

LONDON FIRE

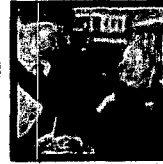
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Press release

London co-ordinates rescue response

Press release: PR017/04

Date: 12 May 2004

Specially trained and equipped fire crews from across the UK are heading to Glasgow to support Strathclyde Fire Brigade in the rescue operation following the Maryhill plastics factory blast.

The response south of the border is being coordinated by London Fire Brigade to provide back-up to Strathclyde and firefighters from other Scottish brigades in the continuing search for casualties. An eight-strong team from London and specialists from the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service are on their way to Scotland. Crews from Tyne and Wear, Leicestershire and Greater Manchester are already at the scene.

It is the first time that new national support arrangements for major incidents have been put into practice in this country, although teams have flown to earthquake zones overseas including Turkey.

The Glasgow-bound crews are among the specialist teams who have trained in advanced urban search and rescue techniques in Texas.

The crews will use new equipment designed to improve the emergency services' ability to respond to major disasters, issued under the Government New Dimension programme. They will be at the scene to support the rescue operation from 6pm.

Eight London specialists are flying by helicopter from RAF Benson, while a specially equipped urban search and rescue vehicle from London's Battersea fire station, is heading to Glasgow by road. It carries search equipment and specialist heavy cutting, breaching, breaking and shoring gear.

Special dogs, trained to detect trapped casualties, were flown by helicopter from Lincolnshire to support dog teams already at the scene, including those from Leicestershire fire and Rescue Service.

Specialists from, Lancashire, Hampshire, Kent, Essex, Mid and West Wales, Sussex West Midlands, Northern Ireland and

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South Wales fire and rescue services are also standing by.

The arrangements, to support and relieve firefighters at the scene, were made overnight. The rescue operation is expected to last several days. A specialist senior officer from London will act as an adviser to support coordination of the continuing rescue operation.

London Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning Ken Knight said: "The trained urban search and rescue teams going to Glasgow will support the continuing rescue operation at this major incident.

"It highlights the value of the national arrangements made for coordinating the response to major incidents and the fact that the UK now has teams trained in the specialist techniques needed at this kind of incident. The factory explosion is a terrible tragedy for the city and the response by our colleagues at Strathclyde has been professional and impressive.

"We are glad to be able to support them in this way - and we all know that should the need arise, we will be able to count on their experience, and that of fire and rescue specialists around the country if we are faced with a similar situation."

Note to editors:

By the end of May, 277 operational staff from London will have been trained in structural collapse and urban search and rescue techniques by Texas Task Force 1 trainers at the Federal Emergency Management Agency training site at Texas A&M University. The intensive 10 day training course, supported by a pre-entry tool skills course at the Fire Service College, has been funded by the ODPM and the LFB.

National support arrangements have already been put in practice overseas.

Members of the media can obtain further information from the press office on:

tel: 020 7587 4063/4064/4065
fax: 020 7587 6086
email: press@london-fire.gov.uk

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last updated: 2007-03-06

The scandal behind Glasgow's factory fire

A MASSIVE blast last week destroyed a four-storey factory in seconds. Nine workers at Stockline Plastics in Maryhill are dead and 40 others have been maimed or badly injured. The carnage happened in a densely populated part of Glasgow. It has stunned the city.

This tragedy could have been prevented. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) served a notice on the factory owners in February 2000. It called on ICL Plastics, the parent company, to improve safety for employees exposed to hazardous chemicals. Laurence Connelly has worked there for ten years. He says this accident "was waiting to happen".

For two years he has been "creating a stink and complaining to the HSE about the misuse of chemicals". But the bosses made his life a misery and branded him a troublemaker. He even called the HSE a week before the accident but got no reply to his complaint. Yet last Tuesday lunchtime an industrial gas oven exploded. Near it were stored large barrels of highly flammable cleaning fluid and bags of flammable plastic coating powder.

Dr Charles Woolfson, head of the European Centre for Occupational Health, Safety and the Environment at Glasgow University, says, "Explosions of this magnitude occurring in a densely packed area raise questions about the control of industrial hazards. Clearly there's been a failure of safety management. That is a matter of deep concern."

This is not the first time that ICL Plastics has dealt in death. A few years ago Channel 4's Dispatches programme revealed the Maryhill factory was exporting electric shock batons and torture equipment to China and other repressive regimes - equipment that had been banned in Britain.

The Maryhill explosion was caused by the relaxation of proper planning controls, the deregulation of safety legislation, and the encouragement of union busting by the Labour government and a Labour-controlled council