

Working towards a resilient UK firefighting response



Work on the FiReControl project to provide the English Fire Service with the first nationally networked communication system is now under way. Project Director **Roger Diggle** from EADS Defence and Security looks at how the technology will enhance firefighting response

IT IS NOW 24 MONTHS SINCE THE UK

Government awarded the £350m (\$528.8m; €389m) FiReControl project to EADS Defence and Security. The project is part of a £1bn (\$1.5bn; €1.1bn) programme by Communities and Local Government (CLG) to increase the resilience of the English Fire and Rescue Service and support them in responding to major emergencies including terrorist incidents, natural disasters and industrial accidents.

SECURE AND RESILIENT

FiReControl, which will be rolled out by 2010, is part of our approach to delivering tailored, secure and resilient networked solutions to address the challenges confronting the emergency services, homeland security units, Government and the armed forces.

I am a relative newcomer to the project, having taken over as Project Director two months ago. I am pleased to be involved in something that could potentially save lives and significantly enhance the country's Critical National Infrastructure.

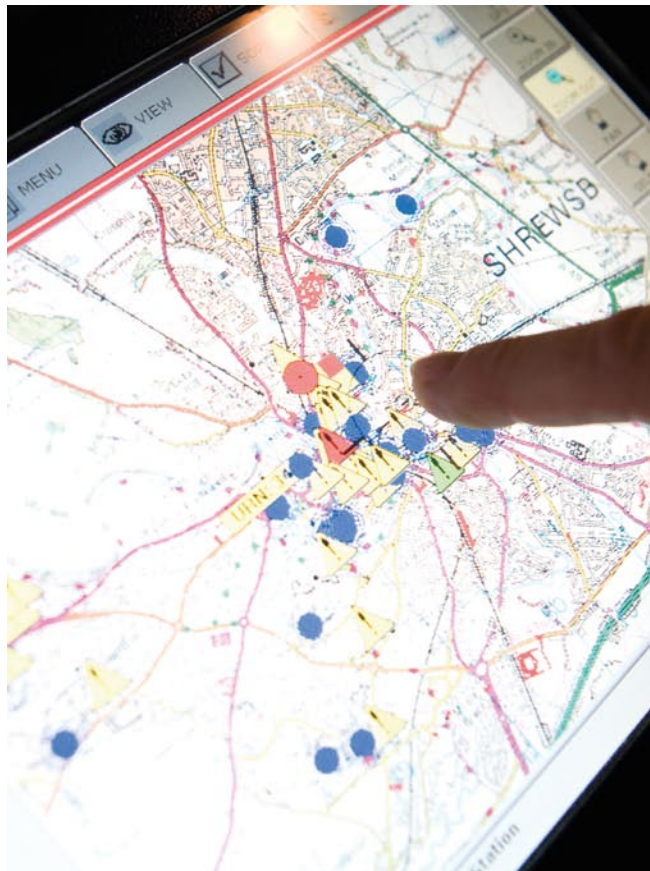
FiReControl will see the setting up of an integrated network of nine Regional Control Centres (RCCs) that will all be linked and can automatically back each other up in times of increased call pressure or failure.

It will play a vital role in capturing and preserving local knowledge and enhancing

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the overall emergency response by allowing control rooms to draw on centrally held data, such as road names, local landmarks and other information relating to any risks that might threaten the safety of firefighters. This might be the location of a chemical factory, narrow road or location of a railway crossing.

In the past, the local data was often



A mobile data terminal will vastly improve the responders' knowledge of the area using GIS mapping and centrally held data on the locality: including real time information

memorised by control room staff and so the new solution will be an important step forward in ensuring all staff have access to the same vital information. During times of peak demand, calls will be transferred to the next available RCC and so this centrally held data will enable control room staff from across the country to have access to the same information and to deal with emergency calls quickly and effectively.

Other main features include caller location and system positioning equipment in appliances that will allow the RCCs to determine which fire appliances are closest to the incident. Where roads have no names, the GIS and mapping data will provide enough detail for a

control room operator to question the caller and mobilise to that location as appropriate.

The system will enable staff to mobilise the nearest available appliance. Mobile data terminals will provide fire crews with valuable real time intelligence to allow them to respond.

In an environment where lives are at risk and the stakes are high, there is no room for error and EADS DS is working to a strict service level agreement which sets a target of keeping the system up and running for 99.9 per cent of the time.

Central to the project is the Integrated Communications Control System (ICCS) – a fault tolerant version of a telephone exchange that manages calls into the RCCs. The ICCS is tried and tested technology provided by Frequentis, which will co-ordinate activity on a national basis. It will manage calls into the RCCs and ensure that emergency calls are routed through to the region in which the call originates.

When calls are received into the RCCs, control room staff are provided with the exact caller location to enable them to appropriately deploy resources according to demand.

INVOLVEMENT

We are conscious that our remit goes beyond being technology providers and that a key aspect of our role is to work with the end-users to provide them with a solution they are happy with and make them feel involved in the process. As a result, I am making it a priority to spend the coming months seeking as much involvement and feedback from fire service personnel that will enable us to provide a cutting edge communication service that will make the UK the envy of the world. **CRJ**

AUTHOR

Roger Diggle is the Project Director for FiReControl, a UK Government funded initiative by EADS DS to improve the communication of the UK Fire and Rescue Services