

Helicopter Fire Fighting Project

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Objectives

The objective of this pilot project is to accomplish for the interest of the EU Member States a worthwhile and feasible introduction of helicopter fire-fighting to supplement the existing tools of the fire service. The project is conducted by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (Crisis Management and Fire Services Department) with the participation of the National Police Agency's Aviation Authority (PLD), the Netherlands Fire Service Association (KNBV), the Netherlands Institute for Fire Fighting and Emergencies (NIBRA) and the Board of Commanders of the Regional Fire Agencies (CCRB).



Description

Traffic congestion, places that can be difficult accessed (high-rise fires, shipping accidents), stricter environmental standards and various other problems the fire service is facing, require new solutions. New technology plus experience in Canada, the US and Japan show clearly that helicopter fire fighting is a top-quality, affordable tool for the fire service. Helicopter fire fighting could be a valuable addition to the set of fire fighting techniques used in European countries. In the Netherlands the infrastructure and organisational situation make a trial project with helicopter fire fighting most relevant for the following reasons:

- The Netherlands is the third most densely populated country in the world. This puts great pressure on its infrastructure. The urban conurbation in the west of the country known as the Randstad with its high-rise buildings is a match for the US and Japan. Helicopter fire fighting is already effective in fires from the fifth storey up.
- The development of new, biodegradable and hence environmentally friendly additives to the water used for extinguishing fires, combined with spraying technology, allow water to be used more efficiently, leaving less waste water as a residual product.
- The police and fire service are working more and more closely together. The police aviation authority, under the auspices of the fire service, is capable of carrying out helicopter fire fighting. In this context the police aviation authority already provides several

support services for the fire agencies. Examples include transmitting live aerial pictures of disaster sites to crisis centres and aerial monitoring.

- Schiphol, where the police aviation authority is established, is the ideal location to base a fire fighting helicopter. The entire Randstad (high-rise) and a large section of the IJsselmeer lake (fires on floating objects) can be reached in an average of 10 minutes.
- Helicopter support is already a well-known phenomenon in the provision of emergency aid. The trial with the accident & emergency (AE) helicopter is proceeding reasonably successfully and shows that technology and improvement in quality can go hand in hand.
- Last, but by no means least, technology plays a major part. The seat of the fire is tackled specifically using infrared heat sensors, whilst IFEX technology provides a maximum extinguishing effect. The restrictions on helicopters imposed by the weather have been reduced; the possibilities for night use are improving considerably.

As mentioned above the general objective for the trial period is to accomplish, for the interest of the member states, a **worthwhile** and **feasible** introduction of helicopter fire fighting to supplement the existing tools of the fire service.

Worthwhile means that it can be demonstrated in a qualitative sense that fire fighting and accident & emergency services benefit from helicopter fire fighting. Take, for example :

- swifter and hence more effective fire fighting;
- reduction in damage from fire fighting (less water damage, more effective deployment);
- reduction in pollution of the environment (less water, less harmful additives);
- fewer injuries and increase in the working safety of the fire fighters;
- and together with these qualitative advantages, there is the associated financial advantage.

Feasible means that helicopter fire fighting can be fitted organisationally and financially into the organisational and financial structure of the fire service and police aviation authority. The basic principles for this are :

- increasing overall safety by police and fire service working even more closely together ;
- creating support, both in society and in the professional organisations, for the introduction, of new environmental and helicopter fire fighting technology;

- an even more effective use of available resources by linking the support services to the needs of the fire agencies. It is not merely the use of water jets, but the broad support of the fire service with the facilities provided by the police aviation authority. These include detection, transport, lighting the disaster area, and other tasks.

The main activity consists in the preparation and setting-up of a trial phase of 18 months (or 15 deployments) in order to examine whether, and if so how, helicopter fire fighting as an additional support service provided by the police aviation authority can be fitted into the fire service's operational tools for high-rise fires. The final outcome of the project will be an evaluation report with conclusions and a series of recommendations regarding the possible introduction of helicopter fire fighting. This will include a video tape with concrete information about the deployment of the helicopter in real situations.