

AGENCIES NAIL DOWN FIRST JOINT TRAINING EXERCISE

A recent multi-agency training exercise with a difference in County Down, which involved RNLI volunteers and lifeguards, the Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Ministry of Defence and the Coastguard was the first of many events planned for the coming year.

The exercise on Saturday 9 September saw Newcastle RNLI volunteers put their various skills to the test with RNLI lifeguards, Newcastle and Kilkeel Coastguard teams and the PSNI, based on and around the shoreline at Ballykinler Army Camp, Co. Down.

The scenario centred around a two-vessel collision, with both survivors and deceased passengers being located in Dundrum Bay and on the shoreline. Newcastle Lifeboat Station's two vessels – the all-weather Mersey-class lifeboat, the Eleanor and Bryan Girling, and the station's D-Class, the Eliza – took part in this multi-agency exercise.

According to Newcastle RNLI's Lifeboat Operations Manager, Lisa Ramsden, the crews found the event beneficial on different levels, including networking, team-building, shared learning and, as always, a beneficial training exercise.

"Each crew member used the day to the best of their abilities, practising their search and rescue skills, first aid casualty care training, and boat handling or crew skills.

"This was a tremendous success and a great way of getting

an insight into the highly specialised work of the departments within the PSNI who participated in the training exercise," she explained. "We look forward to future joint training exercises," she added.

JOINT-OPERATIONAL LEARNING

Around 12 months ago the local police force in Newcastle liaised with colleagues in Newcastle RNLI station to identify an opportunity for some joint-operational learning.

"We realised that if the worst happened and a fatality at sea occurred then it would most likely fall on the RNLI crew to take on the arduous job of recovering the remains back to the shore, to be handed over to the PSNI," noted PSNI's Constable Phil Quinn, who was the Director of the exercise.

"It was agreed that the PSNI would supply familiarisation training to the RNLI to help them prepare for such an eventuality. However, as the training package developed we realised there was a potential to run this as a full-scale rescue. With the welcome help from many outside sources, we were able to



Photographs courtesy of Huw Morgan.



deliver this multi-agency, multi-faceted approach."

Led by the PSNI's Body Recovery and Identification Team and run from the beaches of Ballykinler Training Centre, Co. Down, the collision between two commercial vessels was simulated within Dundrum Bay's inner area.

An emergency call was then received to say that a small cruise liner had stuck a fishing vessel and sank immediately with a total loss of life, and that the fishing vessel was sinking.

Newcastle RNLI responded and provided a search and rescue function on the water while the PSNI provided the land search. "We utilised assets from Air Support to provide an overview of the crash scene and direct the land and sea crews onto possible casualties, while the Search and Rescue team worked alongside the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to co-ordinate the search," Constable Quinn noted.

"The Body Recovery and Identification Team gathered evidence, located and recovered the 'deceased' while establishing a temporary holding and auditing area.



UNIQUE TRAINING EXERCISE

Quinn, who is a member of the Down Neighbourhood Policing Team, described the multi-agency exercise as "a unique opportunity for the PSNI to work with their partners in the maritime sector to co-ordinate a mass casualty incident from point of collision through to final recovery.

"It gave us an insight into where the difficulties may arise in the transition process from the complex working environment of the sea to the non-complex environment of the shoreline."

He said the exercise would not have been possible without the help of "the military to gain access to their camp, the Northern Ireland Sea Cadets who provided us with two ridge-inflatable boats and a number of walking wounded casualties and to SurviTec Group in Dunmurry. They donated an inflatable emergency life raft that simulated the sinking of the fishing trawler and added an additional degree of difficulty for rescuers."

He said it's just the first of many planned exercises in the coming year, and looks forward to applying the valuable learning from this exercise in future deployments.

