

Case Study : Exchange between Southwest and Northwest Europe – An illustration of the benefits of international exchange and the provision of specialist knowledge for wildfire

Following a severe wildfire season in the UK in 2003, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) identified that it did not have the knowledge and understanding of wildfire to safely and effectively manage wildfire incidents. Initially, NFRS sought assistance from other Fire and Rescue Services in the UK. However, NFRS quickly identified that all Fire and Rescue Services in the UK were in a similar situation and that there was a need both locally and nationally to import knowledge from the international wildfire community.

NFRS began approaching wildfire organisations around the world to exchange knowledge and good practice and made contact with Wildfire Specialists working for the Catalanian Graf Bombers (CGB) in Spain. Knowledge was exchanged through a variety of means, including the organisation of exchange visits between Northumberland and CGB. The CGB specialists provided extensive advice and support which helped NFRS to develop an understanding of the wildfire environment and an understanding of the local wildfire environment within Northumberland. NFRS was then able to develop and enhance its strategies for managing prevention, preparedness and response to wildfire incidents. The CGB also provided NFRS with copies of training systems and materials that were subsequently adapted and adopted for use within Northumberland and, subsequently, more widely throughout the UK.

Having established an understanding of wildfire, NFRS began promoting a national agenda for wildfire through its work in developing National Operational Guidance for Wildfire Incidents and National Occupational Standards for Wildfire Training. NFRS was also instrumental in helping to establish important national stakeholder groups for wildfire, including the England and Wales Wildfire Forum (EWWF) and the Chief Fire Officers Association's (CFOA) Wildfire Group.

While initial contact with the CGB enabled NFRS to make significant advances, NFRS was aware of the benefits of further developing a network of international partners with which it could continue to exchange information and expertise. Working in partnership with the CGB, NFRS organised a number of exchange visits with wildfire organizations around the World. NFRS's involvement in these exchanges helped to establish NFRS's position within the global Wildfire Community and helped to increase opportunities to participate in further exchanges and in a range of international collaboration projects.

From 2007 onwards, NFRS has been approached by a number of international fire and rescue services seeking to improve their training, policies and procedures for wildfire incidents. NFRS has provided support and training, and has exchanged information and experience, with Fire and Rescue Services in the Republic of Ireland and Denmark.

In a relatively short period of time, the assistance and support provided by the Catalanian Graf specialists has enabled NFRS to develop an understanding of its wildfire problems and to begin to implement significant improvements. The importation of knowledge from a few specialists has resulted in a significant cascade of knowledge to NFRS, to other agencies in the UK and to other international organizations. The CGB acted as a gatekeeper for NFRS for international knowledge on

wildfire, and NFRS is now able to support other organizations by being playing a role within an informal global network of wildfire specialists.

Source and further reading: The Global Fire Monitoring Center GFMC / International Wildfire Preparedness Mechanism IWPM <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/iwpm/International-Wildfire-Preparedness-IWPM-Brief.pdf>

