

Conclusions of the workshop

The discussion held at the closing session of the workshop brought up a number of useful comments, observations and conclusions.

The discussion started with questions about the possibility to define, even roughly, the level of efficiency of fire suppression forces. This would be very useful for presuppression planning and for dispatching of forces at the time of the fire.

The questions posed soon brought up the difficulties that exist in such an effort. These questions ranged from “*how effective is the kind of attack that forces are doing*” to the need for an exact definition of the term “*initial attack*”. Furthermore, the question about the accuracy of information on which to base dispatching decisions was raised, and the benefits of using aerial images from the area of the fire in support of dispatching was proposed as a very useful tool.

In the end there was agreement about

- The importance of improving our knowledge in regard to the effectiveness of firefighting resources.
- The difficulty of collecting information and the general scarcity of data and studies.
- The existing differences between countries which may be attributed to a multitude of factors (different vegetation and environmental conditions, tactics used, combination of means, etc.) that create difficulties in characterizing the effectiveness of firefighting.
- The difficulty of communicating information due to different environments, organization schemes, and even terminology. This makes it difficult to extract quantitative information from free-form descriptions of specific fires (case studies).
- The need for obtaining better information on
 - Firefighting efficiency and effectiveness of various means (aerial, ground)
 - The operational limits of various resources (especially aerial) in regard to dispatching, and the official restrictions
 - The limits of safety.
 - The best method to make decisions
 - Available data sources and tools for the dispatcher and the optimum way of using them.

Proposals for ways to overcome these difficulties included:

- Analysis of the parameters that lead to these differences and design of specific data forms that will be used in all the countries, in order to create a common data base for dispatching

- These forms should be followed by development of a common terminology and finally common ways of describing the conditions (e.g. fire danger index).
- Establishment of a direct communication line between operational centers of Southern Europe, supported by the European Commission, to exchange and discuss such information
- Further to the above, establishment of a focal point that will collect and distribute the information and will develop the databases.
- Development of European criteria for mobilization in case of request for firefighting resources from one country to another. This subject mainly refers to aerial means and is directly connected to the establishment of a European Rapid Intervention Civil Protection Unit.

In conclusion. the workshop contributed, through the presentations, the case studies presented, the questionnaire that was circulated and the analysis of its results, the final discussion and certainly through the volume of proceedings, to:

- Better understanding of the factors that affect the outcome of initial attack in connection with the size and mix of the initial attack forces required.
- Description (with certain priorities) of the information needed by the dispatcher in order to make more effective decisions
- Documentation of some quantitative examples of past fires, response to them and results obtained so that "lessons learned" could be drafted

Compiled by Dr. Gavriil Xanthopoulos, with contributions by Mr. Ernst Schulte, Dr. Kalli Saini, Ms. Helena Martins, and Mr. Seamus Murphy.