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Aerial Fire Fighting Conference Europe 2015

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EVENT REVIEW This year's Aerial Firefighting Europe 2015 was held in Zadar, Croatia on April 29-30, 2015. Terry Loughran, conference chairman, reports on the proceedings.

The European Aerial Firefighting Conference 2015 was preceded by a one-day interoperability workshop hosted by Professor Dr Johann G Goldammer, director of the Global Fire Monitoring Centre, which functions as the Secretariat for the International Fire Aviation Working Group (IFAWG) and the Wildfire Preparedness Mechanism (IWPM).

The event was held in Croatia because the National Protection and Rescue Directorate (DUZS) and the Croatian Air Force Aerial Firefighting Squadron volunteered to provide a comprehensive dynamic and static flying display.

The general director of DUZS, Dr Jadran Perinic delivered the keynote address, setting out Croatia's need for an effective AFF capability, coordinated with the Ministry of Defence through the AFF Squadron commanded by the Major Davor Turkovic. The squadron regularly responds to wildland fires in neighbouring Bosnia, which lacks the resources to protect its own infrastructure.

This cross border assistance paralleled the workshop goals of mutual support through out-of-area deployments, which depends upon interoperability; ready diplomatic clearance; ease of communication; commonality of aircraft servicing facilities; and detailed operational elements (such as access for scooping water).

The IFAWG is contributing through fire aviation guidelines and an early draft of a framework document. IFAWG is staffed by volunteers and is now opening membership to suitably experienced operators and organizations. [Email the IFAWG Chairman Richard Alder, at: \[general.manager@nafc.org.au\]\(mailto:general.manager@nafc.org.au\) for more information.](#)

EU civil protection mechanism

A particular detriment to interoperability has been the absence of an appropriate tasking authority which could result in, for example, Croatia responding to a request from Portugal.

The Emergency Response Coordination Centre operates within the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department and it has been set up to support a coordinated and quicker response to disasters both inside and outside Europe using resources from 31 countries participating in the Union Civil Protection Mechanism. The ERCC replaces and upgrades the functions of the previous Monitoring and Information Centre.

In a timely presentation that generated the greatest number of questions, Dimitrios Pagidas, DG of the ECHO Emergency Response Unit, speaking on the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, presented on the Commission's Implementing Decision of 17 October 2014 which replaces ad-hoc responses with a planned approach.

Heralding a culture of prevention and preparedness the ERCC will build upon predefined capabilities. Key to this will be the establishment of a European Response Capacity with the essential elements of interoperability; self-sufficiency; dispatch at very short notice; and finance for training and exercise.

The new legislation will establish a European emergency response capacity consisting of a voluntary pool with buffer capacities to address temporary shortcomings in extraordinary disasters (co-financed to 40% of the standby costs) and with seed funding for new response capacities in very specific situations where a potentially significant gap has been

identified.

The voluntary pool will consist of pre-committed response capacities for EU missions with the assistance assured through quality criteria and a certification process. In return for this commitment, Member states benefit from financial support for adoption costs and transporting the capabilities. This promises to be a valuable advance in both the quality and availability of assets, and while the EU is not renowned for rapid response, several deployments have already been made using this process.

Presentations

As a legacy of the war, Bosnia is hampered by a complex arrangement of internal governments together with the added complication to firefighting operations caused by land mines.

Macedonia has relatively limited aviation (Department of Aviation Assets was established in 2010) and as yet is still challenged by too many factors and a mutual lack of appreciation of the roles, capabilities and procedures of air-and-ground forces. Professor Dr Nicola Nikolov (director of the Regional Southeast Europe/Caucasus Fire Monitoring Centre based in Skopje, Macedonia) gained much inspiration from the Spanish Air Force's presentation on communications management.

Captain Chico Chamon, visiting with Spain's Bombardier 415 Superscooper, highlighted the various roles and responsibilities including the priority for ground crew safety. Elsa Enriquez Alcalde, Head of the Spanish Forest Fire Service outlined the numerous helicopter assets under her control and used through Spain's 17 autonomous regions.

In turn Victor Devouge of the French Ministry of Security gave a comprehensive briefing on French capability and AFF doctrine today, and the ambitious plans for a renewal of their fleet, buffer funding from the EU and the vision of a joint European AFF centre of training and excellence.

There were many international contributions about new initiatives. The experience of the Australian state of Victoria's 'Black Saturday' in 2009 still shapes AFF in that country and the conference was briefed by Operations Officer Wayne Rigg on the Royal Commission's recommendation to establish a system that enables the dispatch of aircraft to fires in high-risk areas without requiring a request from an incident controller or the state duty officer. The subsequent pre-determined dispatch of aircraft has shaved 22 minutes off response time.

Unfortunately firefighting operations prevented Andrey Eritsov – Russia's deputy chief of the Aerial Forest Fire Centre – from attending in person but his report was delivered by co-author Johann Goldammer, who took the opportunity to update on current fire activity in Siberia.

Malaysia has significant jungle cover and is relatively well prepared for AFF and fire superintendent Faisal Izani is in the market for additional air assets. However the country is constrained by a political decision to have a Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Arm (MMEA) with responsibilities that seem to overlap with other government forces. The MMEA owns CL 415s which are then loaned for aerial firefighting.

From still further East was Takeshi Ito, head of a section of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, which has carried out advanced modelling on the dispersal of water droplets with a view to assisting pilots, a valuable step in the effective deployment of water in fire fighting.

A welcome return presenter was Sawsan Boo Fakhreddine, the director general of the Association for Forests, Development and Conservation, a not-for-profit NGO which has specialised in forest fire management in the Lebanon since 1992, where due to security problems aerial firefighting is the responsibility of the Lebanese army and air forces. Their challenges, however, paled alongside those of the country in general with its 1.4 million refugees.

Sponsors and exhibitors

Principal sponsor Dyncorp International delivered a presentation on US next-generation fire fighting airtankers. Its partner Wayne Coulson talked about using the latest technology in Next Gen Smart Tank Control Systems, (the Coulson RADS-XXL Technology). Mounted in a Coulson C130, this meets the USFS mandated requirement for existing military aircraft and is under contract for the coming fire season.

Silver Sponsor INAER, part of the Babcock International Group, is a provider of aerial emergency services including firefighting. Former major general Antonio Urbano outlined its fleet of some 350 CL 415s operating throughout Australia, Cyprus, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

Silver Sponsor Hugo Arceo of Air Tractor presented the key factors to success in firefighting with the AT802 plane in both the land and scooping versions.

SAAB's Henrik Naslund, an analyst of pilot requirements presented on heads-up displays contributing to safe and efficient aviation.

Conference dinner and flying display

During the conference dinner the annual Walt Darran Award for the finest contribution to aerial firefighting in the past year was presented.

In a challenging shortlist of finalists, categories were as varied as firefighting in war zones, selfless rescue of isolated ground firefighters, as well as leadership in procedural developments and technical developments.

Philippe Bodino, now serving in the French Ministry of the Interior, won as the outstanding aerial firefighter of his generation.

The highlight of any AFF Conferences are always the dynamic and static displays. With CL 415s flown in from Spain, France and Italy and the full complement of Croatia's fixed and rotary wing on display with live water bombing and heli-rapelling, Major Turkovic had every right to be proud of both his own squadron and his comprehensive planning.

Summary

With 200 delegates from 33 countries and with 30 companies participating, it was apparent that many nations are thirsting for knowledge on procedures and safe and effective action.

The next Aerial Fire Fighting Conference will take place in North America in 2016 and will be back in Europe in 2017.

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