

# VectorCommand systems run major pan European flooding exercise

With the subject of massive coastal flooding in the news following the cyclone and storm surge in Burma, the issue of how to improve the effectiveness of multi-lateral, multi-agency response during major disasters has been given huge prominence once again. The EU FloodCommand project is an 18-month pilot programme established to develop, test and validate improved protocols, procedures and technology for responding to major coastal flooding and other catastrophes.



EU FloodCommand Support System was used to manage and deploy multi national module deployments from four different countries in support of a simulated coastal flooding emergency in Bulgaria

A major international coastal flooding response exercise, linking emergency command centres in the UK, Sweden, Ireland and the Netherlands, was run in April by VectorCommand, the UK based emergency command technology and training company. The exercise took place as part of the EU FloodCommand programme, set up to improve pan European coastal flooding cooperation and supporting technologies. EU FloodCommand is a project grant supported by the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism and VectorCommand

Using VectorCommand's Command Support System for command and control, and its Training and Exercising System for exercise management, emergency command centres in the UK, Sweden, Holland and Ireland were able to work together in real time to coordinate a joined up, module-based response to a simulated tsunami in another EU member state, in this case Bulgaria. Simulated deployments of rescue modules (made up of helicopters, rescue vessels, personnel and supporting services and logistics) were all conducted using the advanced asset management and command and control features within the Command Support System.

## The modules concept

The modules concept has been developed and tested within the EU FloodCommand project, with the object of making the multinational EU wide response to emergencies faster and more effective. While the modules concept and the EU FloodCommand Support System were developed for improving the response to coastal flooding, they can also be applied to manage response to other types of emergencies such as inland flooding and major wildfires.

Coastal flooding from a North Sea tidal surge represents one of the most serious threats to life and prop-

erty facing the UK, Holland, Belgium and Germany. In 1953 a tidal surge in the North Sea killed 1835 people in the Netherlands, 307 in the United Kingdom, and 28 in Belgium. The equivalent of £5 billion worth of damage was caused in the UK alone. A similar major tidal surge nearly overwhelmed flood defences in the eastern United Kingdom, Germany and Holland in November 2007, and there is also a growing threat from rising sea levels caused by climate change.

## Exercise participation

Senior personnel from coast guard and emergency management organisations and government departments in the UK, Ireland, Sweden and the Netherlands, along with representatives from nine other European countries, all participated in the exercise,

working from command centres in their home countries as well as in the simulated recipient nation command centre based at VectorCommand's headquarters in Hampshire. Exercise management was run within VectorCommand's Training and Exercising System, with exercise injects such as simulated TV news broadcasts and flooding updates being activated simultaneously to all the command centres throughout Europe using web connections.

The complex issues of how to offer and prepare emergency response force modules, made up of helicopters and boats, transport them to the recipient nation, and deploy and coordinate them in a recipient nation suffering from all the infrastructure disruption that would be expected following a major inundation, were all explored during the exercise, with VectorCommand's Command Support System being used to improve communications and integrate all aspects of resource command, control and communications.

Rod Stafford, the project chairman, said, "The challenge of maintaining high levels of data exchange over diverse networks across multiple national boundaries was amply illustrated during the exercise, but the system's resilience to variable communications networks ensured that no data was lost and enabled operations to continue at a high tempo.

"Valuable lessons were learned by all participants in the exercise, and these lessons will be incorporated into future pan-European emergency planning.

"The Command Support System proved itself able to support the coordination of multilateral, multi-agency operations while overcoming the challenges of interoperability traditionally associated with such interventions."

**EU FloodCommand** ([www.eufloodcommand.eu](http://www.eufloodcommand.eu))

**VectorCommand** ([www.emergencycommandsystem.com](http://www.emergencycommandsystem.com))



Contingent commanders from maritime search and rescue and emergency organisations from Sweden, the UK, Ireland and Holland meeting in the simulated 'Bulgaria' command room where the EU FloodCommand Support System was used to manage in country deployment