

# The best of both worlds

A recent conference on mutual aid outlined the benefits to governments and industry from public-private partnership models, write Kees Kappetijn and Philip Stohr.

**M**utual aid through public-private partnership is a great way for government and industry to organise and run a large-scale firefighting or safety organisation. This was the message that came out of the conference held by Kappetijn Safety Specialists on the 29 June 2017 in Rotterdam.

The location was fitting because the port of Rotterdam has been home to a public-private partnership involving six industrial and two voluntary fire stations for 20 years, but the international line-up of speakers also outlined existing models from the Netherlands and around the world, demonstrating that mutual aid organisations can come in many different shapes and sizes.

## Different models

Safety specialist Kees Kappetijn organised the conference. He explained that there are some convincing arguments for taking a collective approach, which include where a government mandates that companies that fall under a certain high-risk category must maintain their own corporate fire brigade. These require high levels of preparedness, effectiveness, and facilities to prevent escalation of incidents, and therefore also require considerable resources on the company's side in terms of money, equipment, manpower, preplanning, and specialised education and training.

If multiple high-risk companies find themselves in each

other's vicinity, often with urban settings nearby, a mutual aid construction, whether or not this takes the form of a public-private partnership, can be a desirable solution.

The Netherlands is home to many such partnerships already. The port of Rotterdam has its Unified Industrial Fire Department, the metropolitan area of Amsterdam-Schiphol has Amsterdam-Ymond Mutual Aid, and the chemical cluster Chemelot in Geleen has the collective and specialised firefighting corps of Sitech. As Kees Kappetijn pointed out, there are many more great examples of cooperation between companies or between government and industry in the field of firefighting, all of which have very different organisational structures and governance models.

What these organisations have in common is a shared goal: intelligently organised, specialised fire services for on- and off-site incidents. Despite this, these organisations are still mostly locally active and bound to the companies that founded them. The question is whether they could be deployed in other areas in The Netherlands, if and when necessary.

Around 60 representatives from firefighting corps, municipalities and businesses discussed the question of how government and industry can effectively combine their powers when confronted with fire scenarios that only happen once in a blue moon, but that do require heavy-duty extinguishing materials and trained specialists.

## Unified Industrial Fire Department

The conference offered Jan Waals, director of Rotterdam's Unified Industrial Fire Department, the opportunity to look back at 20 years of collective fire and rescue services in the Rotterdam-Rijnmond area. His organisation covers all fires, spills and incidents in the area, whether in urban surroundings, along transport routes or at refineries, chemical facilities and tank storage.

In 1998, the Rotterdam municipality, the Rotterdam-Rijnmond fire brigade, and the high-risk industry in the port of Rotterdam signed an agreement to create a joint public-private firefighting corps. The organisation started with just over 30 corporate members, but has since expanded to 67. There are now more than 300 employees (of which 250 plus are firefighters), six professional fire stations and two voluntary ones, and between them they are responsible for the fire

Above:  
Tank firefighting in  
Europoort.  
Below:  
The Unified  
Industrial Fire  
Department protects  
the companies in the  
Port of Rotterdam.





Train yards that handle chemicals are examples of areas that require industrial fire service protection and could benefit from mutual aid organisations.

cover in an area of over 12,000 hectares that includes large urban clusters in Pernis, Rozenburg, and Hoogvliet.

Besides industrial fire and public aid services, the Unified Industrial Fire Department also provides services during large-scale tank and bund fires. The industrial firefighting pool (IFP) was established specifically for that purpose in 2006. It is equipped with specialist materials that are designed to combat extremely large fire scenarios at a number of UIF-member companies.

Deploying these resources elsewhere in the country if requested is theoretically possible, but runs into some practical hurdles. This is because as soon as the IFP responds to an emergency somewhere else in The Netherlands, the companies that pay good money to have these materials available to them will lose coverage for a considerable amount of time. Due to the complexity of the logistics and the required time to set up and break down the materials, this could easily stretch into a couple of days.

Other specialist industrial bodies also struggle with this and the conclusion was that nationally deploying such specialised, heavy-duty firefighting facilities is not as easy as it may seem.

### The role of the Port of Rotterdam

The Port of Rotterdam as the harbour authority was one of the initial members of the Unified Industrial Fire Department in 1998. Alan Dirks is the programme manager for policy and planning at the port of Rotterdam, and he explained that although the role of the Rotterdam port company regarding fire services in the area may be small, his organisation as harbour managers benefitted greatly from having an effective firefighting organisation tuned to a high-risk profile.

'Every day 175,000 people work in the area, many at the 100 plus Seveso companies. An important requirement for attracting multinationals to the main port is offering them a stable area to settle in. No large company wants to settle in a region where the safety is sub-par and where incidents are not adequately handled. The UIF, with its up-to-date materials, trained specialists, and quick response times offers such companies safety in a dynamic area. I am wholly convinced that the collective fire care model we offer is much cheaper than having to individually comply with the rules and regulations.'

### Mutual aid in Kennemerland

It is apparent that more and more authorities are realising the use and value of public-private partnerships in the Dutch field

of safety. Theo Weterings, mayor of Haarlemmermeer, is also chairman of the board of the Kennemerland Safety Region. He was the governmental keynote speaker at the conference, with his safety authority participating in no fewer than three large mutual aid partnerships.

Weterings described the agreements between the safety authority and Tata Steel that have resulted in independent deployment up to the level of medium-class fires, with mutual support should anything escalate.

Similarly, the Schiphol fire brigade used to be solely for aircraft firefighting, while the fire responsibility in the terminals and other buildings on site was assigned to the governmental fire brigade. This seemed illogical so Schiphol, Haarlemmermeer, and the Kennemerland Safety Region decided to expand the set of tasks of the Schiphol fire brigade to include the buildings on site.

Over the last few years, this set of tasks has expanded even further to include the industrial fire care required by AFS (the gas station for airplanes) and KLM (maintenance services).

### The Swedish model

An interesting example of how mutual aid could work was presented by Per Brännström, managing director at the Swedish Slacksmedelcentralen (SMC).

Sweden has nationally mandated a cooperative structure for government and industry to cover the risks of extremely large industrial fires. Apart from chemical companies, refineries, and tank terminals maintaining their own corporate fire brigades, there is also a national pool for equipment and vehicles – the SMC – for tank and bund fires.

'The industries that are unified in SMC, finance and manage the materials and supply the necessary training and education, while the operational execution is placed with four selected governmental fire brigades: Malmö, Göteborg, Stockholm, and Sundsvall. From these locations, we can deploy specialised heavy-duty extinguishing materials anywhere in Sweden within an hour and a half to four hours.'

The SMC structure is a good international example of a nationwide public-private mutual aid system for large-scale firefighting and was educational for the Dutch representatives who have yet to take that big step. But the fact that public-private partnership and mutual aid have a future became increasingly clear during the conference. It is the ideal formula for organising firefighting tasks that require heavy-duty, valuable, and specialised materials that are rarely used but have to be guaranteed to be available.

Mutual aid in public-private partnerships is also a smart cooperative structure to promote safety both on the private companies' sites and in the public domain. It is a win/win situation for everyone concluded Kees Kappetijn.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

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