

# London's response to 7/7

**David Donegan** explains how De Boer's mobile mortuary solution is so swift and efficient that the UK Home Office recommended the company to the US authorities following Hurricane Katrina



**T**HE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 changed the world forever. After the grief and shock had sunk in, major cities around the world realised they needed to update their disaster management plans or, in some cases, begin designing new ones.

The overall responsibility for emergency response to a major crisis in the UK capital was given to London Resilience. Working alongside the emergency services, armed forces, local authorities, hospitals, utility and transport companies and central government, London Resilience was charged with the task of preparing for any disaster which could affect the city, be it a natural disaster such as a pandemic, an accidental event such as a plane crash, or a terrorist attack involving the use of chemical, biological or radiological weapons. It was the author's responsibility as Deputy Director to lead the development of a range of new capabilities and, in partnership with others, to consult, liaise, prepare, design and ultimately implement the capital's response to a crisis. On July 7, 2005, those plans were put to the test.

In drawing up the Mass Fatalities document, London Resilience needed to define clearly which organisation was responsible for which role. It was vital no gaps were left if a seamless plan to deal with 500 or more fatalities was to be developed. The author needed to source everything from body bags and transport to personnel and storage, but it was the need for large mortuary space that proved among the most problematic issues.

It soon became obvious existing mortuaries would not be able to cope with a large scale crisis. We needed blue-sky thinking. We decided temporary structures were the way forward. Quick to erect, modular, portable and highly flexible – they became an obvious choice, and De Boer became an obvious supplier.

Based in Northamptonshire in the UK, the company had already completed several contracts for the Metropolitan Police. De Boer had proved it could provide a re-locatable building almost anywhere in London within a few hours' notice.

De Boer offered a managed solution,



*The temporary mortuary was set up near Moorgate Underground Station in central London*

working with sub-contractors to create different environments required by different sections of a mortuary like temperature control, security, privacy, power, lighting, water and waste facilities. The company thoroughly understood our requirements and was able to meet exacting specifications.

## PLANNING

The De Boer team spent months visiting permanent mortuaries and attending meetings with London Resilience to suggest a suitable structure and interior design to replicate the facilities they had seen. The unit needed to accommodate everything from post-mortem facilities to family areas and from body storage to canteen and office facilities.

When the bodies of British residents killed by the Asian Tsunami in 2004 were flown back to the UK, De Boer was commissioned through London Resilience to provide extra space at Fulham mortuary in south west London. It proved the plans in place could work and where they could be improved.

Six months later on July 6, 2005, a document arrived at De Boer's UK headquarters finalising what had been agreed for a future crisis response. Within 24 hours the plan was being

realised and implemented with the creation of a temporary mortuary in the grounds of the Honourable Artillery Company near Moorgate Underground Station in central London.

The four suicide bombers killed 52 people and injured more than 1,100. Detective Chief Superintendent Rick Turner was appointed Senior Identification Manager to make sure the dead were identified speedily and accurately. Within a week of the bombings he had 400 staff working in the mortuary, some of his team remained on site until December.

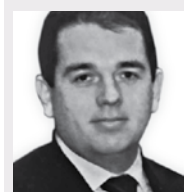
Rick Turner says: "The rapid response structure was excellent. We had letters from bereaved families praising the building and the pathologists said the facilities were the best in the country. It was also secure and permitted complete privacy."

John Barradell, Deputy Chief Executive of Westminster City Council, also praised the response effort. He said: "The staff went far above and beyond the call of duty in response to this emergency. They helped ensure that the response was swift, efficient and, above all, sensitive. The proactive, efficient and positive approach by De Boer was outstanding."

De Boer was subsequently recommended to the US authorities by the UK Home Office to provide a massive temporary morgue in the New Orleans area following Hurricane Katrina. **CRJ**

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