

RISCAuthority at work



With the New Year comes an opportunity to take stock of RISCAuthority's accomplishments and reassess research priorities going forward in 2014, writes **Dr Jim Glockling**

SOME ISSUES stay stubbornly on our agenda, including waste and recycling fires; MMC and combustible material building methods; poor uptake of business continuity planning; erosion of standards; 'value' engineering; fire and rescue service budget constraints; and the generally poor drivers for promoting business resilience endeavours. However, others, such as cybercrime and novel fire suppression systems, present new and interesting challenges.

As in 2013, RISCAuthority seminars will be held in London and Manchester on 6 March and 29 May respectively, where we will showcase many of the projects we've undertaken and allow industry experts to enlighten the audience on current and emerging issues. The current programme will describe research initiatives to:

- ensure building resilience is ingrained in Building Information Modelling (BIM) – the future of UK building design, in which buildings are first 'virtually' built on a computer prior to construction and tested for conformity
- better understand cyber security issues – what they are, how to protect against them, and the associated insurance implications
- describe the results of our initiative designed to understand the true cost of fire in the UK
- gain insight into one fire and rescue service's initiative to take an all-encompassing view of the risk profile within their area of jurisdiction as a means of better allocating resources
- report on novel research specifically aimed at improving firefighting response in challenging environments such as tall and commercial buildings
- provide a general update on all other projects

A key issue that requires attention in 2014 is the exploitation of RISCAuthority deliverables. Such is the wealth of knowledge, toolkits and data available that there is a need to pause and consider how this might be better used and shared.

Over the last five years, there have been various failed attempts to create a centralised forum for researchers of fire within the UK – such as the Virtual Fire Research Academy (VFRA). The intention was to encourage cooperation, dissuade duplication of effort and share knowledge. All initiatives failed and a

contributing factor might in part have been the incorrect assumption that all fire research is done in the name of 'good', when in fact many of the largest budgets come from commercial marketing divisions and are spent in pursuit of developing product market share at any cost.

The RISCAuthority funding is exceptional in that it may support the development of knowledge without the need of providing a direct financial return on investment, which is recognised through the mitigation of loss by the informed decision-making the deliverables enable.

During the course of the last year, a number of factors might suggest there is an opportunity for widening the scope of RISCAuthority and the role the FPA may play in improving risk control on a national level – essentially going some way to meeting the intentions of the VFRA through participation of selected stakeholders with sympathetic objectives.

The recent successfully completed project aimed at geomapping fire and rescue service response across the UK demonstrates well what can be achieved when sufficient pathways exist for collaboration on seemingly impossible or at least very challenging projects.

In pursuit of increased stakeholder collaboration in the field of researching business and property protection, the proposal for 2014 is to initially develop the RISCAuthority website to cater for the wider membership of insurers, loss adjusters, fire and rescue services, heritage, resilience organisations, surveyor groups, architects, fire engineers etc. Unlike the current website, which is very much based around 'delivery', the new website will additionally be a forum for discussions, from which it is hoped research initiatives will develop. Such a facility could:

- raise the awareness of all RISCAuthority deliverables to a much larger audience, who in turn have access to, and delivery mechanisms for, larger commercial and domestic audiences
- make budgets of all stakeholders stretch further where projects of common interest are identified
- increase the knowledge base available to all stakeholders

This proposal does not impede any current initiatives of the Fire Sector Federation. If you have any views on this proposal or suggestions of compatible organisations and groups, please email ccheal@thefpa.co.uk ■