

Fire Risk Assessment and Management Information Provision by Sheila Pantry OBE BA FCLIP

Abstract

In the UK, from 2003, risk assessment and risk management were placed at the centre of fire safety for - the Fire and Rescue Service, under the new Fire and Rescue Services Legislation, the development of Integrated Risk Management Plans and a duty to promote fire safety in the community and for employers, under the Regulatory Reform Order, an obligation to provide a safe place of work. For all these duties and obligations to be covered adequately there is obviously a need for stakeholders' individual points of view to be taken into account fully.

This is now driving the information providers forward to offer up-to-date and relevant information for all levels of users.

Statistics are playing an important part and the UK Government's Fire and Statistics User Group are charged with a new remit to develop a fire information strategy that would:

- identify and monitor existing sources of fire data
- encourage collaboration and data sharing between users and producers of fire data
- identify and prioritise any shortfalls in existing data provision and make recommendations to Government accordingly on the fire community's statistical needs.

The speaker will discuss the current state of play and developments in fire and rescue information provision.

Introduction and background

For a long time in many parts of the world, the workplace has been striving to achieve higher standards of health and safety. Through a variety of tools such as legislation, approved codes of practice and standards, better working conditions, lower numbers of fatalities, near misses, accidents have been achieved.

Long-term health problems still abound in many industries and are being tackled on a number of fronts through:

- education
- research
- banning some industries e.g. asbestos in some countries and
- legislation

One of the major reasons for success is the way this is tackled through **risk assessment** that involves everyone - the individual who does the job and knows it best; the supervisor who must ensure that the work is being carried out safely and healthily and the manager/owner who is ultimately responsible.

What is Risk Assessment

This is nothing more than a careful examination of what, in the work activity, could cause harm to people, so that the person can weigh up whether enough precautions have been taken or if more should be done to prevent harm.

The following steps provide a systematic approach to looking for the hazards and managing the risks:

STEP 1

Take a fresh look at the workplace site, its design, operation and surroundings, and where a hazard may exist.

STEP 2

For each area of the site and operation consider what could go wrong, and who could be affected.

STEP 3

From the findings from Step 2 decide if the precautions are enough to guard against anything going wrong or if more should be done.

STEP 4

Recording the findings.

STEP 5

Consider when you will need to review your risk assessment.

In the past, fire and related legislation has been very prescriptive, for example, occupiers of buildings relied on the fire service to inspect buildings and issue fire certificates. Without the fire certificate insurance would not be given.

The past two years or so has seen a major shift in the UK fire industry since the publication in 2002 of *The future of the fire service: reducing risk, saving lives. The Independent Review of the Fire Service [Bain Report]*.

This report made many recommendations that would bring about a modern fire service amongst which the main ones were that it should in future it should be a risk and community fire safety service and that the work on risk-based fire cover should be taken forward through a series of incremental steps as follows:

- Government should give fire authorities the power to deploy resources differently from the present requirements.
- Government should instruct each fire authority to develop an **Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)** that will save more lives and provide better value for money.
- Fire authorities should be required to consult their communities and key stakeholders in the preparation of their plans.
- Chief officers should be empowered to implement their authority's plan.
- The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) should issue the necessary guidance to implement a risk-based approach to fire cover as a matter of urgency.

Since the Bain Report there has been much activity at various levels. You will hear from our colleagues from the Fire Safety College what is happening there and also to training of fire fighters and managers.

But Bain's recommendations have implications for many others in the fire and related industries.

To this end the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister UK established the Fire Safety Directorate (FSD) which contains many Fire related parts from the previous government department - the Home Office, that for many years had been responsible for fire safety.

FSD is comprised of a number of sections that include research and statistics:

The future Fire and Rescue Service

A Service fit for the future needs statutory backing for all its functions, not just responding to fires, and a funding regime that matches the demands upon it. The emphasis should be on prevention as well as intervention and decisions about using staff and other resources must reflect that. The resources devoted to intervention should be allocated flexibly according to a reasoned risk assessment not a rigid prescription.

Firefighters will have an increasingly varied role and opportunities to specialise and to work different shift patterns which suit them. Many of them will have more responsible, wide-ranging jobs which can be better paid. There needs to be a clear national policy for the Service but also stronger local management, as well as co-operation between brigades and with other emergency services and partners where this gives a more effective and efficient service to the community. These actions are resulting in demands for new types of training and new types of information for all those involved.

Achievement of the employers' modernisation agenda will make the service more responsive and adaptable, in terms of reducing the risk of fire and responding to incidents.

The Fire and Rescue Service will have a wide-ranging role as it does now in improving all relevant aspects of community safety. It will also have to respond to new challenges drawing on core skills, such as its understanding of dangers in built structures. It needs appropriate statutory powers which recognise what it already does and are flexible enough to cope with what might arise in future, not the limited powers it has now.

Under current statutory and fire cover requirements, the Fire Service is organised around the need to respond to fire incidents. This makes up no more than 5-10 per cent of its totals activity that is very misleading and so it is not now and will not in future be the dominant activity. Instead, the Fire and Rescue Service will have specific responsibilities for:

- risk reduction and risk management in relation to fires and some other types of hazard or emergency;
- community fire safety and education;
- fire safety enforcement;
- emergency response to fires and other emergencies where it is best fitted to act as the primary agency responsible for the rescue of people including road traffic accidents, chemical spillages and other large-scale incidents such as transport accidents; and
- emergency preparedness coupled with the capacity and resilience to respond to major incidents of terrorism and other chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear threats.

The Service will:

- apply a risk-based approach to fire cover and to all its activities in deciding how best to use firefighters and other resources;
- focus on reducing the level of fire and other emergencies (i.e. prevention rather than intervention);
- develop and maintain effective partnerships with a range of agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors where these can deliver cost-effective improvements in community safety;
- adopt safe systems of working to secure the health and safety of both its staff and the general public; and

- minimise the impact of the incidents it attends and of its response at those incidents on the environment.

These functions will require a wider range of skills, competences, information and training than in the past. Many in the Service have already responded to these new needs. Removing or reducing the rigid national prescriptions, such as those about fire cover or the level of staffing through the day ('constant crewing'), will make it possible to match the level and disposition of resources to meet local needs without having to seek any central approval. This flexibility will mean managers must be ready and equipped to take decisions about priorities and who does what, when and where. This presents significant challenges for them as well as for staff.

Recent legislation such as The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 received Royal Assent on 22nd July 2004 and most of its provisions will be commenced by order on 1st October 2004 and will drive the changes through.

Risk and Community Fire Safety

A new approach is required to planning and providing fire cover. A model based on risk assessment is being developed by the professional advisers in the Fire and Rescue Service. The work of the Service needs to be grounded more firmly in the community; education and partnership programmes have an increasing role to play. A risk-based approach focuses more clearly on saving lives rather than providing fire cover in line with outdated, rigid statutes and Fire authorities are starting work to implement this approach as a priority. Existing powers can be used to make the change, but new primary legislation is being produced to provide a modern framework.

All these changes present information providers with new challenges and opportunities to provide a dynamic information service that is cost effective, up-to-date and meets the users at all levels with the right information at the right time and at the right place.

Research

Research and other evidence can play a crucial role in:

- development of policy;
- understanding risk and developing strategies to deal with it;
- identifying and sharing best practice; and
- informing the development of equipment and techniques for dealing with incidents, such as improved personal protective equipment for firefighters.

ODPM and predecessor departments have for many years sponsored programmes of research, primarily in support of the Building Regulations and Fire and Rescue Service operations, but also in support of fire safety more generally. ODPM is currently undertaking work on:

- Risk Management, in particular the development of the Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) methodology and the associated toolkit;
- Civil Resilience, including projects identified by the Building Disaster Assessment Group to ensure that fire and rescue service procedures are adequate for incidents in tall buildings;
- Building Regulations, including studies to develop the science that underpins many aspects of fire safety in buildings and developing an understanding of the effectiveness of residential sprinkler systems;

- Community Fire Safety, including an evaluation of the Community Fire Safety Innovation Fund; and
- Arson, through the Arson Control Forum.

Further information can be found on ODPM's website www.odpm.gov.uk under 'science and research', at www.arsoncontrolforum.gov.uk and at www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_fire/documents/page/odpm_fire_601065.hcsp

National Fire and Rescue Research Strategy

Research is also sponsored by other Government Departments and members of the fire and rescue community, including Fire and Rescue Authorities, trades unions, manufacturers and suppliers, academia and insurers.

The UK Government believes that there is considerable scope to improve collaboration on research. It is working to develop a comprehensive fire and rescue research strategy that will help underpin the modernisation agenda and the new challenges facing the Service. It is envisaged that a strategy which embraces the whole cycle of risk identification, prevention, mitigation and emergency response, including:

- further statistical and other analyses better to identify the categories of people and properties most at risk;
- further work on prevention and community fire safety, in particular developing the evidence base on good practice and how preventative work can address fire risk cost effectively;
- research on innovative approaches to fire safety in building design and construction; and work to explore further the role of active and passive fire protection measures in buildings;
- research on enhancing firefighting and other emergency responses, including on the design and use of Fire and Rescue Service personal protective and other equipment, vehicles, and premises;
- research into search, rescue, and decontamination procedures for the civil population, including the deployment of specialist equipment and procedures for use by the Fire and Rescue Service to improve civil resilience; and
- support for underpinning fire science in academia.

The good news is that the strategy will also examine the lessons to be drawn from international research.

Currently, the first stage will be for Government to allocate the £1 million made available in 2004/05 for the support of suitable projects related to Fire and Rescue Service business. It will agree this programme of research in outline, having consulted interested groups - the Practitioners' Forum and the Business and Community Safety Forum.

ODPM has had informal discussions with officials in other Government Departments and representatives of manufacturing industry, academia, and commerce. It has established support for the creation of an online – Virtual Fire Research Academy, whose function will be to create the first comprehensive national fire and rescue research strategy by December 2004. Thereafter, one of the responsibilities of the Fire Research Academy will be to seek to ensure that fundamental fire and rescue research is conducted nationally as set out in the strategy, which it will keep under review.

A steering group will be established shortly and a preliminary website launched. An early draft of the proposed national strategy will be posted on the website for consultation by the end of September 2004.

The strategy will look not just at what research is needed, but also at improving communications between sponsors of research and all those that can benefit from it.

Fire and Rescue Authorities are encouraged to:

- draw on the relevant research in exercising their functions, for example in formulating their strategies to prevent fires; and
- avoid duplication by drawing on others' work and sharing their own findings and plans, including through the Practitioners' Forum.

The Government has recently announced Public Service Agreements for the new Spending Review period (SR04), which will come into effect on 1 April 2005. The new fire Public Service Agreement (PSA) target covers England only and fully incorporates previous targets relating to accidental fire-related deaths and deliberate fires. The target is:

By 2010, reduce the number of accidental fire-related deaths in the home by 20% and the number of deliberate fires by 10%.

The PSA target covers one main and two sub-targets:

Main target: Accidental fire-related deaths in the home

To reduce the number of accidental fire-related deaths in the home by 20%, averaged over the eleven-year period to 31 March 2010, equivalent to 280 fire-related deaths per annum, compared with the average recorded in the five-year period to 31 March 1999 of 350 fire-related deaths.

Sub-target 1: Floor Target

No local Fire and Rescue Authority to have a fatality rate, from accidental fires in the home, more than 1.25 times the national average by 2010.

ODPM will continue to produce national quarterly and annual statistics on the incidence of fire that are analysed and published in accordance with strict National Statistics guidelines. In addition, it collects and publishes data relating to operational and HR issues. These data are published in support of relevant Best Value Performance Indicators and will be used in support of new CPA inspections.

A review of the fire incident report forms has been completed and concluded that detailed information should be collected on all incidents attended by the Fire and Rescue Service. A data definition group has been established to advise on the amount of detail to be collected on these incidents in future.

The review is the first stage of a larger project to upgrade the data collection process by capturing electronic information directly from authorities. This project will improve data quality and result in more timely statistics, thereby allowing many authorities to access their own validated data more quickly. This would mean significant advances in monitoring progress against targets and performance indicators.

Fire and Rescue Authorities will:

- continue the timely completion of statistical returns issued by ODPM; and

- assist ODPM in establishing a fully electronic data collection system by contributing their knowledge of fire and rescue service procedures and incident recording to the e-data collection project, which was launched with the review of the existing fire incident collection in Autumn 2003. The aim is to complete this work in 2005.

Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2004/05

Fire Prevention and Risk Management

The Government's aim, as set out in the new fire PSA target, is to reduce deaths and injuries from fire by:

- preventing fires from occurring and mitigating their effects;
- making sure individuals, employers and others understand and plan appropriately for what to do in the event of fire;
- improving intervention in fire and other emergencies, for example by ensuring that appropriate resources are in the right place at the right time to provide an effective response; and
- reviewing the Building Regulations in relation to the level of fire safety provision that should be designed into new or materially altered homes.

Integrated Risk Management Plans and information

The old, national standards of fire cover, which set out the speed and weight of response to fire depending on building density, were insufficiently flexible to allow Fire and Rescue Authorities to respond to the needs of their communities. They focused exclusively on risk to property rather than risk to life, and did not take account of the serious non-fire incidents to which the Service responds. From April 2003 local Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) have replaced national standards. All Fire and Rescue Authorities must produce an IRMP.

IRMPs set out each Fire and Rescue Authority's strategy for:

- reducing the number and severity of fires, and in collaboration with other agencies, road traffic accidents and other emergency incidents occurring in the area for which it is responsible;
- reducing the severity of injuries in fires, road traffic accidents and other emergency incidents;
- reducing the commercial, economic and social impact of fires and other emergency incidents;
- safeguarding the environment and heritage (both built and natural); and
- providing value for money.

An IRMP must set out an authority's assessment of local risk to life and, in line with this analysis, how it is going to deploy its resources to tackle these risks and improve the safety of all sections of society. The IRMP should identify the ways in which the authority can work in partnership with neighbouring authorities and other agencies to deliver improved public safety. It should develop these relationships and build upon the lessons learned. It must also set out the targets an authority will set itself and the standards it will apply to meet the specific pattern of local risk. This will be done in the context of its statutory duty to secure continuous improvement and achieve best value for its local council taxpayers. The IRMP itself should be a strategic, forward-looking document with the approach and detail of business and change management plans. Annual

action plans, which may be produced separately or integrated with the main plan, will set out what the authority plans to do in the year ahead.

Importantly Fire and Rescue Authorities should ensure that their IRMPs are both accessible - to the public, business and other stakeholders - and easy to understand.

Over 2003/04 authorities drew up their first IRMPs, went out to consultation on them with their local communities over the Autumn and, after taking account of the responses to consultation, started to implement their first year action plans as from 1 April 2004. Authorities need to keep their IRMPs under review, and revise them on a regular basis when new evidence or analytical tools become available.

In summary, Fire and Rescue Authorities must each have in place and maintain an IRMP which reflects local need and which sets out plans to tackle effectively both existing and potential risks to communities. They should also:

- produce annual action plans on which they have fully consulted their local communities, allowing twelve weeks for the consultation;
- take account of central government guidance in producing their plans; and
- make efficient and effective use of resources to implement the IRMP and the action plan, including using more efficient working practices where appropriate.

ODPM recognises that authorities need support in developing and maintaining their IRMPs and provide guidance on preparing and maintaining IRMPs, and in April 2004 issued guidance on the impact of the European Directive *Working Time Regulations* on current and new working patterns. Further guidance will be issued as new issues and demands arise.

During the past year ODPM have also:

- undertaken a 'oneoff' incident data cleansing exercise on behalf of all authorities that wished to avail themselves of the service, to help ensure that local risk can be reliably located and measured;
- made available free of charge the Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) toolkit which is based on years of research into risk-based fire cover; and
- made available the Implementation Support Teams (ISTs), who have provided support and feedback on emerging good practice. ODPM will continue to fund the work of four IST members during 2004/05.

ODPM recognise that the need to coordinate the planning of IRMP action plans with the budgetsetting process will present a significant challenge for Fire and Rescue Authorities this year. Revised action plans that will be drafted by authorities in 2004/05 will need to be prepared much earlier than was the case in 2003/04. Many authorities will be at the intermediate stage of customising their risk assessment tools and developing risk strategies. ODPM expect that they should be able to complete these preparatory tasks in 2004/05 and should look to trial appropriate changes to their patterns of response later that year.

The FiReControl Project will lead to the creation of nine regional control centres for fire and rescue services in England. The technical systems provided in the new centres will enable them to service the mobilising policies of all the authorities in their area, however much they may vary, so there will not be a technically driven requirement to standardise mobilising policies. As part of the FiReControl project ODPM will issue good practice guidance on ways in which regional cooperation can improve the effectiveness of local IRMPs.

Community Fire Safety

The legislation also places a statutory duty on Fire and Rescue Authorities to promote fire safety. This is an important part of updating legislation and reflects the increased emphasis on prevention.

Research shows that those most likely to be at risk from fire are those in the lower socioeconomic groups, the elderly, ethnic minorities, and families with young children - who are often concentrated in deprived neighbourhoods. For a variety of reasons these groups may be particularly hard to reach with fire safety advice and unable or unwilling to take action in response. In many cases this will require innovative methods and as part of the IRMP process joint working with partners in health, social services, housing, education, the voluntary sector and other emergency services.

Statistics

The Fire Statistics and Research Branch compiles statistics on fires and deaths and other casualties resulting from fires are based on returns provided by local authority Fire Brigades in the United Kingdom. Considerable detail is provided on fires in buildings, road vehicles or other types of property or involving casualties or rescues, including:

- cause of fire
- type and location of property
- source of ignition
- material first ignited or responsible for development of fire
- extent of damage caused
- age, sex of casualties
- nature of the injury
- time of day, period
- fire brigade area
- effectiveness of smoke alarms
- attendance times
- method of fire fighting (before and after brigade attendance)
- method of rescue

The main statistics are published annually in the ODPM Statistical Bulletin, but more detailed data are available on request, for which a charge may be made.

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A selection of organisations identifying information and producing publications, web sites and statistics

Fire and Rescue Statistics User Group (FRSUG)

As can be seen statistics are playing an important part in the UK fire and fire related industry - the following will show the range of interest in fire statistics. One of the recent groups to be established is the independent *The Fire and Rescue Service Statistics Group (FRSUG)* that

comprises of members from Fire Brigades Union (chairman), ODPM – the government includes research and statistics, HM Fire Services Inspectorate, Fire Protection Association, Fire Industry Confederation, World Fire Statistics Centre (Geneva), Fire Service College and of course the Fire Information Group UK (FIGUK) This Group has already, through its members and links, identified a range of statistics and work on statistics. The remit of this group is:

1. To provide a consultation forum for fire and rescue statistics and promote the free exchange of views and information.
2. To promote the use of fire and rescue statistics to inform policy and practice.
3. To identify and monitor existing sources of data and improve users access to fire and rescue statistics.
4. To encourage collaboration and data sharing between users and producers of fire and rescue statistics and data.
5. Based on users' needs: to identify and prioritise any shortfalls in existing data provision.
6. To keep fire and rescue statistics users informed of any new developments in fire and rescue statistics.
7. When requested, to provide advice on statistical matters to both the Practitioners' Forum and the Business and Community Safety Forum.

The FRSUG web site will be shortly available on the www.odpm.gov.uk web site. It has been put together by the Group and has minutes of meeting, presentations, contact details and more.

World Fire Statistics Centre

During 1975-78, the Association for the Study of Insurance Economics (commonly known as "the Geneva Association"), a body supported by major international insurance companies in a number of leading countries to undertake research on the interface between insurance and its economic environment, sponsored research into European fire costs by Tom Wilmot at Sussex University. This led to the publication of a report, "European Fire Costs - The Wasteful Statistical Gap", which formed the basis for a contribution by Tom Wilmot to a pilot study on fire statistics initiated by a United Nations Working Party in 1981. Subsequently Tom Wilmot, with the support of the Geneva Association, founded the World Fire Statistics Centre to carry forward this work within a more structured organisational framework.

The objects of the Centre are concerned not so much with academic research but with the practical problem of reducing fire waste. The main focus of its work, the collection, analysis and dissemination of internationally comparable fire cost statistics, is thus seen very much as a means to an end: persuading governments to adopt coherent fire strategies aimed at reducing national fire costs.

The activities include:

(a) Statistics

The Centre each year collects and collates fire cost statistics under seven main headings from a steadily increasing number of leading countries worldwide, mainly from Europe but also including, for example, the USA, Japan and Canada. The Czech Republic, Slovenia and Singapore are the latest adherents.

Each annual report from the Centre to the UN forms the basis for a Bulletin with a worldwide circulation of over 300 to relevant government departments, fire protection associations, fire brigades, insurance companies, fire engineers, the trade press and academic fire experts. These statistics have often proved of use during national reviews of various aspects of fire-related

expenditure or organisation; for example the Audit Commission review of the fire services in England & Wales, a Greek study of building protection, a Norwegian study of the incidence of large fires in industry and a New Zealand examination of the risks of death and injury arising from fire. In addition, the Centre's statistics are often referred to in academic works, for example *The Economics of Fire Protection* (Prof. G. Ramachandran, Routledge, 1998).

(b) Seminars

The Geneva Association has organised international seminars every three to four years, generally in Geneva, in order to enable the Centre's latest work to be presented and discussed and to provide a forum for other fire experts working in related fields. Over the years the Centre has been represented at many international conferences, eg the International Fire Symposium organised in Luxembourg in 1984 by the EC Commission, in liaison with the European Association of Professional Fire Brigade Officers and the Confederation of Fire Protection Associations - Europe. During more recent years, the Centre has attached increased emphasis to publicising its work, both by issuing a number of press releases and by giving a series of papers or talks at meetings and seminars in Prague, Nottingham, Helsinki, Oslo, Boston, Madrid, Melbourne, Hanover, Singapore, Krakow, Vienna and Minneapolis.

(c) European Initiatives

The Centre has for some years been trying to interest the EC Commission and the European Parliament in the inter-related issues of fire protection and fire costs. Despite some initially promising contacts, these approaches had until recently achieved little success. However, a European fire statistics seminar organised jointly with the Federation of European Union Fire Officers Associations (FEU) in Augsburg on 19th June, 2000 ended with agreement on the establishment of a core group, to which the Centre is providing the secretariat, to develop proposals for a European fire statistics database to meet the needs of likely users, and this offers the prospect of concrete progress in a direction which the European Commission could support.

For further information on World Fire Statistics Centre contact:

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The Fire Protection Association (FPA)

The FPA, recently moved to Moreton in Marsh, has a range of services including publications, videos, training packages and training courses, The FPA Technical Directorate undertake research, audits and consultancy in support of all aspects of fire prevention and protection. Extensive studies are routinely undertaken on behalf of commerce and industry, insurers, military, local government and the public sector, to name but a few. The FPA's recognised experts offer a comprehensive service, which can be tailored to meet organisation's precise requirements, as well as ensuring conformity with current legislation and codes of practice.

With access to fully equipped large-scale test facilities coupled with an expertise in fire research and instrumentation techniques, the FPA is able to offer complete experimental solutions to all

manner of fire related problems at virtually any scale. Examples of work undertaken by members of the FPA Technical Directorate include:

- Equivalence proving of proposed Halon replacement systems
- Development, design, and proving of active and passive fire fighting systems for 'special needs'
- Performance testing of 'novel' fire products
- 'Fit-for-purpose' testing of fire products
- Hazard identification
- Storage hazard categorisation
- Fire scene re-enactment
- Standard fire tests
- Fire toxicity studies

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The International Technical Committee for the Prevention and Extinction of Fire (CTIF)

The International Technical Committee for the Prevention and Extinction of Fire was founded in Paris in 1900 to encourage and promote co-operation among fire fighters in the world and other experts in the field of fire and rescue.

Over a century later, it has become famous internationally and has brought together nearly 40 member countries and several private and public organisations as associate members. The CTIF counts 37 member nations represented by the National Committees, founded by organisations that are representative of fire fighters and rescue services within each country.

It has produced publications and important collections of statistics.

www.ctif.org/index.php

Other work is being carried out across Europe and there is a concerted effort being made to bring fire safety onto the European Commission's agenda. The work of a European expert group known as COST Action C17 is looking at the Fire loss to Historic Buildings. A recent topic-specific Working Group meeting was considered necessary with the intention of assessing the different electronic recording systems of fire statistics that were currently in operation.

The future for information providers....it is all there on the Internet and free!

First the bad news, which hopefully may not apply in countries that inFire members represent. In the UK and to some extent elsewhere in Europe and the rest of the world, there is the firm belief held by some, especially those holding the budgets, that all information is out there on the Internet and is free of charge, therefore there is no reason to continue to fund information centres and libraries and employ information specialists.

This 21st century global myth needs challenging for a number of reasons:

- Once a collection is broken up, especially a unique collection then it will never be brought back together.
- Once the information is put into a skip it is lost to the world
- Once the information specialists have stopped looking after the collection their knowledge base is now incomplete
- Once the indexing diminishes in content and quality then no-one will go back and the databases get smaller and less relevant.
- Once research work stops being indexed, we will never know what took place and where- resulting in duplicate work perhaps being carried out.
- Once data is only available on a web site then it is less likely to be kept forever, perhaps part of the short-term projects. Unless someone has taken off and put it on an intranet or other system

The slide is perhaps unnoticeable at first, perhaps the budget gets cut, the staff are not replaced, then there is a executive decision to put all the documents on the Internet and stop the enquiry service. The periodicals budget gets cuts and the documents indexed start to drop. Perhaps not perceptible to those who are busy and don't need to check on quantity and quality of records indexed. The fast moving world has no time or money for information collections, preservation and maintenance.

Gloomy but true! This is happening around the world, not just in the fire information industry but in the wider health and safety information world.

So what is the solution – perhaps more sharing of the information collection costs? Sometimes it is up to others to make the collections and keep them going.

Fire industry risk assessment: information sources

The new way of working is bringing new levels of information to a wide range of people.

Managers and Supervisors

At one end of the spectrum is information required by managers and those in charge of organizations, fire authorities and those working in government. They need to know the results of the latest research wherever it has taken place in the world, because this may have some effect on legislation, guidance and advice that they in turn produce for others. Likewise they will need to know the latest information regarding the health and safety of their employees and the hazards that they likely to encounter.

Managers will also need to be aware of what is being published in journals and other publications so that they can be alerted to the latest topical subjects such as bioterrorism.

Because they are working in a new regime – that of risk assessment -they will need to know more about the hazards of their own workplace and of others in their area. The manager's own training - continuous personnel development will require a whole new range of management information, effective personnel management of firefighters and others in their teams.

Trainers and educators

Will need to be kept up to date regarding the latest information and also the latest tools so that they in turn can keep their students up-to-date.

Firefighters

Will need to have a new range of information for a number of reasons. Their jobs will be very different under the new way of working, and they need to know more about the hazards and risks of workplaces. They will also need information for their own personal development and training and will need to be made aware of authoritative and validated information from around the world.

Information Audit

All organisations, information services and libraries should carry out an information audit, particularly when there is a significant change of roles and ways of working. The information audit will provide the organization with a wealth of important data such as:

- what information exists within the organisation
- where it is located
- how many sections within the organization or the community being served have their own collections of information, or have an official branch of the information service
- what information the organisation needs and when it is needed
- who uses it
- what gaps exist
- where potential customers for information are in the organisation
- why people use a particular service or source of information in preference to others
- why some people use the service frequently or occasionally
- why some people never use the service
- how to produce the information in the format needed
- what training is needed for both staff and users

Typical questions and activities that can help them to identify these include:

- which information resources support the organization's aims and objectives and its programme of work?
- can you categorize these information sources into the following groups: essential; desirable; or nice to have?
- where does the information reside?
- how up to date is it, and how is it maintained
- where are the gaps in existing information flows and currently held information?
- as well as these gaps, what other major information needs exist?
- how many different computer based information systems are in use already?
- how many people use externally based information services already, e.g. online databases, the Internet, CD-ROMs?
- are all community members fully trained and able to use the computerized services and technologies?
- if not, how much training is needed and at what level?
- finally, ask individuals the question: "On what information do you depend to carry out your job, (or any regular activity in the community)?"

The Information audit is likely to reveal a number of problems to be tackled. These are commonly found, although you may find others which are specific to your organisation or community.

Opportunities

Many opportunities exist now for information providers, services, trainers and publishers. In the UK some organisations such as the Fire Prevention Association, Fire Service College, publishers of magazines and journals, electronic aggregators of information sources, such as Fire Worldwide which is a collection of full text documents, legislation, guidance and advice and bibliographic databases are helping to fill the gaps and bringing good quality information to the fire industry.

References and websites

Fire Worldwide: collection of full text and bibliographic databases see www.sheilapantry.com

The future of the fire service: reducing risk, saving lives. The Independent Review of the Fire Service [Bain Report] by Professor George Bain. London, ODPM, 2002; xii,159p.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister UK (ODPM) responsible for fire rescue and safety
www.odpm.gov.uk/fire

OSHWORLD portal - contains links to worldwide validated and authoritative websites on fire, health and safety including those quoted in this paper www.oshworld.com

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