

EU FloodEx 2009 – from the FloodFighters’ perspective

The FloodFighters’ dream draws closer: better international preparation and planning, with everyone sharing highly trained resources in a pre-planned way for emergency scenarios involving governments and agencies, writes **David Lane**

LET BY VEHICLE HEADLIGHTS, CHIEF

Paul Hayden and Assistant Chief (AC) Jon Hall, joined by observers Chief Jeff Dulin (Charlotte FD, NC) and Emergency Manager Jeff Cardwell from North Carolina, USA, fired up the engines of the first full UK flood response module to head for The Netherlands, after a request channelled by the EC Civil Protection Mechanism.

This stirring sight greeted us pre-dawn on Tuesday, September 22, 2009 at 05:00hrs. Leaving the British Fire Service College was the UK convoy of fire and rescue service high volume pumps, frontline rescue appliances, 4x4s and other flood and water rescue assets, headed for the Channel Tunnel and many hours of travelling to reception centres in The Netherlands.

CROSS-BORDER DIMENSIONS

We all know that disasters know no boundaries, having a cross-border dimension, affecting different countries simultaneously. The conjectured North Sea inundation scenario for EU FloodEx aimed to tax available response capabilities at a European level. Such a disaster is not theoretical – Europe has experienced many natural disasters affecting many countries at once, including the 1953 North Sea flooding that affected The Netherlands, the UK and Belgium (see *CRJ 5:3* for background to the exercise).

The likelihood of repetition is ever-present and increased urbanisation is likely to cause many more victims, as vulnerability of societies to such events has increased dramatically over the years. For example, more than 60 per cent of Dutch critical infrastructure is below sea level today, and would be at very high risk were flooding to be repeated on a scale to that of 1953.

The FloodEx 2009 Project was set up to test



Some of the World FloodFighters 2009 delegates group together in Charlotte, USA, for the lunchtime photo

All photos: H&WFRS firefighters / Lane, Jefferies & Associates Ltd / Charlotte Fire Department, NC, USA

the European response to such disasters – a quest led by Peter Glerum, FloodEx Manager, CFO Paul Hayden, of UK’s Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, Colonel Tomasz Gartowski from Poland, Rolf Barsch from Germany, with colleagues from Estonia, other EU nations and the European Commission.

FloodEx organised a table-top and full scale civil protection simulation exercise with a command post at Community level, field testing the understanding and response within the framework of the Community Mechanism immediately prior to moving the resources. Specific objectives were set and included: Enhancing operational co-operation; testing EU civil protection assistance, including modules; testing available early warning systems and evacuation systems for responders and the public; and testing the intervention of an EU Assessment and Co-ordination Team (ACT) on site, as well as incoming EU assistance.

The scenarios used floods caused by storms in the North Sea Channel; category

4 to 5 hurricane, wind speed of more than 265kph, with a width of 80km, direction North West. The floods simultaneously affected The Netherlands, United Kingdom and Germany and ultimately reached the Scandinavian countries.

The exercise timeframe was four days in the field, including travelling. The table-top exercise

The conjectured North Sea inundation scenario for EU FloodEx aimed to tax available response capabilities at a European level



was held on day one, testing decision-making procedures such as requesting assistance from the European MIC and exercising incoming assistance procedures between the involved countries via the EU Response Mechanism. One vital aspect of the exercise was that the usual bilateral suppliers of assistance were unable to help, because they were affected by the flooding themselves. For this reason, assistance was scheduled to come from the Baltic Region (Poland and Estonia).

Day 2 was dedicated to full-scale in-the-field exercises around Wervershoof and

Alkmaardermeer, testing deployment of pumping modules from at least four different states and carrying out water/flood rescues in many seriously challenging situations. Different resources, including vital helicopter air assets, were used for this floodwater rescue.

The deployment of an ACT (previously trained in early summer) under Pief Schneider, was also exercised (the UN was invited to observe). The third day was effectively a rerun of the exercises, together with visits from senior staff and government officials.

This European event was closely followed by the first World FloodFighters Conference in Charlotte, USA, on October 5.

This event, organised by CRJ, Lane Jefferies & Associates and Charlotte Fire Department (CFD), and supported by North Carolina Emergency Management and CFOA, was set in the superb 500-seat CFD Fire Academy hall with a first – live video content streaming to the web.

For some time the UK's Fire and Rescue Services have been working with fire and emergency management professionals from Charlotte and North Carolina and the US to develop flood response and major incident management principles. Many of the principles and best practices that emerged were developed in the 2006 CFOA report *Management of Major Flood Emergencies* by Chief Hayden, and put into practice to save over 7,000 lives during the UK's summer floods of 2007.

This year's conference programme was developed to enable the further exchange and development of disaster incident management principles.

As this US/UK partnership has developed, with world climate change bringing major flooding event issues to the fore, international interest in floodfighting has increased exponentially. The warmest of welcomes were delivered by Charlotte FD's Chief Jon Hannan, and Kurt Walton, Charlotte City Manager in the opening sessions under the Chair of Chief Paul Hayden.

Next, delegates were joined by Deputy Chief Jeff Dulin (CFD), Peter Cinque (NSW State Emergency Service, Australia), Mandy Mackenzie (HMG Cabinet Office, UK), Peter Glerum (Netherlands Strategic Disaster Management) and DO Gary Jeffery (Essex FRS, UK) with overviews on 'Strategic command and control arrangements for disaster management', followed by discussions.

This was followed by US colleague Captain Joe Sorrentino (Florida Task Force), Peter Cinque and Chief Paul Hayden, who gave case studies from the



The first full UK flood response module assembling at the Fire Service College, UK, prior to deployment



Inside the casualty treatment centre on Day 2, Alkmaardermeer, North Holland. Different resources were used for this floodwater rescue



Having rescued casualties, a UK FRS boat crew remove them to safety in a special Yamaha outboard jet UK Rescue 1 flood boat

AUTHOR

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US: Hurricane Katrina, an Australasian major event and a UK major flood event.

A tour of equipment followed lunch, then Secretary Rueben Young (North Carolina Crime Control and Public Safety) gave a real 'Southern welcome' and introduced the afternoon sessions with his own perspectives. Mike Sprayberry (Deputy Director for North Carolina Emergency Management, USA) presented on 'Major disaster response (flooding) – breaking down barriers – multi-agency/disciplinary responses', then Tim Miller (NCEM Ret) spoke on 'National difficulties of response to flood events across jurisdictions.'

VIGOROUS

Peter Glerum discussed flood risk in The Netherlands and the EU FloodEx, followed by Jon Hall (Asst-Chief, H&WFRS, UK) on his CFOA UK national level lead role in the taskforce response to FloodEx.

The author's short film *EU FloodEx 2009* was presented by Chief Paul Hayden, who issued a clarion call to everyone to plan and prepare for emergencies and led a very vigorous closing debating session.

Finally Chief Hannan had the last word to close a very successful first World FloodFighters.

Overall, the event saw a concentration on the strategic challenges arising from major incidents, the challenges of co-ordinating mutual aid across borders, including international borders, and the growing opportunities for the use of helicopters in support of civil emergency response. This is an area where the Fire and Rescue Services in North Carolina have made significant progress, especially in hurricane response and major flood events. Participants saw the latest Eurocopter EC 145 in service with the National Guard later that week. Re-designated as UH-72A Lakota, this helicopter's role is extremely versatile and includes missions such as search and rescue, surveying, firefighting, mobile command centre, SAR command team transport and medical evacuation.

A key element in debate throughout the conference was the political context within which major emergencies are handled, and the approaches that might be taken to facilitate mutual aid between developed countries in the future.

Understanding this context will bring the goal of better international preparation and planning that much closer – so to that end CRJ and Lane, Jefferies & Associates now look forward to the next FloodFighters in London, Friday March 5, 2010 (www.floodfighters.org).