries will be buying their own equipment. "Initially we wanted to issue a joint invitation to tender but that turned out to be impossible because of all sorts of legislation. To keep things practical, each country is now arranging its own invitation to tender." If everything goes to plan all of the MIRG teams to be formed will have all of the necessary equipment by the beginning of 2013 and their training can commence.

'IT REALLY DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE'

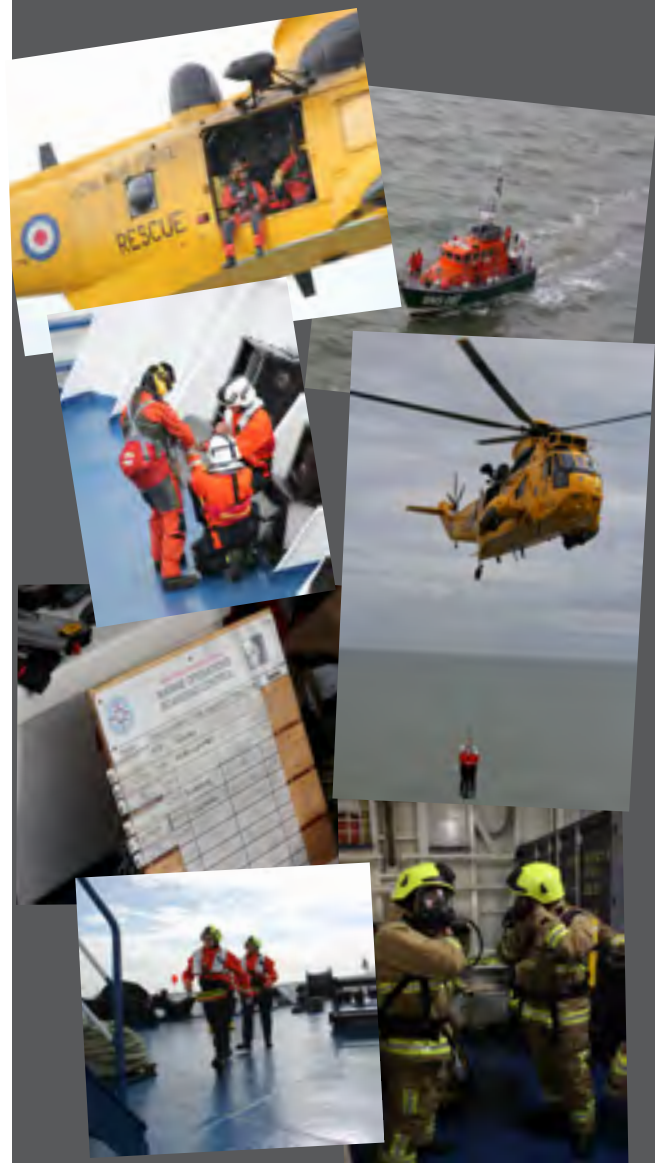
Teamwork and learning from each other are central to every European project. "It really does make a difference", Wassenberg knows. "There's excellent team work and comradeship on the project. In recent months I've therefore learned a great deal from the experiences gained in the United Kingdom. Errors that were once made are no longer being made. It's not just MIRG-EU that is benefiting from the teamwork. As regards my own organisation, I think that the entire Zeeland Safety Region benefits from a European project like this. Contact with our Belgian colleagues, just over the border from Zeeland, have become more intensive. On all points, cross-border collaboration is being taken much more seriously. And this is just the start." It promises a great deal for the future.



GUARDEX EXERCISE 2 OCTOBER 2012

Teams from France, Belgium, Denmark and Finland held a joint exercise on 2 October 2012 which involved dealing with a major shipping incident. Not far from London, the cruise ship THV Patricia collided with a workboat. The result: fire on board both vessels. A number of crew from the Patricia were missing and had most likely fallen overboard, there were injured people on board and a number of engineers working on wind turbines had also been injured. They were evacuated by helicopter.

The exercise was monitored by Eric Lems from MIRG-EU. "After getting the first (Command and Control) team on board it was clear that structure was now present. Everything ran like a well-oiled machine. The speed with which the first team deployed highlighted the long wait for the second team. During this time a detailed deployment plan was drawn up in order to fight the fire. Deployment followed quickly after the arrival of the support team!"



COSTA CONCORDIA LESSONS

On 13 January 2012 the island of Giglio in the Tyrrhenian Sea was startled by a major disaster. The cruise ship Costa Concordia struck rocks off the coast at about 21.45 hours, took on water and ultimately ran aground close to the harbour. More than 3200 passengers and 1000 crew had to be rescued, 32 people perished.

Disasters of this magnitude do not occur often but they do have a major impact; not just on the people on board but on the rescue services as well. Mass evacuations are complex and demand specialist knowledge and skills. Experiences gained from incidents like the Costa Concordia have a major value for the emergency services that have to prepare for such incidents. That is why the Italian Civil Protection Department organised an international workshop in conjunction with the European Commission. Luc Wassenberg from MIRG-EU attended this workshop and that was important because, even though MIRGs will not be deployed for these types of incidents, a number of lessons-learned can certainly be included in the configuration, the procedure and the training programme for MIRG-EU. The most important conclusion: a properly functioning Mass Rescue Plan and international collaboration for disasters of this size are essential. Organisations like the MIC and the European Maritime Safety Agency can fulfil an important role in this.

The emergency services from various European Union member states, including the Netherlands, (Veiligheidsregio Zeeland - Zeeland Safety Region), France and the United Kingdom, exchanged experiences over a period of two days and made plans for further improving large-scale marine incident emergency responses. Changes to emergency plans, the availability of mass evacuation plans, international collaboration between emergency services and the MIC and EMSA as well as exercises involving all of the parties involved (emergency services, shipping companies, ports, coastguard) are just a few examples. These plans will be elaborated further in the future.



MONITORING COMMITTEE MEETING



A Monitoring Committee has been established in order to monitor the implementation of the MIRG-EU project and to bring the results of the project to the attention of the regional, national and European politicians and policymakers. All of the partners are represented on this committee at the highest level and the committee also includes the Belgian Federal Knowledge Centre for Civil Safety (as co-financer of the project), the Governor of the Province of West Flanders and the French organisations CROSS Gris-Nez and EMIZ Nord. The committee met for the first time on 25 October 2012, under the chairmanship of Ben de Reu, member of the Provincial Executive Board for Zeeland, who stood in for the Royal Commissioner for Zeeland, Karla Peijs. The meeting was held in Calais.

Colonel Moreau was the host for this inaugural meeting. He works for the Fire Brigade in Pas de Calais (SDIS62), which is the fifth largest fire brigade in France. He explained that thanks to the Channel Tunnel they have excellent contacts with the Kent Fire and Rescue Service. This collaboration is important because of the many ferries that cross the Channel every day and that collaboration can be further expanded in the MIRG-EU.

ON SCHEDULE

Project Leader Jeroen Zonnevillle says that the project is on schedule. The teams are being assembled and the equipment is being purchased. He also explains that the ambition of the project partners is to register the MIRG teams with the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) of the European Commission, which would then facilitate training and deployment at a European level. The members of the Monitoring Committee have agreed to be advised by their respective national contact persons at the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) about the MIRG-EU project.

Following an explanation about the sub-activities, the group departed for Marck, where there is an SDIS62 maritime fire-fighting training simulator (photograph) which the MIRG teams can use to train on dealing with a range of maritime incidents. According to the Monitoring Committee the set-up is very impressive.



ONE CALL THREE TIMES A KICK!

Tom van Damme is a Lieutenant in the Antwerp Fire Brigade. He works at the main fire station, which is located close to the ports and knows what can go wrong on board a ship. Van Damme: "In recent years I've been called out to a fire on board a ship on about four occasions and so I've now gained a certain amount of experience."

Van Damme also knows that special training is necessary for being able to deal properly with these types of incidents. He doesn't therefore hide his enthusiasm for the MIRG-EU project. "It's an interesting challenge: creating something from nothing. MIRGs are a new phenomenon in Belgium and with this project team we can establish something that's good and permanent. It involves people with a great deal of experience and respect for each other. We are really working together like a team in order to create high-quality MIRGs. The fact that the English already have so much experience of equipment and deployment is a strong point for the project. We are learning a great deal from that and we enjoy incorporating their knowledge and skills in our work. The collaboration with the Belgian brigades is also important to us. In

Belgium a lot of brigades work in isolation. Through this project I'm getting to know my colleagues in Beveren and Ghent and their procedures much better. In the end we'll all benefit from that." Within the project Van Damme is responsible for the composition of the MIRGs.

'TWO GROUPS FORM THE BASIS'

"Two groups form the basis. One group of six people works as the Command Team. This team consists of officers and sub-officers and is the first team to be flown in to a ship during an incident. They ensure that the second team, the Strike Team (which consists of six fire-fighters), is able to fight the fire safely." The first team establishes the nature of the incident: what's the problem, what are the risks? An attack plan is drawn up and everything is mobilised to allow the second team to get on with its work. "They arrange the communications, look at what resources are necessary, set up sentries and explain the routes:

a transit route to the incident, an evacuation route to the lifeboats and of course the route that leads to the command centre on the bridge.”

Each partner country puts together its own complete MIRG. “Each country requires a total of 36 people. For Belgium this is made up of nine officers, nine sub-officers and 18 firemen. Our English partner has of course had its teams in place for a while now so selection is no longer needed there. In France the selection procedure has been running for some time and 14 officers have now been selected and 40 firemen have volunteered to take part in the MIRG teams. Enthusiasm is high and so the French partner will soon have its teams in place. Here in Belgium we are also nearly ready. We are assembling our teams with people from the brigades in Antwerp, Beveren and Ghent. Antwerp has the largest brigade and is therefore providing 17 people. Gent is providing 12 team members and Beveren is providing seven.”

Training and experience are the most important selection criteria when assembling the teams. “It is the first time that we are releasing our ‘grades’, or ‘ranks’ as we refer to them in the Netherlands, and changing over to established role patterns. In principle all of our staff are suitable for fighting fires under difficult conditions, whether out at sea or in a large factory here in the port. Other factors therefore play a role when selecting MIRG team members, such as whether the candidates are able to complete intensive training and courses, whether they are sufficiently motivated,

whether they are team players, are able to resolve problems and dare to take responsibility. We had 40 candidates for just 17 places so we had to disappoint some people, which was a difficult thing to do. The Zeeland Safety Region (Veiligheidsregio Zeeland) is helping with the selection. If everything goes well we’ll achieve the project planning and the new teams will be able to start their training in 2013.”

‘FLYING, FIRE-FIGHTING AND HOME AGAIN SAFELY’

The knowledge and experience that the Antwerp fire brigade is gaining from the MIRG-EU project shall be disseminated further internally. Van Damme: “In Antwerp, for example, we’ll be setting up a maritime fire-fighting working group. A study and training programme for all levels will be developed on the basis of experiences gained from this project so that in the end all of our firemen will know how they have to fight an on-board fire. After all, that’s a completely different discipline, just like being a member of a MIRG. One call, three times a kick is my motto: flying, fire-fighting and home again safely. These are the things that make the job so special.”





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AGENDA

MARCH

**PARTNER MEETING
KENT (EN)**

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