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This circular is	<b>For guidance</b>	No response required	
This circular is	<b>Relevant to the National Framework</b>		
Status	<b>This document explains the arrangements that should prevail between coastal Fire &amp; Rescue Services and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.</b>		

# *Maritime Resilience and the Role of the UK Coastal FRS's*

## Issued by:

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**Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate**

## Addressed to:

**The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority**  
**The Chief Executive of the County Council**  
**The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority**  
**The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue Authority**  
**The Commissioner of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority**  
**The Chief Fire Officer**

## Please forward to:

**Maritime Lead Officers**

## Summary

This document has been produced following national consultation with CFOA and in conjunction with Circular 2005/1095 and explains the arrangements that should prevail between coastal Fire and Rescue Services and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency within the United Kingdom. This document supercedes DCOL 9/1992; Item 14 - Firefighting at Sea and the 'Memorandum of Understanding between the MCA and Fire Service on the Arrangements for Firefighting, Chemical Hazards, and Rescue on Vessels at Sea'.

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this circular is to codify the arrangements which generally prevail between coastal fire and rescue services (FRS) within the United Kingdom and those agencies having statutory responsibilities for dealing with maritime activities (e.g. Port/Harbour Authorities; Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)).
- 1.2 There currently exists two Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) between the MCA and the Fire Service in relation to (i) at sea and (ii) coastline operations (reaffirmed July 2002).
- 1.3 There are 62 separate FRS's of which 39 (See Appendix A) have a 'prominent' coastal risk including extended estuarial waters, sea lochs, large ports and busy harbours. These coastal FRS have a duty to make provision for firefighting purposes within areas of water which are located inside their local statutory boundary.
- 1.4 The UK has 10,500 miles of coastline and its Search and Rescue Region (UKSRR) covers an area of 1.25 million square miles.
- 1.5 FRS response to vessels in distress "at sea" (through either fire or chemical release) has been subject to policies and procedures determined locally, and only where an authority has raised a general concern for the travelling public. As a result such independent responses have often been susceptible to local political and budget pressures
- 1.6 In 1998 the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) Operations Committee set up a joint working party to review firefighting at sea operations, a key recommendation from the report was 'that a national response should be based around the widest involvement facilitated by collaborative arrangements'.
- 1.7 A CFOA Marine Operations Networking Group (CFOA MOG) was also introduced in 1998. Lead officers from all coastal FRS's and other agencies still regularly attend meetings that promote the development of supporting UK maritime resilience.
- 1.8 A number of these FRSs have now made an agreement with the MCA and formed the UK FRS Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG) to provide a response to aid SAR organisations in dealing with incidents on vessels and structures deemed to be 'at sea'.
- 1.9 The MIRG maritime resilience strategy does allow teams to be deployed to incidents other than 'at sea' in support of all coastal FRS within their statutory boundaries subject to request via MCA (HM Coastguard) and agreement between the relevant Chief Fire Officers.
- 1.10 HM Coastguard will not request the services of non MIRG FRSs to deal with incidents 'at sea' as they (the Coastguard) need to be assured that all responding teams have been trained and equipped to the same national standard. These standards have been developed nationally with those FRSs forming the MIRG.

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**1.11** The information herein should invoke mutual support and agreement for operational response where there is risk to life or high environmental risk for which firefighting, chemical hazard intervention may be required.

**1.12** This circular is made pursuant to the relevant reinforcement Orders for FRS's in England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Island States, the Isle of Man and Northern Ireland. It also supports the MCA principals in relation to the UK National Plan for Marine Pollution from Shipping and Offshore Installations (NCP). A Glossary is provided in Appendix B.

## **2.0 Role of the FRS**

### Responsibilities

**2.1** Under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 fire authorities in the UK are required to make provision for firefighting purposes in their area. The FRS also has powers that enable their resources to be used outside their statutory boundaries.

**2.2** A pragmatic approach using a risk assessed procedure in accordance with the MCA Categorisation of Waters has been adopted for coastal FRS's. Further details can be found in Fire Service Circular (England) 35/2004.

**2.3** The Chief Fire Officer of the lead 'Assisting Authority' or his/her authorised representative shall have sole charge and control of all FRS resources and operations at any "At Sea Incident".

**2.4** Where the Affected Coastal Authority is not a MIRG FRS then it will be the responsibility of the lead Assisting Authority, as requested by HM Coastguard, to confirm the request for assistance to the acceptance of the Affected Coastal Authority and at the same time keep HM Coastguard advised.

**2.5** Under Section 45a (i) of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 the safety of the ship 'at sea' rests with the Master/Captain and owner.

### Formal Agreements/Mutual Aid

**2.6** Reinforcement schemes and arrangements for the discharge of functions by others may be adopted where specialisation and high training commitment is essential to maintain safe working practices. An example of this would be the provision of personnel trained to UK MIRG standard.

**2.7** It is under the terms of these reinforcement schemes and in partnership with the MCA that the MIRG resources may be available to assist 'non MIRG FRS' in the event of a serious incident 'within' that Affected Authorities area.

**2.8** Some FRS may have in place local resources (e.g. fireboats) and agreements with regards moving personnel and equipment for local support plans within their statutory areas. These may be called upon to assist at any stage of an incident.

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## FRS Tasking

- 2.9** HM Coastguard will not request the services of non 'MIRG' Fire and Rescue Services to deal with incidents 'at sea'. See 1.10.
- 2.10** All tasking for helicopters and seaborne assets will be coordinated by HM Coastguard. Further details can be found in Fire Service Circular (England) 53/2005.
- 2.11** Arrangements for any craft to transport firefighting, chemical hazard, and rescue teams to vessels at sea should provide for retention of that support/safety vessel on scene to support the teams, act as an operating base, and to provide a safe means of egress in the event of evacuation of the stricken vessel.
- 2.12** A MIRG FRS may request a non MIRG FRS, due to local demographics, to send a 'liaison officer' to the nearest RCC to act as Fire Liaison Officer (FLO). This person should be fully conversant with the roles of the liaison officer. Guidance in relation to this role has been issued by the MCA to all coastal FRS in February 2006.

## **3.0 Role of other agencies**

### The Maritime and Coastguard Agency

- 3.1** The Maritime and Coastguard Agency ("MCA") has a statutory duty under the Coastguard Act 1925 to initiate and co-ordinate civil maritime Search and Rescue (SAR) within the United Kingdom Search and Rescue Region (UKSRR). This may extend to other waters in bordering search and rescue regions. This includes the tasking, mobilisation and organisation of adequate resources to incidents on the cliffs or shoreline of the United Kingdom.
- 3.2** The operational branches of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency include HM Coastguard (HMCG) and the MCA Counter Pollution Branch (CPB)

### HM Coastguard

- 3.3** HM Coastguard is responsible for the co-ordination of incidents at sea.
- 3.4** The Coastguard Co-ordination Centres, known internationally as Rescue Co-ordination Centres (RCC), need to be aware of all events in relation to the incident. Particularly important is the movement of Search and Rescue, SAR, resources and those people on/leaving the casualty vessel/structure.

### MCA Counter Pollution Branch (MCA CPB)

- 3.5** The MCA Counter Pollution Branch (MCA CPB) discharges the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Transport in dealing with major spillages of oil and other hazardous substances from ships which threaten UK interests.
- 3.6** The Unit is the competent national authority as required by the Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation Convention, 1990, and has statutory responsibility under the Merchant Shipping (Salvage and Pollution) Act 1994.

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- 3.7** The MCA response to major chemical hazard incidents is contained within the MCA National Contingency Plan. Details of which may be found on the MCA website ([www.mcga.gov.uk](http://www.mcga.gov.uk))
- 3.8** The MCA CPB and FRS may be able to offer each other mutual assistance during incidents. It is envisaged that both may provide, upon request, expert advice.

#### Port and Harbour Authorities.

- 3.9** By agreement all dock areas, ports and facilities are currently seen as being within the FRS statutory responsibility. Therefore there is a requirement for local authority FRS operations to take place within these areas, and complete reliance is placed upon this response. Calls for FRS assistance within these areas will normally be raised via the Harbour Authority – not the Coastguard. The Coastguard may however be kept advised.

#### Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)

- 3.10** The RNLI provides lifeboat cover around the coast of the UK and the Republic of Ireland including the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.
- 3.11** Their declared commitment, and therefore primary task, is to reach casualties in 30 minutes within a 10 mile radius of the lifeboat station, and provide lifeboat cover to virtually all areas out to 50 miles within 2 hours 30 minutes in fair weather.
- 3.12** The RNLI resources should not be integrated into any formal FRS preplanning as they may not be available due to their primary tasking role, but could be available subject to each individual circumstance.

#### Ambulance

- 3.13** The Ambulance Service has responsibility for co-ordinating the on-site National Health Service response and determining which hospitals(s) to which injured people should be taken. With regard to on land this is generally above the Mean High Water Mark.
- 3.14** By local arrangement specific requests for Ambulances Services assistance beyond this boundary may be met by individual Services on moral or humanitarian grounds. Where NHS Ambulance Services have entered into a local commitment to attend incidents outside their statutory areas of response they should adopt good practice to enable them to function efficiently and safely at all times.

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## 4.0 Contact Details

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**Keith Ring**

**Fire and Resilience Directorate**

## List UK Coastal FRS

Avon	Jersey*
Cheshire	Kent*
Cleveland	Lancashire
Cornwall*	Lincolnshire*
Cumbria	Lothian and Borders*
Devon	Merseyside
Dorset	Mid and West Wales*
Dumfries and Galloway	Norfolk
County Durham and Darlington	North Wales*
East Sussex*	North Yorkshire
Essex	Northern Ireland
Fife	Northumberland*
Gloucestershire	Somerset
Grampian	South Wales
Guernsey*	Strathclyde*
Hampshire*	Suffolk*
Highlands and Islands*	Tayside
Humberside*	Tyne and Wear
Isle of Man	West Sussex
Isle of Wight	

\* Identified as UK FRS Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG) team.

## Glossary

A vessel at sea	Includes those which are afloat, aground or at anchor in tidal waterways or on the shore, but excluding those alongside established docks or jetties, and those for which provision is made within harbour, port, or river emergency or contingency plans.
At sea	At sea is defined in Fire Service Circular (England) 35/2004 – Issued 13th September 2004 entitled ‘IRMP – Firefighting and Rescue Operations at Sea’.
At Sea Incident	Any emergency situation which is declared by the MCA to the Chief Fire Officer of the Affected Coastal Authority, or his/her authorised representative, to be an emergency situation requiring powers to be exercised by a Fire and Rescue Authority under Section 20 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (England).
Authority	Any local or combined authority which is responsible for fire and rescue services in the United Kingdom the Isle of Man and the Channel Island States.
Affected Coastal Authority	Any Authority in whose “Seaward Area” an “at sea incident” occurs.
Assisting Authority	An authority that supports a MIRG team, providing assistance in accordance with the MCA/MIRG agreement;
FRS Liaison Officer	The FRS Liaison Officer will act as the link between the FRS and the other services to facilitate effective communications and response.
RCC	The Rescue Coordination Centre – the international maritime ‘generic’ term referring to a Coastguard Coordination Centre. Known locally within the UK as MRCC – Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre.
Seaward Area	Means the geographical area as determined by the local offices of the MCA.
Structures	For the purpose of this document a structure does not include oil and gas production/storage platforms.