

Beyond FiReControl



Nick Chorley,
Intergraph.

FiReControl was only the starting point, says Intergraph consultant Nick Chorley.

Set up in response to a series of large-scale UK emergencies during the early 2000s, FiReControl was driven by the imperative to respond efficiently and nationally to natural disasters or terrorist attacks. At the same time the 'national project, delivered regionally' was a response to a core fire service control room inefficiency: namely that: 'the processes for dealing with overflowed calls are often manually intensive, which gives rise to problems at times of extreme demand when control rooms are under pressure.'*

The Government's 'what next?' (DCLG) FiReControl project consultation document seeks feedback on fire and rescue authorities' priorities for the allocation of any additional funding which may be available from central government, and seeks to establish 'how we can make best use of [the project's legacy] assets.'*

Mobilising technology has progressed since the project's inception, which means that it is also better equipped to handle the demands of the future (such as next-generation 999) as well as those of the present. Significantly, the FiReControl command and control 'I/CAD' mobilising system, developed by Intergraph (and specifically referred to as an asset for consideration on page 45 of the DCLG consultation document) has a technology roadmap and forward momentum of its own. It has therefore already been tried and tested for its collaborative call handling/mobilising efficiency, regionally, and for its resilience in supporting national response to major disasters [see case studies below and opposite]. In that sense it is



very much a live asset.

I/CAD is already used by over 2,500 public safety agencies worldwide; they include many fire services and are all members of the same user group that contributes to the product road map. The system's multi-tiered technology stack includes a foundation I/CAD command and control engine (or hub), overlaid with UK-specific mobilising modules developed for the UK fire service use. It has built-in scalability, so it can be used by both smaller and larger fire services, as well as an interoperability platform that allows data sharing between agencies.

Looking at possible near-future fire and rescue service scenarios, the I/CAD mobilising technology could be deployed by larger fire services to create a single and virtual, region-wide IT environment where one CAD system serves all, balancing resources across control room peaks and troughs. The same system could also be deployed to smaller brigades in its foundation form; or as a 'federated' grouping of smaller, individual systems to support multiple fire services that collaborate, again sharing resources to cut costs and provide mutual system backup, call-handling and resource mobilising. In the case of regional deployment (on whatever basis) the intelligence of the system would act as a powerful adjunct to local knowledge.

Given this level of flexibility the varying needs of UK fire and rescue services could be met, efficiently, while also ensuring the cost-effective continuity of a core technology asset.

* Source: 'The Future of Fire and Rescue Control Services in England: Consultation'. CLG – January 2011.

REGIONAL CONTROL ROOMS AND INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION: AMBULANCES

In 2006 the ambulance service organised into 12 regional ambulance Trusts (FiReControl planned nine regional control rooms, replacing the current 46). Those Trusts are now completing the successful roll-out of their regional control room technology. South Central Ambulance Service is a case in point: its virtual command and control environment is powered by Intergraph's I/CAD – a scalable system that allows it to share demand peaks across the three emergency operations centres that service SCAS' 3,500 square-mile region. Other Trusts including East of England and Great Western are following a similar pattern. Interestingly, the ambulance service may not stop here: Trusts are already discussing a future where they provide mutual back-up for control room disaster recovery, reducing infrastructure and cost.

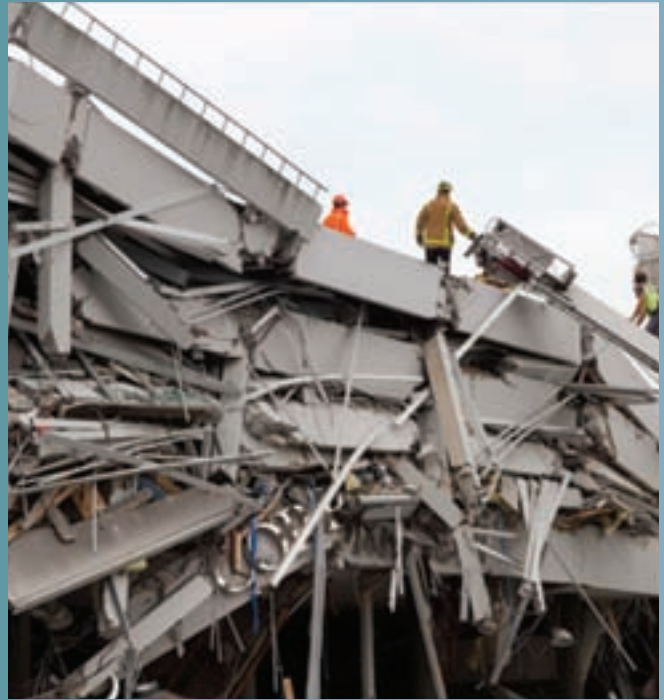
NATIONAL RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS AND TERRORIST ATTACKS

The New Zealand Fire Service (NZFS) has 440 stations and some 8,700 firefighters responding to around 73,000 calls a year. In the last six months Christchurch (New Zealand's second largest city) has been struck by two significant earthquakes. These were the largest incidents that NZFS had responded to in 20 years: after the first quake fire crews officially dealt with over 1,100 incidents in the first four days.

NZFS has nationwide jurisdiction. Its command and control system is also used by the nation's police, and its data linked to its ambulance service, allowing event information to be shared between the three agencies, in realtime. The single national system – which uses Intergraph's I/CAD software – also complies with local requirements.

On both occasions the system (situated in Christchurch) held up well, enabling agencies to respond swiftly and decisively. 'Interoperability of the I/CAD system ensured that all responding agencies could see a common operating picture,' said NZFS assistant national commander and NZFS communication centres director Ian Pickard.

'Our command structure, support systems, equipment, training, professionalism, teamwork and desire to help all meshed together to provide the public with a first-class response.'



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