Networking Women in the Fire Service

Networking Women in the Fire Service (NWFS) was formed in 1993 and now has hundreds of members, providing a solid foundation of support, communication and friendship. Membership of NWFS is open to all women in the fire service, regardless of their role, as well as to men who support the aims of the Network.

The 8th National Conference of NWFS, sponsored by Fire and Rescue Services in the South West region and by the Fire Service College, was held at the College over the weekend of 13-15 July.

There were 240 full delegates, of which 22 were men, with an additional 120 people attending for the first evening.

Terry Standing, CFO, Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue Service gave an excellent opening speech, to welcome members of the network.

The conference offered both classroom and hands-on training and there was a huge range of workshops. Delegates, from all over the UK, and from abroad, described the weekend as a ‘positive and rewarding experience.’ The sessions ‘Be a Firefighter for the Day’ and ‘Fire Appliance Driving’ were, as usual, oversubscribed.

The event was deemed fun, extremely friendly and definitely educational – an opportunity to face new challenges, share new experiences in a really supportive atmosphere and learn something new.

More information about the network is at www.nwfs.net
Following the events of 9/11 and 7/7, and in the wake of the recent floods and terrorist threats, the need to increase the resilience of existing Fire and Rescue Service control rooms in England has been recognised.

A major step towards fulfilling this need was celebrated when the newly completed Regional Control Centre (RCC) building in Castle Donington was handed over by Government to the East Midlands region on 23 July. The FireControl project, which is part of Communities and Local Government’s Fire Resilience Programme, delivered the RCC as the first of a national network of nine state-of-the-art control centres that will replace the current 46 separate control rooms in England.

On handing over the RCC building to the region, the Fire Minister Parmjit Dhanda MP said, “I am delighted that my first public event as Fire Minister is to mark this major milestone in this nationally important project.”

The new resilient three-storey RCC building has passed a flood risk assessment and will serve 4.2 million people throughout the region. It will be networked to the other eight RCCs, which will support each other in times of increased call pressure or other need.

The RCCs will be able to deploy the nearest appliances to incidents, regardless of where they are in relation to FRS borders. They will also provide information direct to the cab of firefighting vehicles about routes to the incident site, floor plans, hazards and water supplies.

When the national FiReControl system goes live in late 2009 the Regional Control Centres will be responsible for the following activities:

- 999 call handling and call prioritisation
- Nearest available appropriate resource mobilisation
- Incident communication, updating and escalation
- System data maintenance – including Pre-Determined Attendance (PDA), gazetteer and risk information
- Performance and quality improvement reporting
- Mutual and fallback support
- New Dimension equipment mobilisation

The newly-established East Midlands Fire and Rescue Control Centre Limited has been set up by the Fire and Rescue Authorities within the region to manage the new control centre for Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Rutland, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire.

Derbyshire will be the first Fire and Rescue Service to transfer its control room functions to the RCC, in Autumn 2009.

For more information, please visit www.firecontrol.communities.gov.uk
North and South:

High Volume Pumps support the FRS response to summer floods

The Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) joined other emergency services in answering a huge number of calls for assistance in June and July, when widespread flooding affected many parts of the country, during one of the wettest summers on record.

High Volume Pumps (HVPs) – which can drain an area three times quicker than conventional fire and rescue service pumps - played a vital role in supporting the emergency response.

HVPs

The floods this summer claimed lives, damaged homes, businesses, schools and farms, disrupted rail and road transport and left billions of pounds worth of damage.

After the extensive floods in 2000, the Government decided that a national water pumping capability was required, which could pump water away from flooded areas or to fires, as at Buncefield.

The pumps were provided under Communities and Local Government’s £200 million New Dimension programme.

HVP rollout

The rollout of the HVPs to individual fire and rescue services was completed shortly before the June floods. The 46 HVP sets, strategically positioned at locations across the country, and 4 HVPs in Wales, can be called upon to work in the host county, region, or at incidents on a national scale.

Since the rollout began two years ago, in spring 2005, the HVPs have been used at over 150 incidents, including the floods in Carlisle and at the fire at the Buncefield fuel depot.

Floods in the North

The North of England was badly hit by floods in June. Over 30,000 homes were flooded, many were left without power, and one of the largest peacetime rescue operations took place across the country.

Humberside

Humberside Fire and Rescue Service had the busiest 12 hours in the history of the service, receiving over 1,500 calls for help on 25-26 June. Dozens of people were rescued, 58 on the night of 25 June alone.

National response

The response to the floods in the three worst affected FRSs in the North (South Yorkshire, Humberside and North Lincolnshire) was truly national. Support for the emergency response came from 34 Services across England, and from Wales.

Welcome to FRS24

In this issue, FRS reports the handover of the new Regional Control Centre building in the East Midlands, explains how High Volume Pumps supported the FRS response to the floods in June and July and looks in detail at the winners and runners up of the first Equality and Diversity Awards for the FRS.

The next issue of FRS will include a readership survey asking for your views on how to improve this newsletter. All returns will be entered in to a draw to receive a £30 Marks and Spencer Voucher.

If you have any initiatives, or good news to share with the whole of the fire and rescue service, please email us at frs@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Don’t forget the online version of FRS, at www.frsonline.fire.gov.uk - which provides access to previous issues of FRS News, and much more.
At the height of the floods, 36 HVPs were deployed, from home locations in Tyne & Wear and Cumbria in the north, and from Somerset and Hampshire in the south, and many places in between. The main role of the HVPs was to prevent an escalation of the situation by pumping out water to prevent further damage.

**Multi-agency response**
The police – through local Gold and Silver Commands – coordinated the response to severe flooding, with FRS, ambulance, local authorities, the Environment Agency and the voluntary sector playing a full part.

**FRS National Coordination Centre**
The deployment of the HVPs was monitored and coordinated by the interim FRS National Coordination Centre (FRSNCC) in West Yorkshire, which coordinates crossregional and national mobilisation of New Dimension resources when these are needed to support the FRS response to major emergencies.

The FRSNCC was supported by the Emergency Information Support Group, based at Communities and Local Government offices in London, which strategically directed the national coordination, liaised with Government Office and kept ministers informed.

**Teamwork**
CFOA set up a Flood Support Room in Hereford and Worcester FRS, which provided 24/7 national coordination of water rescue provision.
Regional Resilience Teams, based in Government Offices in the English Regions, had an important role in ensuring effective two-way communication between local responders and central Government and provided regular updates on developments.

**Threat to Ulley Dam, Rotherham**
At the height of the flooding there were 15 HVPs at the Ulley Dam alone.

Sixty firefighters using HVPs pumped millions of litres out of the reservoir over several days, while engineers shored up the dam walls, so the reservoir held even after further rain.

Steve Makepeace, Central Station Manager, South Yorkshire FRS said, “I realised the huge value of the partnerships we have with other local authorities. And it was testament to the Fire Service as a whole that we could have crews from all over the country working here in South Yorkshire.”

**Electricity supplies**
A key priority was to preserve the electricity supply from the Walham and Castlemeads power sub-stations; both were in danger from potential flooding. They were made secure and operational by the efforts of the FRS, helped by the HVPs, by other emergency services, the Environment Agency, armed forces and others who worked extremely hard to maintain the temporary defences.

The Fire Service College was used both as a strategic holding area and as a ‘recovery hub’ for cleaning, service and inventory checking of all HVPs before their return to home stations.

**After the floods**
As the floodwaters subsided, the emphasis shifted to recovery.

John Healey, Floods Recovery Minister, said, after visiting flood-hit communities in Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Worcester, “I want to praise the emergency services for their outstanding work in responding to the crisis.” Announcing a package of aid to local authorities through the Bellwin Scheme, John Healey said: “My top priority is to help life in flood-hit communities get back to normal as quickly as possible.”

There will be a formal review to ensure that the lessons to be learned from the summer floods are identified and applied.

HVPs pumping out water from Ulley Dam near Rotherham.

HVPs working to secure the flooded Castlemeads electricity sub-station.
First FRS Equality and Diversity Awards

The Awards were presented at the Fire and Rescue 2007 Conference in May by Angela Smith MP, the former Fire Minister, CFO Phil Toase for CFOA, and Councillor Les Byrom for the LGA.

Congratulating all the award winners, Angela Smith said:

“The Fire and Rescue Service does a fantastic job of protecting the public but its staff must also reflect the public that it serves.”

The competition for next year’s Equality and Diversity Awards will be announced in the Autumn.

The Award Scheme was set up by Communities and Local Government, with the support of the Chief Fire Officers Association and the Local Government Association (LGA), to recognise the achievements of Fire and Rescue Service staff in England.

Local projects to get fire safety messages across to young people, to work with minority ethnic and religious communities, reduce anti-social behaviour and tackle disability in the workplace were just some of the entries received under the first national Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Award Scheme.

There were three Award categories:

- Leadership
- Service delivery
- Partnership working

Each category had awards for individual and team achievements.

The 40 entries received were judged by a panel of experts from the public and private sectors, who looked for evidence of:

- innovation, ambitious objectives and sound planning
- successful delivery and effective monitoring
- good practice from which other Fire and Rescue Services would benefit
- a positive effect on progressing the equality and diversity aims of the Service

Equality and Diversity award winners at the Fire and Rescue 2007 Conference.

photo: CLG
The Winners and Runners-up in each of the three Equality and Diversity Award categories were:

1. Leadership

Team Award for Leadership
Career Development and Mentoring Team, London Fire Brigade
This team implemented a fast track development programme for staff with high potential that significantly increased the numbers of women and minority ethnic staff at middle management level.

Team Award Runner-up for Leadership
Patricia Oakley, Head of Equalities, London Fire Brigade
The project supported dyslexic firefighters in London, enabling them to achieve their full potential. It also raised awareness about dyslexia, both within the organisation and in the community.

Individual Award Winner for Leadership
Jayne Monkhouse, Diversity Consultant, Merseyside FRS
This award recognised Jayne’s work and achievements over 20 years to progress equality and diversity in the FRS. Jayne has worked with Merseyside since 2005 to mainstream equality and diversity as key performance targets.

Individual Award Runners-up for Leadership
Steve White, Poplar Fire Station, London Fire Brigade

Steve created a culture of inclusion on his watch, encouraging open debate about equality issues. Steve developed a lecture programme to increase his team’s understanding of different faiths and cultures, to enable them to work more effectively in a diverse community.

Ludwig Ramsey, Firefighter, Hampshire FRS
The award was for Ludwig’s work in the BEAMM (Black and Ethnic Minority Members) group, his contribution as a role model in promoting race equality and tackling racism, and the support he had given to the FRS in meeting their legal obligations to promote race equality.

2. Service Delivery

Team Award Winner for Service Delivery
Community Fire Safety Department, Merseyside FRS

The Community Fire Safety Advocates team (above) worked with minority communities, hard to reach groups and vulnerable people and visited over 12,000 homes. This successful programme has been taken up as a model by other FRSs.

Team Award Runners-up for Service Delivery
Basildon & Castle Point Community Command, Essex FRS
The project to repair and build trust with Muslim communities started after an arson attack on a community centre used as a Muslim place of worship. FRS community liaison officers attended mosques and Islamic centres to deliver fire safety advice and promoted home visits, helping to build community cohesion.

Fire Safety Team, Hampshire FRS
Hampshire set up the Fire Safety Team to raise awareness about changes in fire safety law and reduce enforcement notices within minority ethnic business groups. The team forged an effective network with minority communities and business leaders. It also designed and delivered a popular series of risk awareness seminars and training.

Individual Award Winner for Service Delivery
Simon Hawkins, Firefighter, Hereford & Worcester FRS

Simon Hawkins (above, second right) lost the lower part of his left leg after a motorcycle accident in 2004. In 2006 he returned to operational duty with a prosthetic limb, having successfully gone through a process of rehabilitation, a return to work programme and a series of rigorous assessment tests. This was an excellent example of how a FRS could deal effectively with disability.

3. Partnership Working

Partnership Working Team Award Winner
Red Watch, Faversham Fire Station, Kent FRS
Crew Manager Gary McRobb developed a successful programme for staff at Faversham fire station to work with teenagers with learning disabilities. Students from Meadowfield School (right) took part in supervised team building exercises, and learned about fire safety and the work of the FRS.

The success of the programme has led to the involvement of other organisations including St John Ambulance and EDF Energy.

Partnership Working Team Award Runners-up
Threat Response Group, Merseyside FRS
The Threat Response Group, worked in partnership with Merseyside Police, to reduce the level of threat posed by fire-related crime to local communities and minority groups. The programme saw a significant decrease in anti-social behaviour.

Maria Tonks, Equality & Diversity Manager, West Yorkshire FRS
West Yorkshire FRS is part of ADDRESS, the pan-European emergency services partnership project set up to support equality and diversity training. West Yorkshire was chosen to provide the equality and diversity expertise and to lead on the development, design and delivery of the programme.
Arson Task Force makes an impact in Hampshire

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS) and Hampshire Constabulary formed the county’s first Arson Task Force (ATF) in April, to provide specialist support and guidance to fire and police colleagues investigating deliberate and serious fires across the county.

The ATF can be deployed anywhere in Hampshire to coordinate a thorough investigative response at fire scenes, and offer assistance during the investigation process.

Arson Task Force Team
The team is based at Alton fire station, and consists of Hampshire FRS Watch Manager Graham Howlett, and Detective Constable Mark Leonard of Hampshire Constabulary.

They are assisted by the Hampshire FRS Fire and Arson Support Unit and by Saxon, a Fire Investigation Search Dog. The black Labrador has been trained to detect flammable liquids used in deliberate fire-setting, and attends fire scenes with Watch Manager Howlett.

Roles and functions of the Arson Task Force
As well as an intelligence function — collating evidence to assist police colleagues — the ATF undertakes arson reduction surveys in problem areas, reviews linked arson offences, and arranges emergency fire home safety visits.

Part of the ATF’s role is to engage with local communities. They deliver witness appeal posters and talk to residents and businesses after a deliberate or serious fire. They will also display witness appeal boards near to fire scenes.

The unit is funded by a grant from the Local Area Agreement.

Hampshire FRS Watch Manager
Watch Manager Graham Howlett’s key responsibilities include the operation, promotion, and daily management of the Task Force, its vehicle and resources.

He is responsible for receiving, recording and monitoring intelligence, and has a secondary role as trained dog handler to Saxon.

He also delivers arson awareness training to identified groups, and assists Hampshire FRS fire investigators and constabulary crime scene investigators with the investigation of suspicious fires.

Results
As a result of the partnership, the two organisations are already seeing an increase in the number of arsonists being prosecuted.

Between April and June 2007, Graham Howlett and Saxon attended over 30 fire investigations and the unit assisted Hampshire Constabulary with 34 police investigations.

As a result of ATF involvement there were 18 arrests, of which:

• Four people were charged with arson with intent to endanger life
• Four people charged with arson
• One person was returned to prison under a Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangement.

Common goals
Hampshire FRS Chief Fire Officer, John Bonney, said: “The Arson Task Force is an innovative partnership which sees Hampshire FRS and Hampshire Constabulary working together to detect incidents of arson and enhance fire investigations.”

“This unit combines the specialist skills of the police with those of fire service investigators, with both organisations committed to reducing levels of arson and ensuring offenders are brought to justice.”

“Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service has set itself some challenging corporate aims, including a reduction in the number of deliberately set fires in the county by 20 per cent by 2010. The Arson Task Force will go a long way in helping us achieve this goal.”

There were 9,814 arson incidents in Hampshire in 2006, representing 69 per cent of all emergency responses.

Looking ahead
Hampshire Constabulary Chief Constable, Paul Kernaghan, said:

“This new joint unit results from the recognition by John Bonney and myself of the seriousness of arson and of our determination to tackle it. We want to get two messages across, one don’t play with fire, and two, if you do then we will ensure you are tracked down by highly trained professionals.”

“Hampshire FRS and Hampshire Constabulary share a common mission, namely community safety, and the Arson Task Force will help us in delivering that goal.”

For more information contact Craig Mowat, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service.
Telephone: 023 8062 6812.

Graham Howlett and Saxon, the fire investigation search dog
photo: Hampshire FRS
Training of FRS personnel is a key element in successfully implementing the Firelink project, which is providing a wide area digital communications system for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Firelink will cover England, Scotland and Wales, linking FRS control rooms with mobile fire vehicles.

Training the trainers in the FRS
A training plan, developed by the Firelink project team and the supplier, Airwave, aims to cascade Firelink training through the FRS, with minimal impact on the day to day operations. FRS trainers will receive training before vehicle installations begin in each region.

Training Needs Analysis
A Training Needs Analysis (TNA) was conducted by an independent company to identify FRS training requirements, using questionnaires and structured interviews in eight selected fire and rescue services. Postal questionnaires were sent out to all fire and rescue services.

The TNA has determined the numbers of staff to be trained, their roles and responsibilities, and the scope of the training necessary to ensure the maximum benefit from Firelink.

Firelink User Groups
Firelink users have been categorised into six groups, each will have a training course designed to meet their specific needs:
- Operational users
- Control users
- System managers
- Maintenance staff
- Fleetmapping managers
- Firelink project members

Training Course Units
The training course units will include the following core competencies:
- Airwave overview and Firelink system functionality
- Radio terminals
- UHF (Ultra High Frequency) radio cross band repeater (where necessary)
- Mobile Data Terminal (MDT)
- Control room radio interface (interim) and equipment
- Airwave system fallback
- Mobile data user
- Service management use
- Fleetmap build and management
- Fault reporting procedures

Quality Assurance
The FRS trainers will be evaluated to assess the effectiveness of the training they deliver to the FRS. Feedback will help in the continual improvement of the training programme.

Avon FRS pioneers Firelink installation
Avon FRS were the first to complete their legacy control room installations of Firelink, in preparation for fitting Firelink equipment into officer vehicles and appliances.

The primary control rooms made their first Firelink test call over the Airwave Service. Voice quality was reported to be excellent and the FRS control rooms are very pleased with the standard of installation work.

For more information about Firelink, visit www.frsonline.fire.gov.uk/resilience or contact your local Firelink representative.

The training plan aims to cascade Firelink training through the FRS.
photo: CLG