

# Mutual Aid initiative in the Amsterdam harbour to start in 2020

Recently, in the seaport of Amsterdam, the foundations have been laid for a new firefighting organization with a special character. The Amsterdam-Amstelland fire service, the Port of Amsterdam harbour authorities and 16 industrial companies based in the port area have joined forces in a collective fire service tailored to the risk profile of the industry and the port activities.



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**T**he Unified Industrial Fire and Rescue Service Amsterdam (UIFRS/A) is a Mutual Aid initiative organized as a public-private partnership that is to contribute to improvements to the safety and continuity in the Amsterdam Port Area. Establishing a more effective industrial-fire capability in the area is a win-win situation for the port and the city.

This coming summer, construction will start on the new fire station, which has been granted a strategic location in the Amsterdam Port Area. According to expectations, the UIFRS/A will be operational in Q1 of 2020 and is the final part of a long-standing exploration into improving fire care in the area. The Amsterdam Port Area covers approximately 28km<sup>2</sup> and is home to roughly 1,200 companies. Three of those companies have a formal assignment to uphold an individual corporate fire service according to Dutch legislation, but that is not to say that the rest of the companies are without risk.

The Amsterdam Port Area counts 21 industrial facilities that fall under the Seveso regulations and approximately 80 companies that fall under ISPS legislation. The economic activities in the area also encompass chemical industry, tank terminals, and countless storage and trans-shipment companies for bulk and break-bulk cargo. Amsterdam is also the largest petrol port in the world with a yearly turnover of around 40 million tons of flammable liquids! An important part of the 'vital' corporate activity on which the city and the region are dependent takes place in the Amsterdam Port Area, like electricity and heat production, and sewage treatment. The Amsterdam Port Area also has 200 cruise calls a year. This results in a lot of nautical traffic between what will be the biggest sea lock in the world and the

city of Amsterdam with its characteristic canals. Moreover, the Amsterdam Port Area is an important source of economic activity and work opportunities for the metropolitan area of Amsterdam, which has approximately 2.3 million inhabitants. In short: the city and the port cannot exist without each other.

## Shared interest

'That mutual dependency, the high risk profile, and the safety of the inhabitants of the surrounding region underline the shared interest of the Port of Amsterdam, the industrial companies and the city of Amsterdam to mutually keep the safety in this dynamic area at a high level,' says Leen Schaap, commander of the Amsterdam-Amstelland fire service. 'That includes a specialized industrial firefighting organization. And, however strange that may seem for such an extensive and high-risk port and industrial area, that has not been established until now. It's a consequence of policy choices made in the past. The Port of Amsterdam has had specific cases of large-scale company fires over the past decades, but the highest risk of fire lies in the metropolitan area of Amsterdam, with the central point being the historic city centre and the surrounding older neighbourhoods. That is where the highest number of fires take place, and where the most casualties are caused by fire – almost exclusively as a consequence of housefires. That's why the densely populated metropolitan area has always been the most important focus when deciding the norms of preparedness and the spread of fire stations in our service area. The 12 fire stations in the city of Amsterdam are all concentrated in the residential areas, with relatively short distances between stations for short response times.'



The time is there to change course, according to Leen Schaap, together with the board of the Amsterdam-Amstelland Safety Authority, of which the city of Amsterdam itself is a part. Because the port area has been expanding westward over the past few years and the risks have become increasingly complex for the public fire services to handle. In short, the response times of the Amsterdam fire stations at the time of an incident in the Amsterdam Port Area are increasing, and the knowledge and expertise within the firefighting organization no longer match the characteristic risk profile of the industry in the area. An investigation conducted a few years ago by the Amsterdam-Amstelland Safety Authority confirms this profile.

Leen Schaap: 'There is a need for a fire station that can guarantee a 24/7 availability in the Amsterdam Port Area, with a specialized firefighting team that has been educated and trained to fight and control industrial and maritime incidents. That fire station, with accompanying organization, is what we are building right now. As a public fire service we are responsible for the fire care in a region with almost a million inhabitants in Amsterdam and five bordering municipalities, with a lot of infrastructure and a great logistical hub function within the Netherlands and Europe. Interests of safety, economy and continuity are closely interconnected in this highly urbanized and industrial area

▲ Amsterdam harbor: dry bulk, logistics, chemicals, tank storage (Oiltanking).

► Tank storage Vopak Amsterdam.



and those interests should be properly protected, proactively and preventively, but also with an adequate firefighting organization.'

This is acknowledged as responsible public fire care by the Amsterdam-Amstelland fire service, the Port of Amsterdam and a number of large companies. Schaap continues: 'The government cannot organize this alone and so we worked together with the partners we chose to form a public-private partnership in a "Unified Industrial Fire and Rescue Service Amsterdam". The organization essentially functions as a cooperative corporate fire service for companies in the port, based on a service agreement, but it also takes on the responsibility for fire care in the

public area. The Amsterdam-Amstelland Safety Authority, Port of Amsterdam and the corporate sector each pay a third of the costs for the establishment and exploitation.'

### Innovative organization

Commander Leen Schaap emphasizes that the upgrade of fire care in the Amsterdam Port Area is more than just introducing a new fire station and a team of firefighters. To start, the team will not be a part of the Amsterdam-Amstelland fire service but will instead be an independent entity under its own governance in which the public fire service, as well as the Port of Amsterdam and a cooperative association of participating companies are represented equally on the board.

The UIFRS/A will naturally be working closely with the Amsterdam-Amstelland fire service and will fall into the command structure of the public fire service during incidents, as it is legally laid out in the Dutch system. The organization will be founded according to a similar model that has already been operational for over 20 years in the port of Rotterdam, which has also provided Amsterdam with knowledge and expertise during the early stages of this project.

However, the collective port fire service should also differentiate itself regarding its organizational model. The founders envisioned a 'hierarchically flat' organization, with a small staff and a self-managing team working closely together with its 'clients' to optimize fire safety and incident control. The firefighting organization is also gaining some new and 'personal' characteristics regarding efficiency and working times. For example, shift schedules will not be organized according to the 24-hour schedule that is common for most 24/7 fire services; instead, the organization will be working with two shifts of 9 and 15 hours.

Schaap: 'In this regard, the UIFRS/A joins a much larger innovation process that we are working on within the Amsterdam-Amstelland fire service. The organization

has been coping for some time now with bottlenecks in the fields of efficiency, continuity and overall corporate culture. We are planning for the possibilities of a more modern, more flexible organization, among other things based on an alternative shift schedule to make more productive use of the available hours. Within our team, we have appointed one of the city fire stations as a pilot station for public firefighting tasks, where we are experimenting with such a new model based on self-management. Another goal of the project is a better connection with the neighbourhoods in the city. The first positive results of the municipal pilot station are already noticeable. There has been much enthusiasm about personally slotting schedule times, overall productivity has increased, the number of sick leaves has decreased, and the firefighters on duty perform more activities throughout the neighbourhood, like fire-safety instruction for the locals. Those benefits, translated to the industrial working environment in the Amsterdam Port Area, are what we want to see in the new UIFRS/A. Essentially, we can view the new fire station in the port area as second of its kind, an industrial pilot station, in our region, just as a separate legal entity.'

### Added value for companies

It is a model that fits exceedingly well with the idea of 'working innovatively together towards safety' in the Amsterdam Port Area, says Ilone Blaauw, project initiation manager for the Unified Industrial Fire and Rescue Service Amsterdam. She started in April and is now busy with the selection and recruitment of personnel, the basis of the new organization. 'When we start, we guarantee the availability 24/7 of a team of six industrial firefighters, crewing two trucks: one for regular fire and rescue tasks, and one for industrial scenarios with a high-volume pump and foam. To get the organization up and running, we need six shift leaders and 25 fire and rescue members. The shift leaders come first, because they will function as team leaders and will help further build the organization. We are explicitly looking for people that are viewing the firefighting profession with fresh eyes and that each have a specialism with which they can contribute to the establishment of the organization and that have added value for the UIFRS/A. Naturally, the industrial firefighting team will stand at the ready primarily for a quick and professional response in case of fires and other incidents in the Amsterdam Port Area. During an incident, the UIFRS/A would deal the "first operational blow", but the organization wants to provide the companies with more services than just that operational fire care.'

Ilone Blaauw says she is thinking of supporting the companies through tasks

▼ **Leen Schaap, Regional fire commander Amsterdam-Amstelland** "The Western Port Area needs a specialized industrial fire service".

▼ **Fire at Diergaarde Chemical storage (2011): smoke residue in area with 10 municipalities.**





▲ Ilone Blaauw, project manager and temporary fire chief of industrial Mutual Aid "The UIFRS/A wants to provide companies with something extra in the field of safety"

like checks of fire mains and preparative activities like support and expertise during the establishment and actualization of pre fire plans and procedures for the corporate emergency service. For the companies, the UIFRS/A will not become an external firefighting service that only shows up when the flames have engulfed a building on site; rather, it will become a durable safety partner that also contributes to the fire safety during the 'cold phase'. The project initiation manager elaborates: 'The corporate sector pays a third of the costs of the organization and for that we want to give them something extra in return. Of course, during a fire we will show up on the sites of all the companies in the area, but the companies that enter into a service agreement with the UIFRS/A through the cooperation can count on a higher level of safety. Those companies will receive regular visits, where we will carry out orientational rounds and training, together with the internal corporate emergency service. This way, we learn about the companies and their specific risks and focal points, as well as connect with the responsible corporate officers. That all allows us to be able to perform much more effectively during an actual incident, which minimizes the risk of escalation and decreases damages.'



▲ Diergaarde fire 2011: rubber burnt, cacao saved.

Thanks to the proposed schedule with a shift of 9 hours and a shift of 15 hours, the UIFRS/A has gained more productive hours in which they can be active for their industrial clients. Because of the relatively low frequency of fires and other incidents, the organization wants to also establish itself by performing additional tasks in the now available hours – tasks that connect to their knowledge and expertise and tasks that are of added value to their clients. Ilone Blaauw: 'We're cultivating a different relationship with the companies than the public fire service, because we are partly theirs. That is the core of public-private partnership. By combining the interests of the government, the industrial companies and the Port of Amsterdam into a single firefighting organization we're working together on improving the safety in the overall area.'

Recruitment of the shift leaders has now been completed, and when the fire incident members have also been hired in the coming autumn, further settlement and design processes can begin. Based on a book in which the functional demands of the members of the firefighting team are described, the firefighters will receive specialized education and training in industrial incident control. Ilone Blaauw: 'Candidates that are already experienced

in industrial firefighting are preferred, but because we want to establish a new organization with a personal and new shift culture, we are explicitly recruiting people from all over the country. For the education and training program we make use of the established knowledge and experience of the Unified Industrial Fire and Rescue Service Rotterdam, based in the port there.'

Even when the UIFRS/A team is finally operational, the public-private partnership approach in the Amsterdam Port Area will not yet be complete, say project initiation manager Ilone Blaauw and fire chief Leen Schaap, because the safety ambitions of the Port of Amsterdam, the municipality, the Safety Authority and the industrial companies will continue to grow. They hope the Mutual Aid-type structure will expand into other areas in the long run. And one blip on the horizon is the realization of a 'safety house', a broadly collaborative platform in which services like the police department and customs officers work alongside the port authority and the safety authority in an inclusive partnership for safety in and around the Amsterdam seaport and all its affiliated industrial and corporate sites. The Unified Industrial Fire and Rescue Service Amsterdam is seen by its initiators as the backbone for such a far-reaching structural safety collaboration.



For more information, go to  
[www.gbamsterdam.nl](http://www.gbamsterdam.nl)