

# eMIRG

#5 SPRING 2014

THE MAKING OF MIRG EU



MIRG EU



Maritime  
Incident  
Response  
Groups

THIS ISSUE: SAFETY REGION COLLABORATES WITH SALVORS • TAKING A DUNKING • GERD BUYS REPORTS • TESTING MIRG-EU ON PRINCESS SEAWAYS • FINAL CONFERENCE 17 SEPTEMBER

# COLLABORATE FOR THE HIGHEST CHANCE OF SUCCESS



Towage and Salvage provider Multraship has traditionally had its head office in Terneuzen, right on the boulevard. From the top floor you have a grand view of the River Scheldt. Giant container ships, gas tankers, car carriers, river barges - everything passes by. Part of the fleet is moored in the Port, literally just outside the door, ready to assist ships to and from the Zeeland and Flemish ports. The company also specialises in salvage work, such as raising shipwrecks and emergency response to casualties such as grounded vessels and collisions. With more than a century in the Scheldt Estuary and far beyond, the Muller family has extensive experience. A large part of the company's fleet has firefighting equipment; these are the so-called FIFI tugs. "These tugs have a fire-fighting capacity of 2400 m<sup>3</sup> of water or foam per hour", Bianca Pielat, the company's Safety Expert, tells us. "This enables us to respond and assist effectively when there is a fire on board a ship. At the request of the Zeeland Security Region we make some of our fire-fighting capacity available to them as well. We signed a collaboration agreement to this effect in 2013. In real terms we have always worked together", she adds immediately. "In 2006 the contacts with the operational people were intensified, but now the collaboration with respect to keeping fire-fighting tugs on permanent standby

has been officially documented." This means that in the event of an incident on the River Scheldt the Security Region can call directly on the people and resources of Multraship and their contract-partner URS. "We consciously opted for this public-private collaboration", says Eric Lems, Maritime Safety staff member at the Zeeland Security Region and Duty Officer with the Fire Service.

## FACILITIES AND CREW

"Salvors already have well-maintained fire-fighting facilities on the water, with trained crews the companies themselves use for salvage operations in which the Fire Service is not involved. When they were building their two latest tugs Multraship asked us: 'Tell us what you need, so we can include your requirements in our design'. If a company can do this for us at a relatively low cost, why would we purchase our own vessels with FIFI capacity and incur unnecessarily high costs every year?"

Ivo de Zeeuw, Salvage Officer at Multraship, can also see the benefits of collaboration between the public and private sector during salvage operations. "We serve the same interest from a different perspective: to resolve an incident quickly, cleanly and safely. The Security Region has a statutory task and a public interest. Our interest is obviously commercial, separate from any civic duty, but there is no conflict. Quite the contrary: we complement each other and take advantage of each other's expertise. As a salvage company our many years of experience have taught us how to fight a fire; by joining forces with the Zeeland Security Region we both can benefit from even more knowledge and expertise during an incident." Eric: "In simple terms, a salvor can tell me exactly where the hazardous substances are located on board a ship. We know the characteristics of these substances and know what happens if they come into contact with foam or seawater, for example. If you work together this way you have the highest chance of success."

## WORKSHOPS

Ivo: "We did notice that some of the emergency responders took a sceptical view of our work. They considered us cowboys of the waterways, out to make a quick buck. To rectify this image we organised workshops on five different days this past year, for



a total of some 320 people who are involved in managing incidents on the water. We explained what happens in the case of an incident. When you come on board you always encounter panic and a captain who does want to stay in control. However, you still have to be able to act quickly to limit the damage. We analyse the situation, reassure the crew and any passengers and, meanwhile, notify all the relevant parties. We utilise the first 'golden hour', in which you have to share information quickly."

## GOLDEN HOUR

"That is very important for us", confirms Eric. "They are the first to get to the incident and are immediately close to the situation, so they can give us a lot of very important information." Ivo: "Together we make sure that we get the incident under control, that the ship can be towed to a port and that the problems can safely be dealt with there. We normally respond to casualties on a 'No cure no pay' basis. We are not paid for our services until after the incident and we have to negotiate with the vessel's Underwriters. Sometimes things are finalised quickly. Sometimes we first have to demonstrate that we made the right decisions, that we work safely, that we have the right equipment and the right knowledge. A process like that can take years. This story impressed the listeners and has definitely generated a better understanding."

In the coming period the collaboration will be continued with training and exercises. Eric: "We have been able to get to know each other and each other's equipment. The procedures have also been put under the microscope and changes have been made where necessary. Should an accident happen, then I'm convinced our collaboration will be a success!"



# TAKING A DUNKING



Quick action in the case of an incident saves lives and limits economic damages. That applies on land and at sea. In the case of a fire on board a ship the rapid transport of a MIRG is therefore essential, which is why MIRGs use helicopters. They can get to the site of the incident quickly, carry (a limited amount of) equipment and hover above the vessel. The team is lowered onto the ship with a winch.

## INTENSIVE DAY

Helicopter travel is not without risks but proper preparations can prevent a lot of problems. This is why all MIRG members must undergo compulsory Helicopter Underwater Escape Training to learn how to escape safely from a helicopter that has crashed into the sea. The French teams completed the training at the national training location in Marseille. The Belgian and Dutch teams travelled to the Rotterdam port area, to the brand-new training facility of the Royal Dutch Sea Rescue Institution (KNRM) to be exact. The teams faced an intensive day. In the morning they learnt the theory of what to do when a helicopter crashes into the sea, how to react and what

to do to get out quickly and safely. Then the real work started: practising in the swimming pool with the simulator. The safety of the participants is the priority. With an instructor on the edge of the pool and two divers in the water very little can go wrong.

## 180 DEGREES

The participants get into the helicopter simulator in groups of six, fasten their seat belts and wait in anticipation. The first two times the MIRG practices without air. The simulator is carefully lowered into the water and then spins 180 degrees. There is movement inside: windows are being opened, the door is being unlocked. In a short space of time all the men have reached the surface. In the final two practice rounds everyone is given a PSTASS (Passenger Short Term Air Supply System), a small bottle of oxygen that is enough for 1 - 2 minutes. "In principle you should be able to get out of the helicopter without oxygen", André Kwadijk, instructor at the KNRM tells us. "But if a window fails to open you have to be able to take a breath. Stress can also affect your breathing so extra oxygen may be needed."

The training increases the chances of survival in the case of a helicopter crash. Kwadijk explains: "This is a serious test and you can actually fail. For example, we get people who can't swim, or people who panic when they are under water. It's not surprising: you are in a small, tight space and are strapped in, but it is dangerous, also to the other passengers." All the MIRG members passed the test with flying colours and are very satisfied. "The training went well", Pieter Jongejan, one of the participants, tells us. "It is indeed important. Everything is controlled, not much can go wrong, but it does give you confidence in the equipment and in yourself. It is a bit of a mixed feeling, because I hope I never need to use this training." The training also has other benefits: "It's good for team building", colleague Ton den Breejen adds. "In this kind of training the hierarchy disappears, you all work together because you have too. I also got to know new people. In the Fire Service you become a single team when your pager goes off; you're there for each other. But it is certainly a big advantage if you know each other."

## STAY TOGETHER

Escaping from a helicopter is one thing; surviving in the rough seas is another. That's why there is a comprehensive Survival at Sea training scheduled for the afternoon. The training starts on the edge of the pool. A life raft is lowered into the water, the men follow and make sure they inflate their lifejackets. They learn how they can stay together as a group, how they can swim a distance together in a long chain, and how they can climb into a life raft. First they practice in calm water but then the swimming pool becomes a wave pool. Eventually all the participants safely reach the life raft - and have taken another important step on the road to MIRG-EU!



## CATCHING UP WITH HENRI POORTVLIET



*"The training has made me even more enthusiastic"*

He hasn't regretted his participation in MIRG for a second. Quite the contrary: all the training and exercises have only made Henri Poortvliet more enthusiastic about the work. On 12 February, during the MIRG call-up exercise (see also page 8 of this newsletter), he is therefore one of the first to arrive at the barracks in Vlissingen. Henri: "I always turn out, even if I'm out to dinner or visiting friends or family. I don't mind. Except when I'm on duty as flight operations officer (at the airbase in Woensdrecht), then I can't leave." Tonight he will also be receiving his HUET certificate and HUET passport. He is full of confidence. "The HUET was good. I actually expected it to be harder to get out of the submerged helicopter without using oxygen. In the end I found it an easy exercise. I had no trouble with the rescue swimming either."

Henri has also completed an exercise on the Westerschelde River. "We left in the RWS 78 (a patrol vessel of the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, equipped with a special space for a Water Commando Team) leaving from Vlissingen, in

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# TEAM WORK AND COLLEGIABILITY



*Gerd Buys from the Belgian MIRG team has completed half of his training programme and things are going well. He has written this special report for eMIRG.*

We have made good progress in our training to become fully fledged MIRG members – and about time, I should say! The more I get to know about it, the more interested I become, and we have already learned so much.

The last-but-one course that I took was the Command and Control course at the main station of the Antwerp Fire Service. This course for officers and non-commissioned officers was supervised by our two English instructors, and focused mainly on all the theoretical knowledge required to guarantee the efficient functioning of the MIRG. During a tough two-day programme, the entire procedure was examined and dealt with in great detail, from the beginning of the intervention to the transfer of the ship, including all the related tasks.

During this course everyone gained a better impression of the specific tasks that they would be able and willing to carry out. There it became very clear to me that anything is possible for a non-

commissioned officer, so I will regularly have to take a close look at everything in order to ensure that I am well prepared at all times. The course ended with a tough exercise. Two groups working separately tackled a complete case. Putting theory into practice was very rewarding, and the competitive element between the two teams added to the fun. In short, this course was fascinating but definitely not easy. However, I have every confidence that our group will be able to execute successful interventions.

The last course I followed was the sea survival and HUET in Rotterdam. This was more of a physical training, although it was essential to keep a clear head. I was mainly pleasantly surprised by the very professional supervision and smart training infrastructure. After a brief but challenging theoretical background requiring independent study, we were finally ready for action. Sea survival, HUET and “swimming” with breathing apparatus (BA) – these activities are right up my street. I have always loved the water, so this was great fun!

In fairness I have to admit that everything looked much easier than it actually was, but, as with everything, practice makes perfect. If you do exactly what the instructors tell you to do, there is never any



danger. However, I definitely think that a follow-up is needed.

Finally I would like to stress the importance of teamwork and comradeship. Our MIRG is a highly diverse and professional group. It is immediately obvious that everyone has signed up voluntarily for this very challenging task. There are never any complaints, and we are all ready to help one another regardless of rank and corps. I think this is unique and commendable. It is a good thing, too, as in the future we will certainly have to rely on one another, on land, in the sea and in the air.

I would like to end with a small anecdote. A few weeks ago we had a fairly severe fire on a ship in our harbour. Our Antwerp colleagues were also present, and I immediately noticed a MIRG member with whom I consulted. Our chief fire officer, another MIRG member, soon arrived on the scene as well, and the intervention was tackled quickly and effectively. The success of this intervention was probably partly due to our MIRG knowledge.

Sgt Gerd Buys

Beveren Fire Service



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the mouth of the river, to Rilland, all the way over on the east side, near Belgium. There we

transferred to a Belgian tug and familiarised ourselves with the firefighting facilities they had on board. Important information to be able to work together well during an incident.” The coming period is going to be a busy one for Henri. “We’ll be getting winch training, ship-to-ship training and an exercise in which we run through all the procedures. These exercises are quite different from the everyday work. Normally you jump into a truck and head out, but in this case you get to the barracks and have to wait until you get assigned. And if you do get assigned it is for an extended period. You work out in the open sea with limited resources. That requires improvisation and that is one of the interesting aspects of the job.”



## DANGLING UNDER THE HELICOPTER

During the MIRG training programme the men and women practise all the procedures and skills needed for a deployment at sea. Because helicopters are the main means of transport for getting to a ship in an emergency the MIRG members are introduced to all aspects of this aircraft. In February the French MIRG trained on the winching procedure. They departed from Le Touquet Airport in a rescue helicopter, heading for the open water. Once they were over the sea the men were lowered on board a ship by winch from a considerable height. Nicolas Leclerc: “This helicopter is frequently used in rescue operations, so it was a very realistic exercise.”



# MIRG-EU TESTED ON 18 JUNE 2014

17 SEPTEMBER: RESULTS PRESENTED  
AT FINAL CONFERENCE



## PROBLEMS ON A FERRY

On 18 June the teams from the partner countries will be confronted with a simulated incident on board DFDS Seaways' cruise ferry Princess Seaways, which normally operates between IJmuiden in the Netherlands and Newcastle in the UK. The exercise scenario is designed to test some key objectives. First of all the compliance of each partner with the MIRG-EU Standard Operational Procedures. Secondly the exercise will test the strategic, tactical and operational level of cooperation between partners responding to a fire on a vessel at sea, and thirdly their ability to carry out a formal debrief to share areas of best practice and capture lessons learned.

## PREPARATIONS

All MIRG-EU members are preparing for the final exercise which will see each of them respond by helicopter to a large vessel on fire in the busiest shipping lanes in the World. As part of the preparation each partner has undertaken a tasking

exercise to test their local arrangements from receipt of call to embarkation and has completed a tabletop incident command exercise within the ETE programme. In April the teams will do a complete mini-exercise, going through all procedures, within the simulator at Marcken-Calais. Then they must be ready for their final test in June. What the scenario will be, remains a secret until 18 June.

## FINAL CONFERENCE

The project partners are all committed to seeking continual improvement and learning and therefore internal and external observers will be invited to follow the proceedings of MIRG-EU and to give recommendations for improvement of the procedures. The results of the project and the final exercise will be presented at the project's final conference which will be held in Vlissingen in the Netherlands on 17 September 2014. International speakers will elaborate on the future of MIRG-EU and how the skills and knowledge of the team can be most effectively deployed in western Europe.

### Technical Details Princess Seaways:

- Length: 161 m
- Width: 27 m
- Gross Tonnage: 31360 GRT
- Cruising Speed: 20 Knots
- Number of Cabins: 501
- Cars: 580
- Passengers: 1600
- Electrical system: 220 V. AC
- Engine Output: 19600 kW

## UNIQUE COLLABORATION WITH DFDS-SEAWAYS

MIRG-EU is proud to work with DFDS Seaways and collaborate on this large scale exercise to test both DFDS Seaways and MIRG-EU emergency procedures. The ferry operator will provide Princess Seaways for the MIRG-EU large scale exercise, making this final test as realistic as possible for both the ship's crew and the firefighters. Princess Seaways was built in 1986 and renovated in 2006. It operates a daily car ferry service between IJmuiden and Newcastle and has room for over 1,300 guests. With its range of onboard restaurants, shops, cinema, bars, cabins and kids play areas, – it will challenge the skills of MIRG-EU.

Steve Demetriou, Director of Operations at Kent Fire & Rescue Service said 'We are delighted that DFDS are supporting the MIRG-EU project and promoting a capability that helps to make the sea a safer place in which to work and travel. Fire remains one of the top three causes of loss for marine vessels in the world fleet so it is really important that ship's crew and operational firefighters are able to work together to mitigate its effects especially whilst vessels are out at sea'

Stephen Fairlie, Marine Standards Superintendent at DFDS Seaways, said:

"We are very keen to support MIRG-EU in this key exercise, as they provide a vital role in fire and rescue efforts at sea across Europe. Training of this kind is crucial in our industry, where the safety of our passengers and crew at sea is paramount. This exercise also provides us with a great opportunity to provide our crew with additional training with these key organisations, which is always beneficial."

## MIRG-EU MEETS NORDIC MIRG

MIRG-EU attracts attention, even in the far north. On 16 January a Delegation from the Zeeland Security Region and the Province of Zeeland departed for the Swedish town of Höör, where they introduced MIRG-EU to representatives of the NORDIC MIRG teams from Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. These teams have been working together for a number of years and are extremely interested in the methods of MIRG-EU, and particularly the jointly developed and implemented Education, Training and Exercise programme and the Standard Operational Procedures that all the MIRG-EU teams use during a deployment. For the MIRG-EU delegates, in turn, it was interesting to learn how the Scandinavian teams, which don't operate on the basis of a joint organisation, are structured and deployed.

If it's up to the two delegations this will not be the only meeting. MIRG-EU and the NORDIC MIRG teams want to get to know each other better and can see opportunities for further collaboration. The teams have agreed to invite each other to exercises as observers. The next meeting has also been planned. This will take place in September, following the MIRG-EU final conference in Zeeland.







FRANCE  
ENGLAND  
VLAANDEREN  
NEDERLAND



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

## AGENDA

APRIL  
**23**  
**COMMAND & CONTROL  
TRAINING  
MIRG KFRS**

APRIL/MAY  
**SIMULATOR TRAINING  
MIRG-ZEELAND.  
BELGIUM SDIS62, KENT  
IN MARCK-EN-CALAIS**

MAY  
**21**  
**PARTNER MEETING  
MIRG-EU, KENT**

MAY  
**22**  
**MONITORING  
COMMITTEE MEETING  
KENT**

JUNE  
**18**  
**LARGE SCALE  
EXERCISE**

SEPTEMBER  
**17**  
**FINAL CONFERENCE**



## COLOPHON

Publication of: MIRG -EU  
Photography: Mariska Dingemanse, Nicolas  
Lecllet, Hanneke Blok, Marcel Simons, DFDS  
Seaways, Multiship  
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## READY TO GO IN 30 MINUTES

It is Wednesday evening, 12 February, and all is quiet in the Vlissingen fire station. It is the calm before the storm because at 5 minutes to 7 exercise leader Eric Lems calls up the entire Zeeland MIRG team: 'EXERCISE \*\* MIRG team call-up Olympiaweg barracks \*\* EXERCISE'. The beepers go off. To make sure that everyone has received the message the communicator, which notifies the members by telephone, is also utilised. The call has only just gone out when the beepers go off again, this time for a real fire alarm in the local parking garage. Because the MIRG fire crew were already on their way a truck could be turned out in double-quick time. Fortunately this proves to be a false alarm. Meanwhile the call-up exercise continues. At 2 minutes past 7 the first five men come into the station. They immediately initiate the special MIRG procedures. They take their name badges and carefully slide them onto the 'holding area board'. That way the Operations Commander can instantly see who is present and can compile the two required teams, a command team and a support team.

Ronald Mies also arrives quickly. "I was prepared", he tells us over a cup of coffee. "We knew there would be an exercise tonight, but not what time. I didn't let it affect me, I just did what I normally do. When my beeper went off I packed my bag with dry clothes and some toiletries and came here." "This is the first of two call-up exercises", Eric Lems adds. "With these exercises we want to practice the procedure of turning out, reporting in and compiling the teams. We also want to see how many people can actually turn out for a call-up. For example, I got a message from someone who is elsewhere in the country and is unable to come. That is something we deal with in reality, as well. Of course people knew there would be an exercise today, so the situation is not entirely realistic. Next time we will not tell them in advance. That way we will be able to see if we really can get a team of 12 people together within the hour." This is also the reason why all 36 MIRG members are contacted for a call-up. "There are always people who are on holiday or too far away, so everyone has to come; that enables us to compile a complete MIRG in the shortest amount of time." The first exercise progresses smoothly in any case. Everyone who was able to attend is actually present within 30 minutes. Only six name badges are left on the table. "Things went very well", Eric tells the attendees when the exercise is finished. "We were complete within half an hour. If we can do this in reality as well we will be geared up and waiting for the helicopter rather than the helicopter waiting for us! But we're not quite there yet", he adds immediately. "In the coming months we will complete a number of further serious exercises and training courses and we will have to do a lot of hard work. But our ambition is clear: a well-trained MIRG that can be deployed Europe-wide."