

Chief Superintendent Andrew Sigsworth,
Head of the UK's Police National CBRN Center, tells *CBRNe World*
how their Ryton centre will move from strength to strength



School's out

Business as usual is the driver for the centre ©PCBRNC

CW: With Ryton having been in place for two years (by time of publication) what do you think the major goals and achievements during that time have been?

AS: It is easy when you are involved in such dynamic work as the capability-driven programme we are engaged with, to fail to recognise short term successes. So I think your question is very timely. It's timely for a number of reasons, not least because we have just conducted a customer survey: an enquiry of the Police Service seeking views on successes and potential gaps. What is clear from that survey is that the 24 hour Advice and Operations Centre is a clear and obvious benefit that did not exist before we opened at Ryton. Whilst this visible success is important there are also less obvious successes in terms of the positioning of CBRN capability in the mainstream of UK policing, aided without doubt by the publication of doctrine at the beginning of the year. In addition our contact with industry and the development of bespoke equipment to meet the needs of the Police Service is symptomatic of a collaborative procurement methodology which is so important for the Police Service. I could go on and indeed write a full article on successes to date and, whilst taking stock is important, we still have a great deal more to do and learn.

CW: One of the major drivers of capability has to be the capacity to be able to achieve the required result. Are numbers of trained operatives, and throughout the Command chain, causing a problem - especially as the Olympics approach?

AS: As it stands I see the Olympics as a driver likely to encourage commitment, not as a problem. CBRN as a capability is yet again a new skill that police forces have had to take on and I would say against the backdrop of many other changes and initiatives in the Police Service. The commitment of forces across the UK to CBRN is frankly commendable. We have seen and continue to see increases in numbers of trained responders at all levels and I am extremely encouraged by the current trend. That said we cannot afford to be complacent and will, through the Police National CBRN Centre acting on behalf of the Police Service and the Home Office, continue to perform the role of "watch keeper" monitoring numbers and resilience across the UK.

CW: How much of a driver is 2012 in terms of things like Quick Don or the Scene Assessment Vehicle? Are procurements linked to that date, allowing a period of time prior for training etc, or are current capabilities enough to deal with any threat?

AS: The Olympics is on the horizon and its existence forms one part of the ongoing risk assessment that determines threat. Quick Don and Scene Assessment etc are part of the development to meet anticipated threats. These things will, as it happens, be embedded in good time for 2012. Much of the work in developing national risk assessments for threat and the work on our current programme took place before the decision to award London the Olympics so in some senses what we are engaged in is "Business as Usual".

CW: Do you think there will be a spate of, what are called in the military, Urgent Operational Requirements, brought in for the period of the Olympics, but not renewed, part of the equipment programme or universally available?

AS: It goes back to what I've said earlier about matching requirements to threat. I've talked in the past about keeping "a weather eye" on the intelligence picture to inform decision making and the current strong links that the Police National CBRN Centre has to the intelligence community to aid this process. We believe that the capability we are developing will meet the threat and risks associated with the Olympics, and take us beyond.

FIRST RESPONDERS HAVE TO BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING...



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SURVIVAL EVOLUTION

School's out

CW: What lessons have been taken from procurements like the EH20 Escape Hood? Is this considered a legacy programme, or is it an example of the sort of procurements that might evolve?

AS: The escape hood was an early project and pre-Ryton and the new project and Procurement processes. Saying that, however, it has added to police capability – and it remains viable and current – I am not sure “legacy” is the right way to describe it. Procurement is something we match to concept of operations, operational requirement with an element of training demand, capital cost, lifetime costs and supplier resilience as important factors that need to be applied. This means we need to work with suppliers in an open and professional manner, and be driven by a clear user requirement and procurement strategy. We are supported in this by the Home Office Commercial Directorate and procurement professionals form a strong part of the Centre's business structure.

CW: As you have now down-selected on Quick Don, you are getting an increased view of the capability it can provide. Do you see these allowing you to perform new roles, or just to increase the time you are on site?

AS: We are very excited about the progress made on the Quick Don Project; the process is not yet complete with technical testing our focus of the moment. The principal driver of the project has always been to decrease response time and usability trials have illustrated that the primary goal will be achieved, we hope, without diminishing levels of protection. Whether there are other opportunities that might arise out of the project will only become evident when it is brought fully into use. At the end of the day it is merely a method of protection to enable the Police Service to carry policing responsibilities in a contaminated environment safely. It has been proven capable in that respect by the usability trials which used Police Officers from across the UK performing a wide variety of tasks. Many doubted the viability of this project. It is my hope that when completed it will reflect both well on both us and industry.

CW: Scene management is the major role of the police, but it's currently held back from lacking a common, integrated situational awareness of the scene. Is this going to be the part of the puzzle solved by the Scene Assessment System, or are its goals more conservative than that?

AS: From the outset in developing



The HART teams are having a positive impact on all UK civil missions ©PCBRNC

response to a CBRN terrorist attack we have worked closely with our partners in the “blue light” agencies. Common situational awareness is precisely what we train through the multi-agency Gold/Command Courses at the Police National CBRN Centre. What the Scene Assessment Vehicles (SAV) will provide is early situational awareness which will enhance that collective awareness that has been the hallmark of the CBRN response. The aim with SAV will be to provide a platform from which information and assessment from the scene can be communicated to whomever needs it to advance the effective management of the scene. It simply takes us back to the core aim of all agencies protecting the public and responders by making the right decision as a critical incident unfolds.

CW: How is the relationship developing with the other emergency services? Have the HART teams made life easier – in that roles and capability of the ambulance service have now been made clearer – and does that help drive Police understanding of their role?

AS: The HART Project is an excellent example of single-agency development with multi-agency benefit. Throughout development the Police National CBRN Centre has had representation at strategic and operational working groups not only offering support and agency understanding, but also looking at outcomes and how they may impact on our tactical options. Our tactic writing team includes embedded fire and ambulance staff and this, coupled with fire and ambulance support at all levels of training, means that relationships are as strong as ever. A relationship I would say that remains the envy of many of our

international partners. The UK, whether driven by personalities or by legislative framework like the CCA, is well placed in terms of multi-agency working and CBRN is no different.

CW: Now that the Scotland office has gone will there be a further reduction of centres and bring the training at Winterbourne Gunner up to Ryton too?

AS: The aim is ultimately to centre all activity on the single site at Ryton. By this time next year we should be in the final stages of the migration. The important thing with any change is that “Business as Usual” (BAU) is unaffected, so we will migrate elements from Winterbourne Gunner with the BAU principle in mind. There can be no doubt that the Ryton site is a step forward in placing us close to the Police Service and geographically more central to the UK. The disadvantage of moving away from a military site and the doorstep of Porton Down will be compensated through the strong working relationship established since the Centre opened in 2001. The challenge we will rise to is sustaining these strong links with the expert community and discussions are ongoing as we speak to secure these links on a long-term basis.

CW: One of the drivers in the US has been to develop standards for bio assays, so first responders and the military have a common understanding and confidence in their results. Is this something that you can see further down the line, or are standards more the domain of Europe rather than the UK?

AS: Standards for the Police Service in the UK are developed by the Home Office Scientific and Development Branch (HOSDB), working in conjunction with other agencies. This unit test and evaluate all detection equipment for the Police Service in the UK and, whilst standards are not set, they produce a comprehensive evaluation of available technologies working closely with, and, as appropriate, drawing upon further expertise provided through, DSTL Porton Down, the Atomic Weapons Establishment and the Home Office Science and Technology Team. The published reports are available to MOD and agencies involved in response to CBRN terrorism and this in a sense sets the common standard you talk of. As far as European standards are concerned, we work closely with our partners in Europe through the Home Office, all with the common purpose of developing, improving and thus achieving an effective response.