

Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service
with Martin Walters

In a lively and extremely interesting talk, Group Manager Martin, began by explaining that the stations at Rushmoor, Fleet, Hartley Wintney, Yateley and Odiham come under his command, covering a large area of North East



Hampshire.

He went on to talk about the wide range of equipment housed at the stations, including the familiar fire engines, modified four-wheel drive vehicles and even bicycles, so that difficult terrain or obstruction should not prevent fire fighters reaching the scene of any emergency.

Martin's team works within a number of clearly defined corporate aims:

- To improve the way they respond to and support incidents
- To reduce accidental fires in the home
- To improve community safety with sprinklers
- To improve economic sustainability through effective business support
- To improve how our communities are able to respond to emergencies (community resilience)
- To review their role in road safety and create safer road users in Hampshire

Building resilience is a collaborative effort, however, and Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service work closely with a number of community organisations both on prevention and on response.

With regard to prevention, they liaise with groups such as Neighbourhood Watch, Rushmoor Voluntary Services, Rushmoor Healthy Living and Naya Yuva, taking special care to reach vulnerable and difficult to reach residents. In an effort to reduce road accidents, they will also go into colleges to educate students on road safety. Foreign drivers represent a significant risk—something that the service is seeking to address.



For major incidents Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service work closely with other first responders, such as the Police and medical professionals, and with local authorities to rigorously prepare for any

emergency. Regular drills take place so that everyone involved knows exactly what their responsibilities are and contingency plans are in place for things such as evacuation and emergency shelter. As a last resort, they can call on the Army for assistance.

To illustrate how this works in practice, Martin provided an example of a serious road crash and resulting forest fire attended by teams from Berkshire, London, Surrey, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Buckinghamshire, Norfolk, Oxfordshire, West Midlands, Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire, Northamptonshire and wildfire experts from Northumberland. The equipment needed to deal with this incident included:

- 18 jets
- 21 hose reels
- 2 high volume pumps (HVPs)
- 6.5 kilometre water relays (i.e. 13 kilometres) from open water supplying three water supply lines
- one water relay of three pumps from 21-inch towns main, four hydrants, four Fire & Rescue Service water bowsers and three Forestry Commission water bowsers
- four portable dams
- eight light portable pumps
- 10 HVPs
- 10 various off-road pumps
- one Urban Search and Rescue Module
- one military fuel tanker
- Forestry Commission resources
- one large mulcher
- one tractor-mounted mulcher
- three 360-degree slew excavators
- two tractor-mounted excavators
- four forestry teams for felling operations

Managing an operation of this magnitude requires enormous discipline and co-operation. First responders may be inexperienced, so it is vital that a seasoned officer is quickly at the scene to assess the situation, to secure the area and to establish a command centre.

Giving an example of a helicopter crash at Barons BMW, Martin explained how three zones would be established around the crash site, with the command centre in the middle, or silver, zone, well away from danger but closely linked by telephone to those at the site of the crash and all the agencies further away who may be called upon for evacuations, to set up road closures and manage traffic, and to establish rest centres, etc. Communication is absolutely crucial, to ensure that resources are deployed efficiently and to make sure that information is disseminated to everyone who needs it, including the media.

In the event of such an emergency, Rushmoor Borough Council would set up a centre in the Concorde Room, where a senior officer of the Council would take

control. Should the Council offices be unavailable, as might be the case in the example Martin used because of the proximity to the crash site, the centre would be set up at Hart DC. Telephones and computers would quickly be brought in, a switchboard set up, and work will begin on monitoring weather, identifying individuals at risk, especially at schools, residential care homes and other locations where vulnerable people can be found, to locate suitable buildings for rest and evacuation centres, if necessary, and to manage all the information coming and going.

To minimise injury and loss of life, to safeguard the responders and to contain the situation, it is vital that all the emergency services work smoothly together, each understanding their role and respecting the command structure. Regular drills ensure that the system works effectively, with feedback so that improvements are constantly made. While everyone hopes that these measures will rarely be needed, it is reassuring to know how thoroughly prepared Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service is to deal with any emergency, no matter how serious.