



KEES KAPPETIJN

Zippering towards successful collaboration

Perceptions of the organisation of safety, the availability of emergency response capabilities and ambitions in safety policy within government and industry are often one-sided. Companies are seen as investing minimally in safety, implementing only what regulations require, postponing maintenance until demand the following year, and treating training as something that must be earned. Governments, on the other hand, are perceived as constantly creating new rules with additional administrative burdens, increasingly interfering in business operations, and appointing a new civil servant for every development in the safety domain. Both views are highly exaggerated and driven by prejudice, stemming from a lack of understanding of 'the other' and insufficient communication.

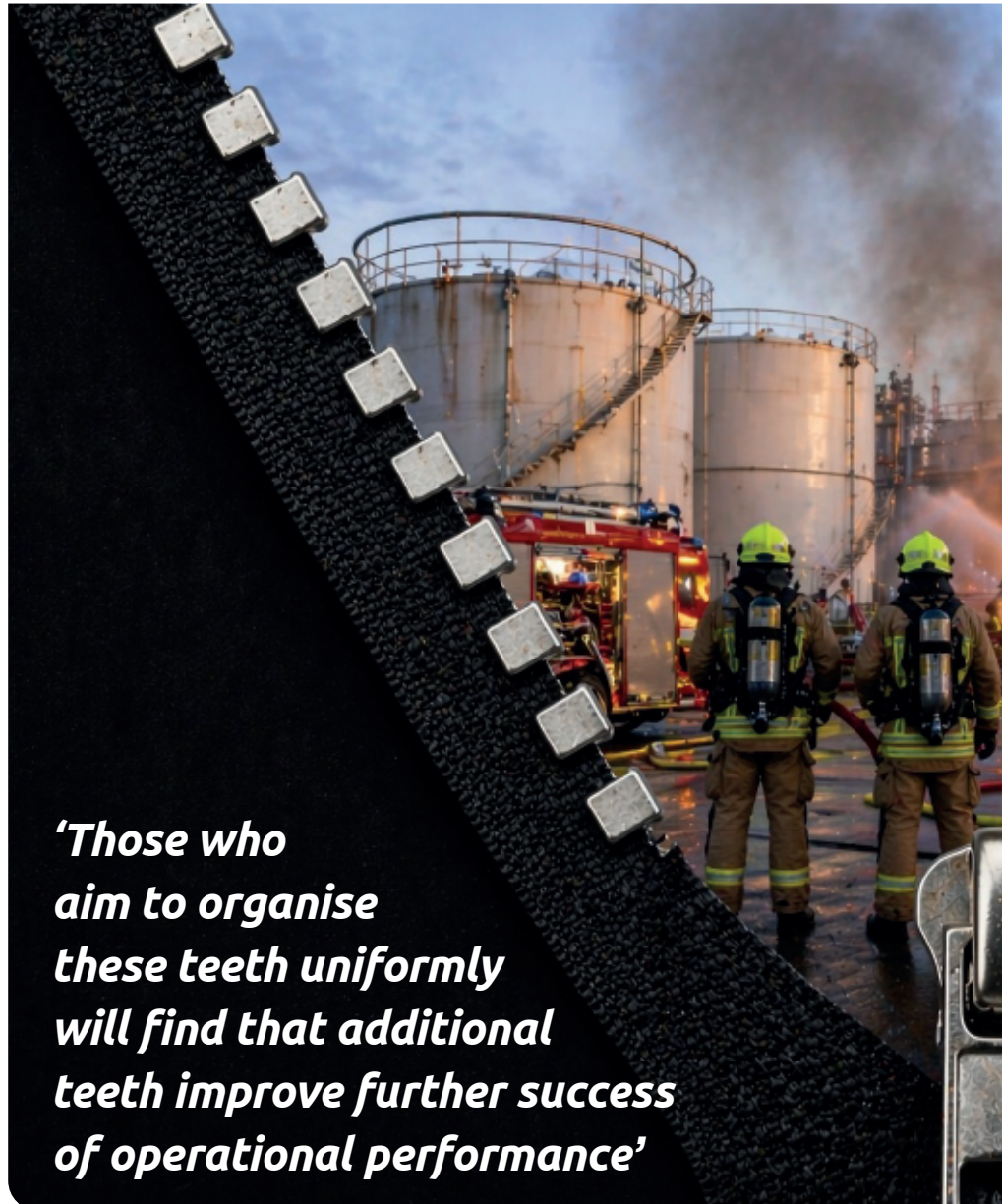
Companies with specific risks, valuable assets and products, and often unique processes have a strong interest in robust safety policies, effective systems and procedures to prevent incidents, well-trained personnel capable of acting as emergency responders, and properly functioning equipment. The same applies to government: setting rules and ensuring compliance is their primary instrument to guarantee a (largely democratically desired) level of safety in society. When circumstances demand it, public emergency services must be able to operate in increasingly complex and hazardous environments. This requires training, equipment and standards.

Both sides often invest substantially in what is needed, driven by business interests and societal expectations. However, insufficient attention is often paid to coherence when making these investments. The coherence that is almost always required during incidents: incident

response demands collaboration. As an industrial incident escalates, cooperation becomes essential. Company fire and rescue teams and local public emergency services must work together to achieve an effective response, aimed at control, restoration of business continuity,

and to restore order in the public domain. To enable this collaboration during incident management, cooperation in the preparatory phase is essential.

Think of it as a zipper: government and industry each hold one side, and the teeth of the zipper represent the themes



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both sides must address safety and emergency response. Vehicles with equipment, suppression systems, tools and ICT. People who must be educated and trained, equipped with clothing, PPE and communication devices. An organisational concept for operations, including roles, command structures, alarm and escalation procedures, working protocols and codes. When an incident occurs and both sides must collaborate, the zipper must be closed quickly and effectively. This requires not only the availability of the elements mentioned above, but also a high degree of uniformity. A zipper with round teeth on one side and square teeth on the other cannot be closed. Where collaboration is required, the teeth must be uniform. The exact shape matters less, as long as both sides can connect.


In addition to uniformity, simplicity

is also an important principle for the zip. A zipper with too many teeth, even if some are uniform, will function sub-optimally at best. A simple zipper with uniform teeth is preferable to a complex one with varying shapes.

In ports and industrial areas around the world, there are Public Private Partnerships in which companies and governments collaborate extensively in firefighting, hazmat response and rescue services. Examples include the Joint Industrial Fire Services in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, the Schelde Firefighting Network in Port of Antwerp, Channel Industries Mutual Aid in Houston, and the Sohar Emergency Response Organisation in Sohar. These are organisations where the zipper can fully be realised. Where such extensive cooperation is not yet feasible, a shorter zipper can already be beneficial.

The following themes are important starting points for achieving uniformity of the teeth:

- **Alarm procedures:** Uniform procedures for alerting and escalation within both companies and public services, with particular attention to gate management when external units arrive at a site.
- **Communication:** Communication systems that enable effective interaction between teams during an incident.
- **Command structures:** Operational structures with equivalent command and control systems, allowing response teams and leadership structures to align.
- **Key roles:** Clarity on and alignment of key roles within the response organisations of companies and emergency services.
- **Compatibility of key equipment with water supply:** Equipment from both companies and authorities used in fire and spill scenarios must be able to connect to firefighting water supplies.

Collaboration between industry and government: a zipper with at least five teeth. Those who aim to organise these teeth uniformly will find that additional teeth improve further success of operational performance. The strongest zipper is the one with as many uniform teeth as possible. Alignment and communication in the preparatory phase are key. And for a fact: mutual introduction, acquaintance and sharing of experience significantly determine the successful outcome of an operation. 

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