Preparing to manage 999 fire calls across the East Midlands

State-of-the-art communication equipment is being installed at a regional centre that will start handling 999 calls for the fire and rescue service in less than 18 months' time.

A giant 7m x 4m screen, capable of displaying maps and live pictures from an incident, is the focal point of the Control Room where staff will receive and manage 84,000 emergency calls every year. Behind the screen lies a wealth of technology that will give Control Room Operators instant access to the information and knowledge they need to call the right experts and equipment to the incident, no matter where it is.

Nine Regional Control Centres (RCCs) are being built across England, and the East Midlands centre in Castle Donington, Leicestershire will be one of the first to ‘go live’ under this new Government initiative. Over the next two years, the existing control rooms in Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Northampton and Nottingham will gradually come together in this brand new building.

The centres have been designed to streamline and synchronise the 999 control room functions of all fire and rescue services across England, providing a co-ordinated response to national disasters such as terrorist incidents, widespread flooding or a major fire on a similar scale to Buncefield. Staff will operate the same equipment, they will work to the same procedures, they will have access to the same information and their systems will be networked.

The first county to transfer its calls to the East Midlands RCC will be Derbyshire in May 2011. This will be followed by Leicestershire and Rutland (July 2011), Nottinghamshire (November 2011) and Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire (transferring together in January 2012).
Planning the training for staff who will work at the RCC has begun, and two highly experienced Control Room Supervisors have been seconded from existing fire and rescue services to develop and deliver the training that will be needed.

Staff who are transferring from an existing Control Room will receive six weeks of full-time training before they take any calls; any new starters appointed will have an additional two weeks’ training. This training will be standard across all nine RCCs that make up the national network and will be piloted before it is rolled out to staff.

Paul St Clair, Regional Control Centre Director, said: “We have a lot of work to do to make sure we will be ready to take 999 calls from the public, but we are making good progress towards our targets.

“Our Control Room Operators will have highly sophisticated technology at their fingertips to provide all the information they need to manage an emergency call. The appointment of our two Training Advisors is a positive step forward in developing a high quality and comprehensive programme of training and continuous skills development for every one of them.”

The RCC building is already in constant use for meetings, briefings, training seminars and workshop events. Other activities taking place to prepare the centre for opening include:

- establishing terms and conditions of employment for new employees, and developing policies and procedures for the RCC;
- keeping Control Room staff in the five fire and rescue services and their union representatives up-to-date with developments;
- matching existing staff who wish to move to the RCC with available positions;
- liaising with the national project team and the company which is building the technological solutions which will support the Control Room function;
- testing the equipment and systems.

Cllr Darrell Pulk, Chair of East Midlands Fire and Rescue Control Centre, said: “Staff working at our centre will have access to a vast amount of information that will help them to manage all emergency calls efficiently, effectively and to a very high standard.”
“People who live, work or travel in the East Midlands can be reassured that they will be looked after by a team of highly trained professionals, who will be part of a national network of skills and expertise, that will give vital support at times of high demand.

“This kind of resilience will make us stronger, and our service to the public can only be improved as a result.”

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For further information about this article, for an electronic version, or for photographs to illustrate, please contact:

- Liz Reeson, Communications Advisor, East Midlands Regional Control Centre, on 0115 967 5889, or email elisabeth.reeson@notts-fire.gov.uk