



## Frequently asked questions

- **What are the reasons for the change?**

- The requirement for communications interoperability between different Fire and Rescue Services (FRS), and also between the three primary emergency services. This will increase the ability of the FRS to work with other emergency services when responding to large scale emergency situations such as major flooding or terrorist attack.
- The wide area radio systems currently in use by many Fire and Rescue Services were installed over twenty years ago and are approaching the end of their operational life and do not meet the current resilience and interoperability requirements.

- **What are the benefits of Firelink over most existing systems?**

Benefits include:-

1. built in resilience to system failure to ensure continuity of service
2. improved voice quality
3. encrypted voice and data communication services
4. radio talkgroups that can be configured to suit operational needs
5. more available capacity; and
6. national roaming where a fire vehicle can remain in contact with a control room wherever it is located across the country

- **What will Firelink actually provide?**

- It will provide a digital wide area radio network that ultimately enables firefighters and officers to communicate with any FRS mobile resource and/or Regional Control Centre (RCC).
- Firelink will install radio terminals, Global Positioning System units, printers and mobile data terminals (MDT) in over 7,000 FRS appliances. It will also be providing interim connections into existing control rooms so that FRS vehicles can be transferred onto Firelink prior to migration to the new RCCs. The software applications running on the MDTs will be provided by the FiReControl project.
- We are creating a framework that provides the devolved administrations with an option to extend it to Scotland and Wales in the future.

Underpinning all of the above is a national fault management and maintenance infrastructure that will ensure that the availability of the system and terminals is maximised.

- **What will not be provided under the Firelink contract?**

- replacements for the tactical (at-incident) radios currently used by the Fire and Rescue Service.

- software and hardware integration of the mobile data software to the control rooms. This is the responsibility of each Fire and Rescue Service in Scotland and Wales, and will ultimately be the responsibility of FiReControl in England.

- **What is the implementation timetable?**

The implementation timetable for England is anticipated to last from contract signature through to completion of rollout of the system to the last FRS in 2009. The Rollout Plan will be finalised early in the New Year to reflect contract signature and development work with the selected bidder during the Planning & Preparation Phase.

- **How easy will the new technology be to use?**

The proposed systems have been designed for use by the emergency services. Even with the introduction of additional functionality, the operation of the radio terminal of the proposed systems will be similar to the existing ones. The mobile data terminal software applications will have been designed for ease of use in a moving vehicle.

- **Will the new technology affect peoples' roles?**

The improved functionality being provided by the new technology will support individuals to perform their role but like all new technology the Firelink radio system will work in a slightly different way to existing systems which will result in some changes to operational procedures.

- **How will operational procedures change?**

Apart from changes caused by the way the system physically functions, the technology will enable changes to operational procedures if required by the fire and rescue services. Such changes will be driven by the FRS not the technology.

- **How resilient will the new system be and are there back-up facilities?**

The system will offer a high degree of availability and resilience. Elements such as the power supplies and communications links are duplicated to ensure that the service continues in the event of a mains electricity failure or a failure in a communications cable.

- **Are there any Health and Safety issues?**

Studies to date suggest that the features of TETRA pose no greater threat than the use of mobile phones.

See the Stewart Report ([www.iegmp.org.uk](http://www.iegmp.org.uk))

A radio device used in an emergency service vehicle will need to comply with appropriate installation parameters and be operated in accordance with agreed procedures whilst communications are undertaken.

- **What will the initial and ongoing costs be?**

In conjunction with fire authorities in England ODPM is considering the treatment of resource costs following rollout of Firelink. The Scottish Executive and Welsh Assembly Government are also considering this issue.

The project will be disseminating the pricing schedule for call-off items once the contract has been signed; prior to this point, indicative costs may be made available to FRS for the purpose of developing annual budgets.

- **How secure will the new system be?**

The Firelink system will offer a significant improvement in security compared to the majority of existing radio schemes.

- **What training will be given?**

Firelink will be using a 'train the trainer' approach for each Fire and Rescue Service. Typically, existing training staff will be sent on courses to enable them to train the control centre staff and firefighters within their organisation.

- **How will the system be interoperable with the other primary emergency services?**

Multi-service communications interoperability in accordance with the agreement signed by the three emergency services is one of the main elements of the Firelink project. The agreement covers voice interoperability at strategic and tactical command levels.

- **Will the system provide useful management information?**

Firelink will provide regular statistics on the performance of the system and will also collect information on network usage that can be provided to individual Fire and Rescue Services.

- **Will the system be capable of coping with technology updates?**

As with nearly all modern digital communication systems, the ability to upgrade both software and hardware components is built in. Both proposed technologies have stated development plans and these will be evaluated by Firelink when they become available.

- **How will Firelink and FiReControl be linked at implementation?**

The first stage will be to deploy and test the network in a region then install Firelink into vehicles (at which point they will be operating on the Firelink system). As the Regional Control Centres (RCC) become available, Firelink will install the necessary network access equipment and then assist in the migration from existing control rooms to the new RCCs.

- **Who will maintain the new system?**

The Firelink contract includes maintenance arrangements for the steady state phase. There is provision within the contract for individual Fire and Rescue Services to opt to undertake their own first line maintenance on radio and mobile data terminals if they wish.