

eMIRG

#4 AUTUMN 2013

THE MAKING OF MIRG EU



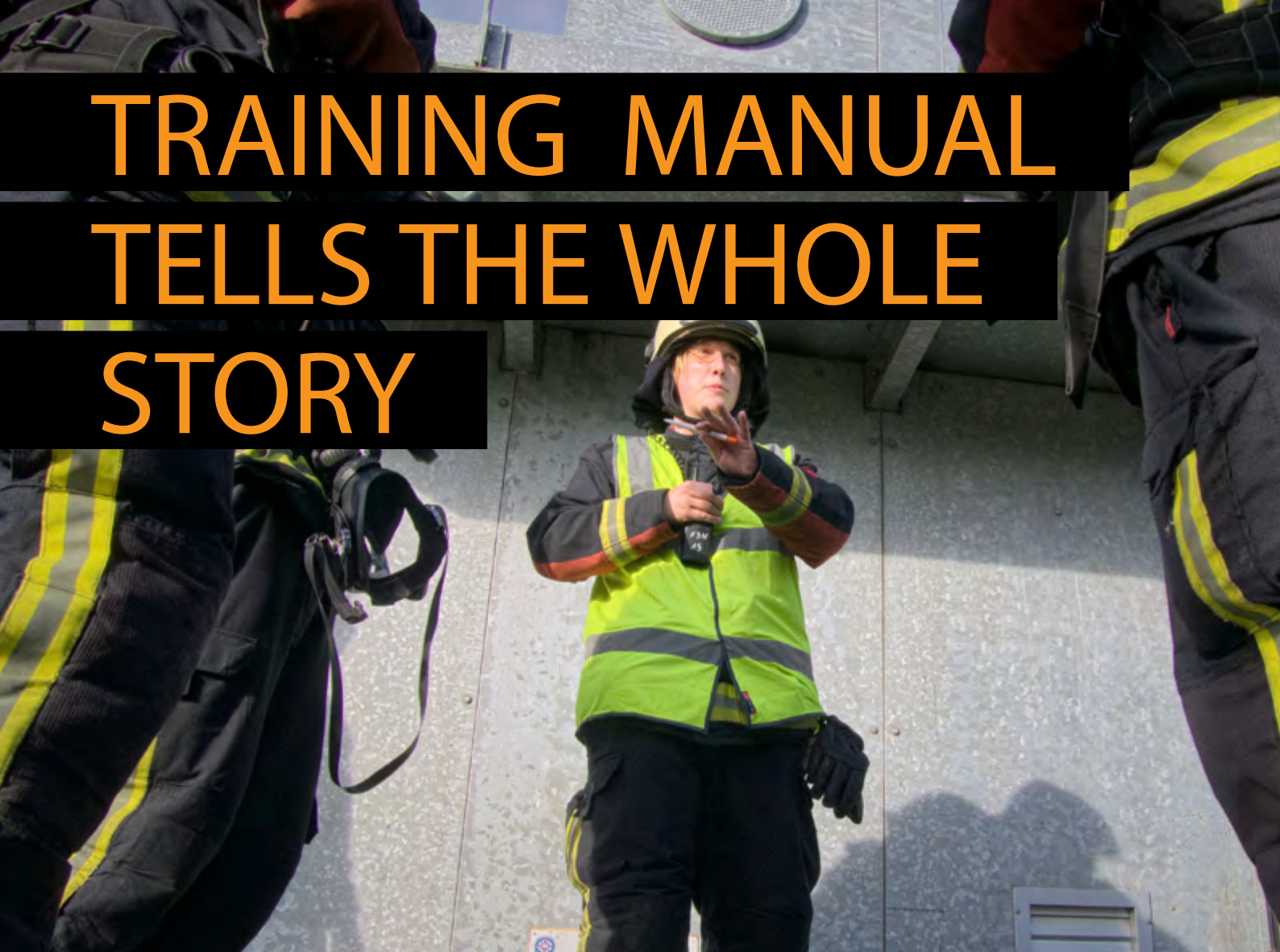
MIRG EU



Maritime
Incident
Response
Groups

THIS ISSUE: TRAINING MANUAL • LARGE
SCALE EXERCISE • HELICOPTER TRAINING •
ON THE SIMULATOR IN CALAIS •
OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

TRAINING MANUAL TELLS THE WHOLE STORY



MIRG-EU trains four MIRGs in four different countries. That's four MIRGs each with their own background and competencies, acquired on the basis of national standards. It also means that in a short period of time those teams have to be welded together into a single MIRG-EU, in which all the members can rely on each other's knowledge, skills and abilities. This is why the MIRGs are trained on the basis of a single Training Manual. This manual was put together by a special workgroup in which all the partners were represented. David Brown from the Kent Fire and Rescue Service was the leader of the group, as the English MIRG team has many years of experience in educating and training these specialist fire services. With the input from the other partners the training has been updated and improved.

SIMULATOR TRAINING

The training for a MIRG ensures that all the members develop the additional competencies needed to deal with incidents at sea, for example survival at sea or escaping from a helicopter that has crashed into the water. The total programme takes nearly a year and consists of a number of components. The first component in the programme is a training session in

the ship simulator in Marck and Calais. This is where the participants train in the operational procedures. This means that - among other things - teams learn the steps they have to follow if they are called up for a deployment, and how the command structure works. They also familiarise themselves with combating an incident on a steel ship, with all the associated heat and hard-to-access areas. To give the participants a good start the theory is taught first, followed by a practical component. For the Command team there is additional training to highlight their specific tasks and focus on them in more detail.

KNOWLEDGE OF SHIPS

Next, the MIRG members are taught all the necessary knowledge about ships and ship design. Stability, techniques and tactics for the offensive, all these kinds of matters are dealt with in two days. The Command teams focus more specifically on strategising for an offensive and they learn the laws and rules that apply in international waters. The teams also get to know the support vessels that can take them to a ship in distress and they train in transferring from ship to ship - a hazardous procedure in rough seas. Things can easily go wrong, also when

dealing with the incident, which is why the men and women receive general training in survival at sea

HELICOPTER TRAINING

MIRGs are often taken on board the ship by helicopter; a fast transport method, but not without risks. This is why the training programme focuses a lot of attention on working with this mode of transport. Helicopter Underwater Escape Training is part of the programme and the teams also receive Helicopter winch training. This ensures they are not faced with any surprises during the transport. At the end of the training programme the teams learn to work with all the new materials that have been purchased for combating incidents at sea.

The series of theoretical and practical training sessions is concluded with a deployment exercise and a call-up exercise. This is where the teams have to be ready for the real work, capable of controlling an incident methodically, hand over the job to colleagues where necessary and return to the home front safely. To find out if they really are ready, the ETE programme is concluded with a large international exercise, on a real ship out on the sea. This is where the teams can show Europe what they are capable of and demonstrate to other Fire Departments what they have to offer.



PREPARATIONS FOR THE LARGE SCALE EXERCISE

The MIRGs of the partner countries are now hard at work with training and exercises. All the individual teams follow the MIRG-EU programme. Of course the teams do have to be capable of working together, of taking over from each other in the case of lengthy incidents. In June 2014 the project will therefore be concluded with a large final exercise: the ultimate test to evaluate whether MIRG-EU is ready for action. All the partners will be playing a role. The main objective of the exercise: working together, being able to take over each other's jobs.

So it's all about good communication, following the right procedures and providing clear information at the handover. Of course the teams will also be faced with a tricky situation on board the ship. Several seats of fire, problems with chemical substances, anything conceivable could happen. This enables them to put their knowledge and skills in practice, starting with the alarm call, an assessment of the risks and bringing the command team on board. This team will formulate a plan of attack and get everything ready for the support team. As soon as this team is on board they can get working on the incident. How will they approach things? What dilemmas will they be faced with? Will they bring their assignment to a satisfactory conclusion? A workgroup has been in place since the spring to organise the entire exercise: a considerable job. Four countries have to be able to participate in an extremely realistic scenario. It will be clear that this requires a lot of organisation. The results will be presented during the final MIRG conference in September. Not only the exercise results will be discussed; speakers will highlight different facets of international collaboration in fighting fires in international waters. We will keep you informed via the website and this newsletter.





HELICOPTER TRAINING IN MARSEILLE

In September the French MIRC team completed a Helicopter Under Water Escape Training course, HUET in fire-fighting jargon. Twelve men learned how to get out of a helicopter after it has hit the water. This is an important component of the training, because a single person panicking once a helicopter has crashed into the water may have fatal consequences for the entire crew. "We trained in our national training centre in Marseille", Nicolas Leclerc from the Calais Fire Department tells us. "This is where all French fire departments come for their training. All the facilities are available and the training is certified. It was an excellent course, very intensive. The remaining MIRC members will also be doing the training in the near future."



With an Operational Manual and a comprehensive Training Manual the preparation of MIRC-EU is, theoretically, well organised. However, ultimately it is about how the theory is put into practice. With specific training and exercises the new MIRC teams experience, step by step, the practical procedures and problems they may encounter on board a ship.

One of the training sites is the simulator in France, in Marck and Calais to be exact; a large steel building that looks like a ship. Here, fire can break out in different areas. The narrow staircases, the tight dark spaces and the limited lighting make combating the incident feel very realistic.

THE SCENARIOS INTENSIFY

Early in October the members from the second Zeeland team are guests here for a week. The procedures are briefly reviewed, after which the team gets to work right away. The scenarios intensify throughout the week; the problems become more complex. On Wednesday morning the communication between the command team and the support team is the focal point. The command team directs the men who are working in the ship from the bridge, so it is important that both teams know exactly what the other team is doing and what is expected of them. In earlier exercises that didn't always work properly. This time the Dutch MIRC is confronted with a fire in two compartments of the ship. The command team is first to go on board to assess the situation and prepare for the offensive. A yellow line is laid down to the evacuation point, a red line to the incident. Finally, a blue line is rolled out to the bridge. Here the command team, together with the ship's Captain, is working on the best strategy. Meanwhile the logger records all the important decisions and incoming information.

SUPPORT TEAM

On land the support team is getting ready to board the ship. When they get the go-ahead the helmets go on, the men pick up their special bags full of equipment and walk out to the waiting 'helicopter'. Once on board they receive their instructions and start working on cooling down the compartments. Communications are good. Both teams are

NARROW PASSAGES, STEEP STAIRS



very familiar with the methods and procedures of the other team. The plan of attack is clearly communicated and properly implemented. But the ship is not cooperating. In sector three things are on fire, but that part of the ship is difficult to reach. On the bridge the command team, together with the Captain and the ship's engineer, looks for and finds a solution. But who do you call to the bridge to explain things, who is in a position to leave the incident for a few minutes? That proves to be a difficult question. Eventually someone comes upstairs, the strategy is discussed and the team manages to get the fire under control. End of exercise. The management is happy.



MIRC-EU in Safety Award finals

In May, six Dutch projects were selected for the Don Berghuijs Safety Award. A voting round, in which people from the industry could nominate their favourite project, and a speed date with the panel of judges separated the wheat from the chaff. Three projects were selected for the finals on 12 December. MIRC is one of the three finalists. Of course we are extremely proud to be nominated, but now we want to get our hands on that award!

During the Captain's Dinner we are given 6 minutes to highlight our project in the most spectacular way. The judges and the attendees award points to each project. But the general public still plays a role as well. Until 9 December anyone can vote for his or her favourite project via the website of the Blomberg Institute. So we are asking you one more time to vote for MIRC-EU. Voting is easy: send an e-mail to peijnenburg@blomberginstituut.nl and put in the subject line 'I vote for MIRC-EU in the Don Berghuijs Safety Awards'. On behalf of the entire project: thank you for your support!



NAVAL BARRACKS: BASE OF OPERATIONS

There is a Royal Navy barracks site in Vlissingen, right on the Westerschelde River, which is used to accommodate crews from the navy ships that are being built or maintained at Damen Shipyards in Vlissingen. This is also the site from which the Ministry of Defence can organise military support in the event of an emergency situation.

This means the barracks are not used exclusively by the Navy. Willem Meijer, Commander of the Naval barracks, explains: "In addition to protecting the Dutch territory and the enforcement of the international legal order, the Navy is also tasked with supporting civil authorities. As an extension of this responsibility we make our barracks and grounds in Vlissingen available in the event of an incident at sea." Until now this service was merely a verbal agreement. In the event of an emergency formal procedures were needed to be able to use the barracks. "Two years ago I talked to Eric Lems from the Zeeland Safety Region about the Safety Region's request to use our barracks as a springboard for the Zeeland MIRG team. A logical request. Here we have jetties for various vessels, three helicopters can land simultaneously and there are facilities to house 500 people, all of whom are given a real bed. And if necessary we

can expand the capacity to a maximum of 1000 people, although they would be sleeping in the hallways and in extra tents. Another important advantage of our barracks: it is a secure site so we are able to properly register victims. It isn't possible for family or friends to just enter the grounds and take people home. This also enables us to provide controlled information to the media. And finally, we have all the necessary communication and emergency systems, so we are always accessible."

AGREEMENT

The Safety Region and the Navy decided to officially document their collaboration. "In the first instance we wanted to formulate an agreement between the Safety Region and the Navy", Meijer continues his story. "Ultimately it became an agreement between the Safety Region and the Ministry of Defence. A good development, because it means that agreements with other branches of the military have now also been officially documented. Consider tasks that, in addition to the Navy, are performed by the Royal Military Constabulary, the Army or the Air Force in emergency situations. The agreement has now

been approved by the Ministry of Defence and the administration of the Safety Region and is due to be signed soon. This means the MIRG team can call on us at any time. They can store their materials in our grounds, and we ensure that there is always enough food for the personnel. We can also have an emergency hospital built. People with signs of hypothermia must be treated as soon as possible, so often there is no time to get them to a hospital. If necessary we will also organise the deployment of the Royal Military Constabulary or Customs. Because even if you are a victim in an international maritime incident, you are still entering the Netherlands and that must be documented accordingly."

SMART COLLABORATION

This type of agreement has many advantages. Meijer: "It is clear to all the parties who has what responsibilities, and who performs what tasks. That benefits the speed of scaling up. The Safety Region simply has to sound the alarm and all the procedures are set in motion. That is a real improvement. If you have to start thinking about agreements when the emergency is in progress you are too late. For that reason I think it is also important that the Ministry of Defence is included in the operational plans, in the phased plan, of the Safety Region. That makes for truly smart collaboration. The government has so many facilities and resources; if regional and local services are able to call on them we can utilise all those facilities efficiently. Which, in return, saves costs in the region. I'm therefore convinced that we will not stop at this one agreement. We now have a solid, well-thought-out document, evaluated by 17 lawyers. This makes it easy for other organisations to follow suit." So: there is work to be done and Meijer isn't resting on his laurels either. "We have a lot of experience with netcentric working, with educating, training and exercises. I can see plenty of opportunities for collaborating more closely in those areas as well."



HENRI POORTVLIET EVACUATED

On Saturday morning 22 September MIRG member Henri Poortvliet suddenly found himself on the receiving end of the emergency response. The Royal Dutch Lifeboat Institution expertly evacuated him from a local bicycle-pedestrian ferry in Zeeland. The ferry had collided with a container ship on the Westerschelde River between Vlissingen and Breskens and was taking on water, making it impossible to return to the port. The Captain decided to run his ship aground on a sandbank.

Fortunately this was the scenario of a large-scale joint exercise between the Royal Dutch Lifeboat Institution [Koninklijke Nederlandse Reddingsmaatschappij – KNRM], Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management Coast and Delta [Rijkswaterstaat Kust en Delta], the Zeeland Safety Region and the police. Nearly a hundred passengers were quickly taken to safety that morning. Henri observed everything closely. Once the ferry is firmly positioned on the sandbank he is given a life jacket and instructions on how to leave the ship. Together with the other passengers he waits on the back deck until he can go. Henri: "It was surprisingly quiet on board, there were no children, there was no panic." Meanwhile the first life raft, able to carry 150 people, is being lowered, followed shortly by a second life raft for a further 75 passengers. Henri descends to the life raft via a long chute. The first KNRM ship soon comes alongside. "Leaving the ship and getting into the life boat went well." The victims are quickly taken to the quay in Vlissingen, where everyone safely leaves the ship. Henri: "The arrival in Vlissingen was kind of messy, people didn't know where to go. There is room for improvement there." Eventually all the participants do arrive in the nearby railway station restaurant. A cup of coffee and a sandwich help them to recover. "It was a successful exercise", Henri comments, "an opportunity I obviously couldn't pass up. It was very instructive to see things from the opposite perspective."

AGENDA

NOVEMBER
20
PARTNER MEETING,
WORKING GROUP
LARGE SCALE
EXERCISE

NOVEMBER
21
PARTNER MEETING
ARRAS

NOVEMBER
25
COMMAND EN
CONTROL TRAINING
DUTCH MIRG

JUNE 2014
FINAL EXERCISE

SEPTEMBER
2014
FINAL CONFERENCE



COLOPHON

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FOUR COUNTRIES, ONE OPERATIONAL MANUAL

On Thursday 26 September representatives from all the MIRG-EU partners put their signature to the Operational Manual. A true milestone for the project. After all, it is a unique achievement for Dutch, French, Belgian and English fire fighting teams to document agreements and procedures that enable them to work together as a single team.

Each partner country operates as usual, in accordance with its own national fire-fighting protocols and legislation, with its own equipment and with its own training requirements. However, in this international context it is necessary for the teams to be able to work closely together. That means that they deal with an incident in the same way, use interchangeable equipment, have the same training and use the same jargon. All this is regulated in the jointly formulated Operational Manual. This manual meticulously describes the methods and procedures the MIRG-EU teams must follow in the case of an incident.

The crisis room in the Antwerp fire station was prepared especially for this occasion. Mayor Hennie van Kooten (Zeeland Safety Region) warmly welcomes all the attendees. Together with Captain Thierry van Goethem (Beveren Fire Department), Lt Col Chris Addiers (Antwerp Fire Department), Major Wim van Zele (Gent Fire Department), Deputy Chief Officer Steve Demetriou (Kent Fire and Rescue Service) and Colonel L. Moreau (Calais Fire Department) he takes a seat behind a long table. The Manuals are ready and everyone signs each of the six Operational Manuals. All the partners now have a copy, each in their own language, signed by all the partners. The press, present in large numbers, documents the moment. After the signing ceremony the Antwerp Fire Department uses a well-oiled demonstration to show everything involved in the deployment of a MIRG. Because documenting everything neatly in writing is one thing, but the ultimate objective is the practical application!

Would you like to take a look at the meeting? You can. Various media reported on this important occasion. Please visit the www.mirg.eu website and take a look.

**EUROPEAN
COOPERATION
PROJECT**

2 Mers Seas Zeeën

INTERREG IV A

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