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contents

News	
News	4
Editorial Advisory Panel	9
Incident reports	
Denmark's fireworks blast	10
CFO Henrik B Hansen reports on November's fireworks factory explosion in Kolding, in which one firefighter died and several others were injured	
Quake rescues in Japan	12
Last year, Japan experienced typhoons, heavy rains and mudflows, as well as a devastating earthquake in October, writes Yoshihiko Ishikawa	
Rescuers killed in Bangkok	15
Thai authorities are attempting to tackle illegally modified buildings after a fire caused a building to collapse, killing several rescue workers, says Tony Oliver	
Madrid terror attacks	16
Joaquin Saez Murcia describes the March 11, 2004 terrorist bombings on Madrid and outlines the lessons learned	
Underground duct blaze	19
An underground cable duct fire at a cement factory was a particularly demanding incident for emergency responders, says Richard Baker	
Asian tsunami	
Can lessons be learned?	20
S K Dogra, Director of Tamil Nadu Fire and Rescue Services, introduces this special section looking at the impact of the Asian tsunami, as experienced by those who actually responded to the event	
International assistance	22
Toni Frisch presents his observations on the massive international response to this disaster	
Emergency response in Thailand	24
Thailand's response to the tsunami attracted both praise and criticism and its government has been frank about what parts worked and what areas need to be improved upon, writes Laura Wilshaw	
Crisis management	26
R Santhanam outlines governmental rescue and relief operations in Tamil Nadu	
Military assistance	28
The army, coast guards and the navy were directly involved in rescue and relief efforts, writes Commodore Thaiy Hari	
Fire Service operations	30
Divisional Officers in charge of the more severely affected areas of Tamil Nadu share their experiences and observations	
From relief to rehabilitation	32
Mr Thirupuggazh shares his observations on disaster management capacity building and long term reconstruction	



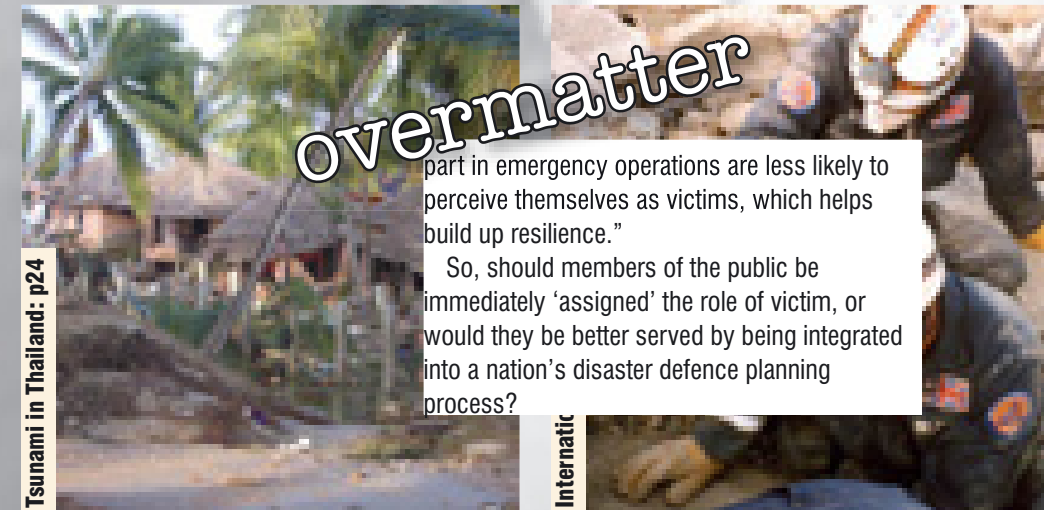
Japanese earthquake: p12



Madrid terror attacks: p16

Features	
Integrated disaster response	34
Emily Hough interviews Elie van Strien to find out more about how the Netherlands is ensuring greater overall co-ordination and co-operation between its Police, Fire and EMS services	
Leading for our future	37
It is possible to run a large Fire Service, both on and off the fireground, with an extremely flat structure and traditional fire staff will respond positively to true empowerment and trust, says Mike Hall	
A command system for all agencies?	40
Arnold M Howitt and Herman B 'Dutch' Leonard say that some shortcomings must be addressed to avoid failure or incomplete adoption of America's national emergency response system	
Adapting to new threats	43
Adi Moncaz contends that the threat of modern terror means that emergency organisations must adapt their risk management methodology, organisation and operational methods	
Public partners	46
Singapore's well known community-based disaster preparedness programmes have been greatly expanded to confront today's new security threats, according to Daniel Seet of the country's Civil Defence Force	
Epidemic – a case study	48
As the provider of emergency ambulance and paramedic services, Hong Kong Fire Services Department was in the front line in the battle against SARS, write Lam Chun-man and Leung Shi-hong	
In-depth	
International rescue teams	50
In this second part of the series, John Holland and Mark Wilson North of RAPID UK, look at the requirements for a response mechanism, including equipment requirements and standards, disaster search dogs and operational support	
Chemical and biological issues	54
In part II of this series, Michael J Powers examines likely scenarios, saying that nations' response capacities must become better integrated	
Vehicle rescue	57
The second part of this series focuses on liaison between Fire and Rescue Services and the Police, writes Seth Armstrong	
Elements of preparedness	58
Gunnar J. Kuepper examines the evolution of disasters and draws the most important elements of preparedness, response and recovery in order to formulate comprehensive strategies for disaster prevention and mitigation	
Partners' page	45
Gore	
Why Royal Berkshire chose Airlock	

front cover picture (and p20): Vasily Titov, NOAA Tsunami Programme



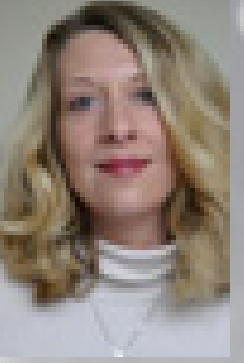
Tsunami in Thailand: p24

overmatter

part in emergency operations are less likely to perceive themselves as victims, which helps build up resilience.”
So, should members of the public be immediately 'assigned' the role of victim, or would they be better served by being integrated into a nation's disaster defence planning process?

comment

THE CONTENT OF this issue ranges from reorganisation, regionalisation, and integrated command, to incident reports on Madrid's train bombings, severe weather, and earthquakes, as well as a study of the SARS crisis in Hong Kong. We also have a full section on the Asian tsunami of December 26, 2004.



Whatever the form and nature of the various crises and emergencies in this issue, one subject is particularly striking: Is a vital resource being overlooked? Should the public's role be more participatory – and formalised as such – during times of major emergency?

After the tsunami struck, while governments were attempting to assess the damage and mobilise their response forces, the first on the scene were members of the public, who assumed an immediate rescue role. One village in Tamil Nadu suffered far less casualties than its neighbours; this is attributed to emergency training its population had received just a few weeks prior to the disaster.

After the Madrid train bombs went off, the author says: "The people [...] helped the emergency services in many ways and collaborated with a great deal of laudable solidarity."

Without doubt, well meaning assistance and involvement by unqualified and untrained people can cause problems for the professional emergency services. But is restricting or denying public involvement in fact a disservice? Making the public a partner through training and organisation, as Israel and in Singapore, can pay great dividends, and not just in terms of response efficiency. As Adi Moncaz says on page 43: "Members of the public who take

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