

eMIRG

#3 SUMMER 2013

THE MAKING OF MIRG EU



MIRG EU



Maritime
Incident
Response
Groups

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TRAINERS TRAINED



In MIRC-EU three completely new MIRGs are being configured. Each team consists of 36 people; well-trained firemen who want to deal with incidents on board ships – somewhat different than fighting fires in homes – and that requires extensive practice and training. In this project each partner country will be training its own MIRC people, supported and advised by MIRC teams from the Kent Fire and Rescue Service. The team members will be getting to know each other during the training and will be practicing the procedures in order to gain the skills required of this specialist role. That knowledge and expertise has to be acquired under the leadership of experienced trainers and instructors. This project is also all about ensuring that the well-trained leadership and command roles are in place.

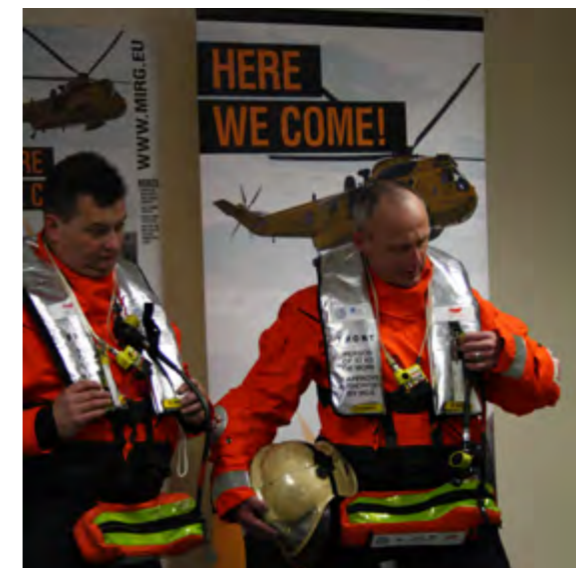
TRAINING WEEK

A special training week was held in Calais at the end of April for future MIRC trainers. A total of 12 students took part – three from each partner country. They have been tasked with preparing their own MIRC team for deployment at sea. David Brown from the Kent Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) is an experienced MIRC member and trainer. He has been involved in providing emergency response on water for 20 years and it was he who set up the special instruction and training programme based on the Standard

Operating Procedures that have been developed for this project. He has also developed an intensive Train-the-Trainers programme that prepares the MIRC trainers for their task in one week. 'There's no reason it shouldn't be a success', says David. 'The men here this week are already experienced trainers so they know how to deliver training. During this course we examine every detail of the MIRC system and we make sure that everyone knows every aspect of how the procedures operate – in theory and in practice.' It is important that the trainers know exactly what the procedures involve and are able to convey this to their teams in the same way. In the end, the teams from the four partner countries have to be able to work together and have to have total confidence that all MIRC members, wherever they come from, are able to set about their work in the same way. The intention is to create an EU team, a collaboration of interdependency.

'The first day starts off with an assessment of knowledge from the pre course learning workshop, a presentation of the MIRC EU ethos and specialist command and control and a demonstration of the boarding procedure. On the second day we start with a repetition of the theory, we ask questions and look to see whether everyone knows the ins and outs of the procedures. You also see that after a first day like that people start thinking about the course material and have the time to process it. That always results in

questions being raised. It's specifically those moments of calm that ensure that the course material sinks in. Then it's time for action and we practice specific elements contained within the training manual and as set out in the SOPs, e.g. how to don the Transportation Protection Equipment and how to move through the holding area to embarkation a casualty vessel and arrive safely on board.. At the end of the exercise it's back to the theory class for the evaluations and the next step in the process – This is followed by a demonstration and then the students practice



Training with Transportation Protection Equipment

the entire procedure from the first step. They therefore repeat these elements and they embed the new procedure when doing so. This is how the week is composed – a lot of repetition, evaluations and moments of calm. By the end of the week, they know the ins and outs of the procedures and we test that with a final exercise.'

TIPS AND TRICKS

Lucas Deschuttere from Belgium is one of the students. 'This training is excellent. We don't normally work with this type of equipment, like an extinguishing system that can operate through walls that allows you to cool an adjacent room without actually having to enter that room. And thanks to the experienced trainers you learn all sorts of handy tips and tricks, like not sitting on the metal parts of the ship – they're hot! It's better to sit on the hose.' Erik Lems from Zeeland adds: 'This training course shows that we all speak the same language and that four different countries can all work together perfectly.' At the end of the course all 12 trainers can now deliver the training. David: 'The trainers now have the knowledge, skills and some experience to deliver the training to their respective teams. They will also be confident of knowing they have the ongoing support of the KFRS to provide back-up and additional advice.'



'I CAN'T SIT BEHIND A DESK ALL DAY'

He's born and bred in Vlissingen, 26 years old and has been involved in the fire brigade since he was 11: Henri Poortvliet.

Why did you become a fireman?

'I think it's in my blood. A member of my family was a commander with the fire brigade and the emergency services have always appealed to me. I've got the fire brigade bug. In addition to being a volunteer with the Vlissingen Fire Brigade I'm also a full-time fireman with the Royal Dutch Air Force in Woensdrecht, where I specialise in aviation fire fighting – experience that I can use well as a member of the MIRC team. After all, an aircraft is also a steel tube with lots of fuel and oil on board, where a fire can become exceptionally hot. Here we use foam and our exercises involve fighting oil fires - the same things you would encounter fighting a fire on board a ship.'

What's your job with the Vlissingen Fire Brigade?

'My job varies depending on the shout – from commanding officer, to driver or as one of the crew. I don't mind doing anything, so long as I'm out there fighting a fire. As of yesterday, I've also become a Fire Brigade instructor (I sat the exam yesterday) so I can now train others to become firemen. I've been an assistant instructor for six years at the training centre in Vlissingen, from which I've learned a great deal. I particularly enjoy providing refresher

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WORKING TOGETHER FOR WORLDWIDE TRUST

AUSTRALIA AND EUROPE ARE NOT SO VERY DIFFERENT



The largest port in Australia is in Melbourne, where large numbers of containers are transhipped and liquid (hazardous) substances, wheat, and cement are stored. Some of the largest cruise ships, with thousands of passengers on board, regularly tie up closer to the city and over the coming years the port will be undergoing a major expansion amounting to AUD\$1.6 billion. This means more ship movements and more tourists visiting the city, and therefore means increased risks for which the fire brigade shall have to prepare. 'And that's not the only thing,' says Acting Senior Station Officer Michael Campbell from the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

MORE SHIPS MORE RISKS

'The area we cover has expanded considerably. Initially we were responsible for the ships at berth, however, Port Phillip Bay, with an area of more than 100,000 hectares, has been added to our remit and now includes those vessels waiting to enter port at anchor within Port Phillip Bay. Our tasks of course focus on fire fighting, rescue on board and hazardous incidents but we are also responsible for minimising environmental damage. Our region is vulnerable because of its significant cultural heritage and areas

of natural beauty. As a fire brigade, we have to be well prepared for all of the risks associated with port installations and shipping.'

Those preparations are approached seriously and are the precise reason why Michael attended a simulator training course held in Calais by the MIRG-EU team from Zeeland. 'We did draw up our own manuals and have set up training courses for dealing with maritime incidents but in the UK they've already gained 20 years' experience and so there are more brigades in Europe that are involved in this. MIRG-EU is at the beginning of the process and I want to learn from it. I specifically want to look at how people and their equipment are taken on board. We currently take people to the incident by boat but in the future we want to deploy helicopters. An interesting question for me is also: how to get emergency workers and all of their equipment on board a cruise ship when three thousand passengers have to be evacuated at the same time? In addition to this, my focus is also on the strategic and tactical decisions that are taken when a maritime incident occurs. What struck me during the training in Calais was that the fundamental principles used in Europe are similar to those we use in Australia. There are of course differences but the way we work is generally the same.'

Michael is not just looking at the operations of the MIRG-EU. In July he will also be visiting the London



Michael Campbell in London

Fire Brigade, the Rotterdam-Rijnmond Safety Region and the Port of Rotterdam. A visit to colleagues in Italy is also planned and, if time permits, Michael will conclude his tour with a visit to Gothenburg in Sweden. 'It will then be time for me to write up my findings, present them back home and convert them into firm recommendations for our interoperability as emergency service organisations within the marine environment. Melbourne Fire Brigade is committed to building capacity and capability of its marine response in line with its statutory responsibility. The emergency services foundation scholarship which was awarded to Michael, allows the opportunity for emergency service organisations to investigate global best practice in regards to emergency response, instruction and training within the Melbourne Metropolitan fire brigades marine training department. We are currently building a large training centre where our people will be able to practice dealing with all kinds of emergencies in a very realistic way. There will be a large underground room where, for example, we can simulate a fire in a multi-storey car park and we will have a large ship structure with 5 hot fire scenarios throughout. The Australian Navy have even given us equipment like chairs, mooring lines and even an anchor in order for it to appear very realistic. It will also be surrounded by water. We can practice five different scenarios.' Practicing on a simulator is one way but there's nothing better than a real ship. 'That's why we've been in contact with ship owners and agents and have made agreements with them that when their ships are in our port we can go on board and practice. It's a matter of one telephone call and then we can head out.' Building these relationships with industry is vital.

Michael is positive about his European encounters. 'In our country we are the only brigade that is involved intensively with this form of fire fighting. I'm therefore hoping that the contacts I'm now establishing will result in a global network in which we can exchange knowledge and expertise. Ocean-going ships do not restrict themselves to just one country, so why should the emergency services? The more we harmonise our approach the greater the trust we will gain worldwide.'

training for commanders and leading firemen. They already know the profession and so it's a big challenge to teach them something new. I think I'm quite good at delivering training – I'm comfortable talking to people and I'm well-grounded socially.'

You have been selected for the Zeeland MIRG team, so why did you apply?

'When I saw the vacancy I immediately thought "That's something for me!" I love ships. Even back when I was 12 years old I spent some of my school holiday on board a fishing boat. Later, I worked on a cutter as reserve crew for six months. Back then it was a difficult period for professional fishermen, with little work to be had. In the end I decided to join the fire brigade but I've always been attracted to the water and the MIRG has now brought shipping and the fire brigade together. MIRG also means action, helicopters, ships and that's what I like. I can't sit behind a desk all day and much prefer to be doing hands-on fire brigade work all day.'

What are your expectations of MIRG?

'Spectacular exercises, dangling from a helicopter and also being able to offer real assistance, though of course I hope it'll never really be needed. But it's nice to get this opportunity and it's good that as a region you can build up a professional organisation. In a year we'll have a complete team that's on the same wavelength, which is good and necessary and a benefit for the shipping industry and for the economy. We save people and we save ships. Collaboration with the other countries? That's essential. We need each other. There is so much water and you can't cover it with just one team based in Zeeland. I still have to improve my foreign language skills but that's happening during the course and when I'm working with the other teams. That's when you get to know your colleagues and even though you may not have complete command of the language you're all still on the same wavelength.'

What are you looking forward to?

'For me that's the big final exercise. That's still a long way off but it'll come around quickly. I'm part of the strike team, so when the action happens I'll be right in the middle of it. But we're not there yet and this month I'll be undertaking my first simulator training session in Calais, which I'm really looking forward to.'

What do you expect from your colleagues?

'I hope my fellow MIRG team members are just as enthusiastic as I am and that all of us – from officer to crew – are there for each other and become a close-knit group.'

THAT'S THE BASIS OF A MIRG TEAM

SEEKING THE RIGHT CANDIDATES



Wanted: Firemen to deal with incidents on board ships as part of an international team. Requirements: competent, English speaking, sea legs, not frightened of heights and looking for a challenge.

The MIRG teams in the four partner countries each consist of 36 firemen. All ranks are represented in the team. How do you create such a team? How do you find the right people? The Zeeland Safety Region drew up details of a vacancy and distributed it amongst the fire brigade teams in Vlissingen. 'It was a conscious decision to only recruit in Vlissingen,' says Sjaak Vermeulen, Senior Watch Officer. 'The men know each other, they know each other's abilities and they know how to work well together. That's important when you have to deal with an incident in a new, unknown environment. In addition to that, we have experience of maritime incidents in Vlissingen because we are responsible for dealing with them in the Vlissingen seaports. The men will also be departing from the Navy base in this city, which means they can be on scene quickly.'

After seeing the vacancy, Ronald Mies (41) completed an application form immediately. 'In the 21 years that I've been a fireman I've been deployed on various occasions to deal with problems on board a ship. The one that I remember the most involved a fire on board a ship in a dock at Scheldepoort, where an oil tank was on fire. We had to descent to the lowest

deck, through narrow access hatches and doors through which you couldn't actually fit with your gear on. You've got to watch out for open hatches and you have no idea what you'll find behind the next door. Is there someone there? Is there smoke? It was an unusual experience that's remained with me and which has made me want to know more about this specialist field of fire fighting. I'm a technical person, an IT manager by profession, I have a good command of English and I've sailed occasionally so I know something about shipping and maritime rules.' These are ideal qualities for being part of an MIRG team. No wonder therefore that Ronald was invited for a fitness test that was held in an empty factory building.

LOWERED BY A ROPE

'During that evening all of the candidates had to complete an obstacle course during which they were faced with all elements of fire fighting: breaking down a door, dragging a person across a distance of 20 metres, walking with a filled fire hose, climbing over obstacles when fully kitted up – those kind of things. We had eight minutes in which to complete all of the exercises. To my amazement I completed everything in five minutes, which was pretty good for someone of my age. I had made up my mind that if I was to fail that would not just have consequences for

my participation in the MIRG but that it would also have consequences for my work for the fire brigade in general. You simply have to be fit all of the time. You have to be able to give it everything because, after all, lives are at risk. For that reason I didn't do any extra training.'

'The most enjoyable part of the evening was being lowered by a rope from a 25-metre high platform to simulate being lowered to the deck of a ship from a helicopter. There's of course a big difference between that and the real thing, where you have to land on the deck, swinging back and forth in wind force 8, plus the downwash from the helicopter. For me it was over too quickly. As soon as I was on the ground I asked if I could do it again. Because time was running short that was not possible but in the forthcoming training sessions I'll be able to do it more often.'

I CAN'T WAIT

Ronald weathered the test brilliantly and has now been assigned to the MIRG strike team, with training due to start in June. 'I immediately applied to be included on the earliest possible training course and I can't wait. I want to learn the procedures and get to know the people with whom I'll be working – their qualities and their specific knowledge. In addition to working for the fire brigade everyone is involved in all sorts of other things. For example, I've got colleagues who are excellent welders or who are part of a professional ambulance crew. Provided you're aware of that you may be able to make good use of it during a call out. I'm also very interested to find out whether the various country teams are on the same wavelength – figuratively and literally in the sense of appropriate equipment. All of this will come together in a major concluding exercise next year, which I'm really looking forward to. Then we'll know whether what we've learned actually works in practice!'



Fitness test in Vlissingen



TRAILBLAZERS FOR EUROPEAN DEPLOYMENT

Amongst other things, the Beveren Fire Brigade provides cover on the left bank of the Scheldt for the port of Antwerp. This is an area full of risks, including those relating to shipping. Beveren Fire Brigade has united with the fire brigades from Antwerp and Ghent to form a single Belgian MIRG team. Gerd Buys and Nino Petricone have been selected to join this team and they told us about their work and their MIRG ambitions one sunny Friday afternoon.

Nino has been working for the fire brigade since 2009. 'Before that I was mainly involved in top-class sport, judo to be precise, competing at national and international level. I now work for the fire brigade but I still take part in judo competitions though these days only in Belgium. Being a fireman was actually a childhood dream for me.' Nino initially chose a career with the police. 'Because of the sport I had little time to complete my Police studies. Then I discovered that the fire brigade were recruiting. I took the tests and was able to join. I do all sorts of things here. I'm a driver, paramedic, diver and a specialist in large-scale water transport. That's what we call Brandweer++, which means we're able to supply a large volume of water over large distances, which is important for fire fighting in the port or for incidents that require large volumes of water.'

Gerd is the only volunteer in the Belgian MIRG team. 'I work as a shift leader at EVAL Europe, a Japanese company that makes high-grade plastics for coating fuel tanks in aircrafts for example. This plastic is completely impervious and is therefore also used extensively in the food industry. Prior to taking on that job I was an operator and member >>>>

"A WELL-TRAINED MIRG TEAM HAS ADDED VALUE FOR THE PORT OF GHENT"



You wouldn't expect it in inland Belgium, but Ghent has an impressive seaport. Covering an area of 4700 hectares with five docks and annual transshipments of 49.5 million tonnes of goods, the port is an important economic factor. "We also have 23 Seveso companies within our boundaries", Ghent Harbour Master Dirk Vernaeye tells us, "including VLS, BP, Shell and Oiltanking; companies that have mooring facilities and where there are potential hazards. Should something happen on board a ship the Fire Brigade must be able to deploy a specialist team as quickly as possible, a team that knows what's involved in that type of fire." Vernaeye knows what he's talking about. Eleven years ago he was a navigating officer and captain in the deep sea trade. These days he works for the Port of Ghent and previously he was associated with the Nautical College in Antwerp as a Professor. Today he still lectures about ship's fires to fire fighters. "Only in theory", he emphasises. "In my lectures I talk about the ships, what they look like, what you have to be aware of. Fighting a fire on a ship is completely different from fighting a fire in a building. In a ship's fire you go down into the bowels of the ship: an unfamiliar environment where you don't know what to expect. There is only one entry and that is also the exit. These are things that complicate the job. Ships

have a variety of systems; systems that help fight fires, but also systems that make the job harder, such as ventilation systems that make it easier for a fire to spread."

Vernaeye wholeheartedly supports the arrival of MIRG teams in his region, for a number of reasons. "When problems arise you want to save the ship and the load. A sunken ship not only costs a lot of money, it inevitably contaminates the environment as well. There is also an external safety aspect. Hazardous substances are stored on the quayside and a fire on board a ship can have terrible consequences." Well-trained fire fighting teams can make the difference. "It is important that the fire fighters get practical experience, that they are confronted with real ship's fires and know who they need to talk to on board for information. One day I went to see a fire that was raging on board a scrap ship. The Fire Brigade was trying to put out the fire. When I arrived the ship was already listing heavily. I immediately called "Stop!". The use of water was creating stability problems, threatening to sink the ship. These are the kinds of things you have to learn, in theory and practice. It would be good if we had exercise facilities in Belgium. The Belgian Navy, for example, has a special

'PRACTICAL
EXPERIENCE IS NEEDED'



Harbour Master-Commander Dirk Vernaeye

installation for exercises, and it would be useful if fire fighters could use that as well. That way they could conduct regular fire fighting exercises and learn how to stop leaks. That is the only way a specialist team can maintain its value."



Belgian MIRG-team training in Calais

of the company fire brigade at BP'. Gerd joined the Beveren Fire Brigade in 1996, since when he has held various positions. 'I was a driver for example and a paramedic for five years. These days I'm CE driver and a decontamination suit fire-fighter so I'm called out when chemical incidents occur.'

Both men were immediately enthusiastic when they were able to apply. Gerd: "It's like going into the complete unknown, something totally new. That's what I like, being a pioneer. Building something up, with all the associated ups and downs. That's what I need; it's what I'm always on the lookout for. My knowledge about chemical installations will come in handy and that was clear from the first exercise on the simulator in Calais." Nino is also enthusiastic: "It's great working with other brigades from Belgium and from further afield; you can learn a lot from each other. I'm also used to the water; I've got diving experience and paramedic experience."

SOMETHING NEW

All of those aspects give me a broad foundation for my work in an MIRG team. And it's something new. You're still fire fighting but it's different. It's fantastic that I'm able to do it. It allows you to develop. I expect to learn a great deal of additional skills from the training, not just the theory but the practical skills as well. How do you use the equipment? How is the transport undertaken using helicopters?'

Gerd has already completed the initial training, joining in without knowing what to expect. 'I was mainly intrigued to find out what level our team was at; would we be able to hold our own? My mind has now been put at rest about that. The level of the team members coincided well; we were all pretty much at the same level. And all of the barriers that had been formed artificially between the brigades in recent years disappeared immediately. We found each other without hesitation and we worked as if we'd been working together for years.' Both men know what they want to achieve: an international, well-trained team that provides added value for the whole of Europe.



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NEDERLAND



'INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE'
Crossborder cooperation programme
2007-2013 Part-financed by the
European Union (European Regional
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AGENDA

SEPTEMBER **VERGADERING
MONITORING
COMMITTEE IN
ANTWERPEN**
26

De Monitoring Committee meets in Antwerp for the second time.

SEPTEMBER **SIGNING
STANDARD
OPERATIONAL
PROCEDURES**
26

Before the Monitoring Committee meeting, all partners will sign the Standard Operational Procedures.

SEPTEMBER **PARTNER MEETING IN
ANTWERP (BE)**
**25
26**



COLOFON

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VOTE FOR MIRG-EU!

MIRG-EU has been nominated for the Don Berghuijs Award, a prestigious prize that is awarded each year to the best Dutch safety project. This year six projects have been nominated for the award. The six nominees are evaluated for effectiveness and efficiency, collaboration and innovation. In addition it is evaluated whether the project offers innovative solutions for complex safety issues and whether the process bridges the gap between emergency services personnel and administrators. Finally, the project must set an example for others and be a source of inspiration to the providers of emergency services to start using the solution as well. MIRG-EU meets all these requirements!

SEND AN E-MAIL AND SUPPORT MIRG-EU

The ultimate winner is partially decided by a panel of judges and partially by safety professionals.

Individuals can easily vote for their favourite project by sending an e-mail to: peijnenburg@blomberginstituut.nl and tell you vote for MIRG-EU.

The three projects with the most public votes will go on to the final, which will take place on 12 December 2013. During a gala evening the projects will once again show why they should win the award. The judges will make the ultimate decision who gets to take home the award based on their opinion and the opinion of the public. It's obvious we need your support; please send your e-mail to the Blomberg Institute today and support MIRG-EU!

For further information visit the special website:
www.donberghuijsaward.nl