

The police dimension



The Police's perspective regarding water emergencies is rooted in their responsibilities in national search and rescue (SAR)

by Lane, Jefferies and Associates

MoD Police Marine Unit RIB craft patrol training to "pace" and intercept other vessels

The Police Service, through its command infrastructure, co-ordinates land based and inland waters SAR operations including those that originate at sea or in the air and provide co-ordination of all emergency services and other authorities where appropriate. These are further refined during major flooding.

POLICE RESPONSIBILITIES DURING FLOODING

The Police are responsible for co-coordinating the emergency services at a major flooding event, as well as helping to save lives and protect property. Where practicable the Police establish cordons to facilitate the work of the other emergency services in saving lives, protecting the public and caring for survivors. They oversee any criminal investigation and also facilitate inquiries carried out by the responsible accident investigation body. The Police process casualty information and have responsibility for identifying and arranging for the removal of the dead. In the event of the agreed procedures for warning and informing communities at risk not being effective, then, where practicable, assistance will be given.

If we briefly examine the roles of the other main authorities and organisations involved this will give an added dimension to the depth of Police liaison required.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES RESPONSIBILITIES

Local authorities are responsible for co-coordinating emergency plans of local bodies involved in the emergency response. In major flood situations, local authorities provide an immediate response in order to care for people affected. The precise nature and extent of the response will depend upon available resources and local arrangements, but includes supporting Police arrangements for co-ordination.

THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

We know of course the extensive and vitally important roles of the Environment Agency regarding flooding and the support they give the Police and local authority by providing materials, equipment and manpower (with differing local agreements).

THE FIRE SERVICE

The Fire Service's role is as follows:

- Saving life and rescuing trapped persons from fire, wreckage or debris;
- Containing and extinguishing fires and undertaking protective measures to prevent them;
- Preventing, containing and making safe spillage or release of chemicals, radioactive materials or other hazardous substances;
- Protecting property;
- Assisting the Ambulance Service with casualty handling;
- Assisting the Police with the recovery of bodies;
- Providing monitoring procedures in respect of health and safety of those persons operating within an established inner cordon of the Police outer cordon;
- Carrying out essential damage control operations, such as pumping out flood water and salvage works.

THE AMBULANCE SERVICE

The Ambulance Service has a responsibility for life saving and to respond to trauma and medical emergencies.

RESPONSES

The response to a water emergency incident may involve a wide number of organisations working together, namely the Police, Fire Service, the RNLI, Volun-

teer SAR Organisations, the MCA, the Civil Aviation Division, the MoD, local authorities, the Environment Agency and other bodies such as British Waterways, the public utility companies, the communications media, voluntary organisations and the public.

The Police procedures have then to be carefully planned and take account of the complexities of working with all these differing organisations with their differing needs and sensitivities.

TRAINING

Clearly understanding these needs forms a backbone for Police training requirements, which will in some cases be very different to other agencies. Adding a further complication for example will be where say water borne patrols are provided. Not only will the public expect the officers to be competent in life saving protocols and use of equipment, but also they may need to be trained to "pace" and intercept other vessels. This training is rigorous; bearing in mind any such fast vessels may contain terrorists or criminals intent on evasion.

There is obviously a need to understand the protocols and requirements of the other agencies and there are some common training requirements for all the blue light services in the face of common risks eg 'Awareness Training'.

It is intended to examine some of these complex issues, risk assessments and their consequences for safe working near water, at the conference, from a 'Police Dimension'. ●

