

Management of flood emergencies – part III

In the preceding parts of this series, a need to improve mutual aid arrangements was identified by Paul Hayden. To address this, he has helped to develop Project Resolve, as **David Lane** now explains



ONE OF THE key outcomes from the Management of Major Flood Emergencies (MMFE) project was the need to improve resilience and mutual aid arrangements for truly major incidents. When the European Commission Directorate-General for Environment called for proposals for pilot projects on civil protection and cross border co-operation in the fight against natural disasters, the potential was obvious.

PARTNERS

A number of European partners were quickly pulled together to address the issue of pan-European mutual aid with a determination to make a real difference on the ground for citizens all across the EU. The bid for €1.5 million, led by Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive Paul Hayden of Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, has been made to resolve the issues arising.

The partners involved in Project Resolve are Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue

One of the key outcomes from the Management of Major Flood Emergencies project was the need to improve resilience and mutual aid arrangements for truly major incidents

Authority in the UK, which is representing the (Chief Fire Officers' Association) CFOA in this project; the UK's Department for Communities and Local Government; Sussex Police Authority in the UK; the IBI Group (an organisation with specific expertise in the application of technology to address transport problems); KLPD, The Netherlands' Traffic and Transport Division; the Universidad de Valencia LISITT (a laboratory developing research in the field of telematic applications to traffic and transport); and Intelligence for Environment and Security (IES) Solutions, an IT company.

The objective of Resolve is to: "Strengthen emergency services' preparedness and capability to respond to disasters by resolving organisational and operational barriers that

limit the cross-border exchange of information, resources and knowledge."

Experiences across the EU show that there are serious organisational and operational blockages that prevent information and resources being shared in an operational environment and consequently restrict emergency services' ability to respond to major disasters.

Resolve therefore aims to address these organisational and operational blockages by:

- Developing common procedures and practices for requesting/sharing operational resources;
- Producing multi-language operational orders to allow the deployment of shared resources;
- Defining a generic, agency-facing Memorandum of Understanding to cover sharing/release of knowledge and resources;
- Providing links to and analysis of other projects and initiatives in this field in terms that emergency service responders can understand and benefit from; and

- Facilitating multi-agency access to tactical information on disaster response and the sharing of specialist resources across national borders by establishing the Resolve network.

This network will consist of two elements. There will be a 'human' network of emergency services and civil protection agencies across the EU which wish to co-operate in the sharing of information, knowledge and resources. There will also be a 'technical' network in the form of an internet-based co-ordination tool supported by interoperable databases allowing agencies participating in the human network to access information, knowledge and resources.

RESOLVE NETWORK

The first step will address organisational and operational blockages including the common rules and procedures which underpin the operation of the human aspect of the network. Steps two, three and four will establish both the human and technical aspects of the Resolve network. Step five will test and evaluate the entire concept through a series of table-top exercises.

These steps will be undertaken by partners from the four member states participating in the project. Once the project is complete and the network is proven, additional members from other states will be allowed to participate.

Any kind of initiative that aims to support responses to natural disasters has to facilitate co-operation between agencies from different geographic regions, different operating environments and different operating cultures in an effective and simple way. To provide the level of services envisaged, Resolve cannot be developed on a unilateral or bilateral basis. It has to be undertaken at a European level in order to provide a true cross-border solution.

The human aspects of the Resolve network will require common procedures and a common operational model. The Resolve co-ordination tool will require both a common architecture and the use of recognised standards.

Where initiatives such as this have often failed in the past is by having non-user led groups providing 'solutions' to narrowly-focused problems. Ultimately, busy emergency services do not see the value in maintaining systems which may never be of direct benefit to them. Resolve is different. It is led by users who know what needs to be achieved to be of most benefit to their colleagues around Europe. The end result will be a network that, through an underlying common architecture, the use of standards and a common organisational approach, will be scalable to the environment in which it is being used. It will be capable of operating nationally, regionally and across borders and will also cover

By resolving the current barriers and allowing access to information and resources, Resolve aims to assist emergency services in saving lives, making best use of scant resources and increasing the speed of return to normality

a range of disaster scenarios.

Resolve will also offer support from the first notification of an event to the return to normality. It is the longer-term deployment of resources which is often forgotten and yet can put the greatest burden on emergency services and civil protection agencies. Resolve will be able to identify what kind of support may be required in the long term and help to identify where it can be drawn from.

In the future, Resolve may support the European Commission, emergency services and civil protection agencies in the strategic deployment and purchase of equipment and resources to ensure member states funding is most effectively used. Neighbouring states and regions may in the future share specialist resources or collaborate to share the overall cost burden of maintaining some of these expensive but rarely used resources.

It is also important to recognise that Resolve is entirely complementary to command and control or risk management work that is being done by others. The Resolve network is not a replacement for the Crisis Management Centre – rather, if successful, it is a tool that could eventually sit within the Crisis Management Centre.

Perhaps most importantly, by resolving the current barriers and allowing access to information and resources, Resolve aims to assist emergency services in saving lives, reducing damage to property and the environment, making best use of scant resources and increasing the speed of return to normality.

CLOSE LINKS

Resolve is only achievable in the form proposed because it makes maximum use of the results from other EC-funded research projects.

The Resolve network will be built on the tried and tested principles established in other EU-funded research projects such as VERA3 and PETRA-NET. VERA3 is funded by DGTREN and is developing a pre-operational data exchange network for the cross-border enforcement of road traffic offences. It involves operational collaboration between authorities in France, Spain and The Netherlands. PETRA.NET is part of the Commission's security research programme and is looking to bridge the knowledge gap between the security research community and public authorities by offering an information exchange and brokerage service.

Resolve also has close links to the ORCHESTRA project on risk management; Project OASIS; the parts of the LIASION project examining incident management; the Advisory Board of the Public Safety Communication Europe Project soon to be started; the Euro-regional

projects funded by DGTREN, which is working on cross border information exchange and traffic-related incident management plans (It also addresses organisational and multi-language issues); and, the international OASIS standards body and in particular, their work on Emergency Service Data Language.

Resolve could be seen as the glue that binds these initiatives together by allowing the resources and techniques which they are developing to be shared.

The aim of Resolve is to resolve the organisational and operational barriers that currently restrict emergency services' ability to respond to disasters and to facilitate the cross-border exchange of information, resources and knowledge. Establishing the Resolve network will provide information, knowledge and resource exchange service which will help improve emergency services and civil protection agencies ability to manage and respond to major disasters. Resolving the organisational and operational issues will lead to:

- More timely and effective response to disasters – saving lives and reducing risk to citizens;
- Better management of resources over the longer duration of many disasters – thereby saving resources;
- Improved co-ordination between agencies involved in the emergency phase;
- Making use of best practice and learning from the experience of others;
- Helping to ensure that lessons learned are incorporated into any emergency response;
- Identifying the training and equipment requirements of the future;
- Improved plans for providing information to the media and public;
- A process for requesting mutual aid and clarification required for allocating international/national/regional resources; and
- At a local level, better identification of where dedicated equipment can be pooled.

A determination by the European Commission is expected by Spring 2007. Whatever the outcome, it is clear that the issue of closer collaboration and mutual aid at an EU level is now firmly on the agenda.

Author

Formerly a UK Senior Fire Officer, David Lane is now a fire and marine safety consultant and film producer. He is a partner at Lane, Jefferies & Associates, a small specialist fire and marine safety consultancy. The author extends his personal thanks to all those from HWFRS swift water rescue team and North Carolina