

Incident Command Training delivered with Kiwi ingenuity

Nigel Richards, the manager of simulation training for the New Zealand Fire Service, has responsibilities for training fire service commanders serving a population the size of a large English county. The challenge arises because the officers requiring training are spread throughout an area larger than the size of the entire United Kingdom.

With a relatively small population scattered over a large area, the New Zealand Fire Service faces a considerable challenge training its 1700 full time and 8000 volunteer firefighters. The solution? Kiwi ingenuity, in the form of a fleet of three command training buses that are in constant use throughout the year delivering command training to over 2500 officers.

Driven to each of 8 fire regions, where they stay for up to three months before moving on to the next location in the schedule, the vehicles allow the New Zealand Fire Service's National Training Department to deliver consistent, doctrine-based training to over 2,500 officers around the country each year. In so doing, the New Zealand Fire Service has become one of the world's most active users of the Tactical Command Trainer - Fire system, as well as the Team Trainer extension and the Training and Exercising System.

The Mitsubishi Fuzo is the vehicle that was chosen by the service to deliver incident command training to communities throughout the country. These are staffed in the different regions by local command trainers, part of a team of 24 nationwide. Trainers are operational officers who have undergone specialist training on the Tactical Command Trainer - Fire system, after which they 'shadow' experienced trainers for around 6 to 8 months, learning how to optimise their use of the system in live training sessions. They are then allowed to go solo.

Intensive Training

Basic training for career firefighters is done on an intensive 12-week residential course at the National Training Centre in Rotorua. This covers not only traditional firefighting subjects but also other skills required of a modern professional fire and rescue service such as urban search and rescue (USAR), motor vehicle extrication and hazardous materials.

Competition is high for career positions in the New Zealand Fire Service, with large numbers of applicants, often in the thousands, going through a rigorous selection process for the 25 vacancies on a recruit course.

The majority of the manpower available to the New Zealand Fire Service is the 8000 volunteers, however, who receive no payment for their time or labour. Professional career firefighters are primarily available in the cities and large provincial towns, and in some cases are supplemented by volunteers from other urban and urban-fringe fire brigades.

Volunteers come from all walks of life and are trained for their role with a seven-day residential recruit course, normally at the National Training Centre (NTC) based in Rotorua. Under these circumstances, with such a high level of volunteers, it is essential that incident command skills are raised and maintained at a high level, to prevent loss of life from accidents.

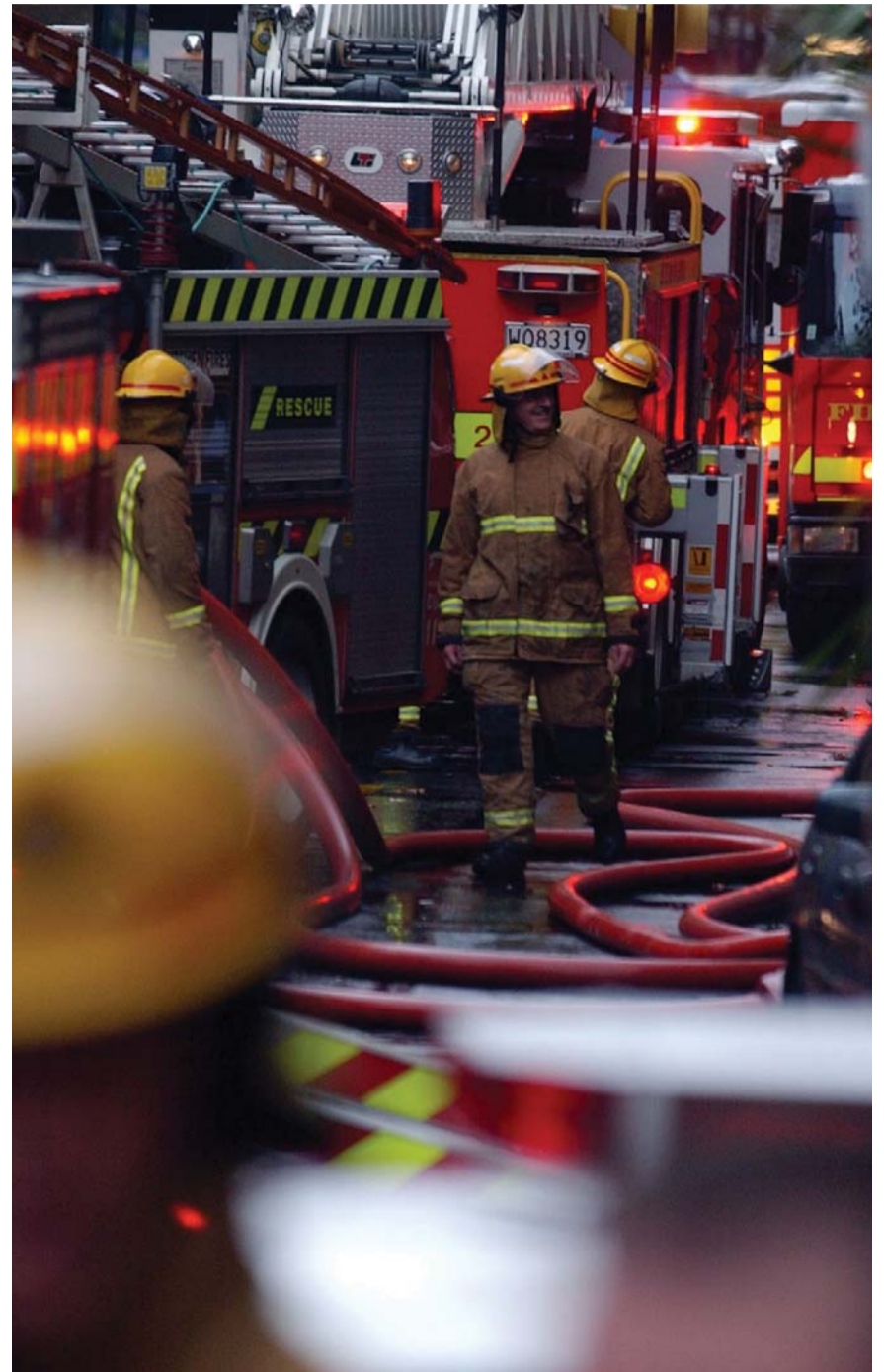
Incident Management

The New Zealand Fire Service follows the incident command doctrine known as CIMS (Coordinated Incident Management System) and the Command and Control Technical Manual. The New Zealand Fire Service was one of the key developers of the Coordinated Incident Management System, which is now in widespread use throughout the NZ emergency services environment. This provides for a common set of terminology and procedures which lends itself to use in multi-agency incidents. The system shares many principles in common with the UK Fire Service's Incident Command System.

Managing emergencies with Incident Management Teams is an approach the New Zealand Fire Service shares with all other members of AFAC (the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council), all of whose members use the Tactical Command Trainer - Fire system and the Training and Exercising System, with locally customised variants).

IMT is an approach to major incident management that provides for training and deployment of staff in specialist roles - Operations, Planning and Logistics - working within Incident Management Teams. The New Zealand Fire Service uses Wildfire and Tunnel scenarios in the Training and Exercising System. Three Team Trainer Heads are utilised to create multi-sector scenarios in Tactical Command Trainer - Fire to exercise numerous officers in the virtual fire ground.

The New Zealand Fire Service's Training Centre is soon to undergo further expansion of its Rotorua facilities, with an enhanced training suite being considered for development. Nigel Richards is very pleased with his mobile training solution, however, and the results achieved by the New Zealand Fire Service prove the value of this highly innovative approach.



'A fleet of three command training buses is in constant use throughout the year, delivering command training to over 2500 officers.'

Top: New Zealand firefighters in action, Queen Street, Auckland;

Below left: One of 3 command training buses;

Below right: Candidate and Facilitator stations within the buses.

