# 'S-HELP' IS AT HAND IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Following the recent conclusion of a three-year EU-funded research project to develop new systems to standardise cross-border emergency planning, preparedness, response and recovery procedures, discussions are now taking place with agencies in Ireland, Germany and Israel to pilot test the findings of this S-HELP project.

The three-year S-HELP (Securing-Health Emergency Learning and Planning) project (2014-2017) has developed a range of support systems to manage planning, preparedness, response and recovery procedures in large-scale and cross-border emergency situations. The project team held its final event workshop in Dublin's Wood Quay Venue at the end of January.

Co-ordinated by UCC's Dr Karen Neville, Managing Director of the Centre for Resilience and Business Continuity (CRBC), the €3.5m S-HELP project was funded under the EU's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) for research and innovation.



*Dr Karen Neville and Dr Andrew Pope (Development Co-Lead) are in discussions with agencies in Ireland, Germany and Israel to pilot the tool-sets.*

**These exercises were conducted to demonstrate S-HELP:**

1. A Public Health Emergency exercise was conducted at the headquarters of the MDA or Mah-Da, in Tel Aviv, (Mah-Da is Israel's national emergency medical, disaster, ambulance and blood bank service).
2. A cross-border chemical explosion exercise on the border of the Republic of Ireland, with Northern Ireland at Strabane, took place in the National Emergency Co-ordination Centre in Dublin with the full co-operation of the Office of Emergency Planning.
3. A major regional and inter-regional flooding exercise across the southern counties, based on the detailed scenario of a previous flood in 2009, was the final exercise in a series of three with the agreement of Cork City Council. It was conducted in the Regional Control Centre, which is based at the central fire station in Cork.

**These exercises were designed with a clear focus to:**

1. Introduce and explain the S-HELP platform to the exercise participants.
2. Demonstrate a variety of tools to the exercise participants.
3. Give them an opportunity to experiment using the platform, tool by tool and then experience the integrated platform.
4. Allow each exercise participant to use each tool before seeking their feedback.

"The S-HELP project team set out to invite participants with real-world emergency management experience and to encourage them to attend and actively participate in the demonstration and validation exercises," Dr Neville told *'Emergency Services*

*A simulated cross-border chemical explosion between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, was one of three scenario exercises rolled out by the project team.*

effectively with the exercises."

FAMILIAR SCENARIOS
The fact that the scenarios were familiar to most of the participants and were conducted in the very locations, from which actual events are normally co-ordinated, added a significant degree of realism to the exercises, according to Dr Neville.

More significantly for the evaluation process, it allowed the participants the opportunity to evaluate the S-HELP platform in familiar surroundings and to exercise in their roles from the actual response teams/agencies which would be responding if the scenarios were real. All of this allowed an effective evaluation of the S-HELP

Ireland', after the final workshop.

"The exercise project team, led by the Health Service Executive (HSE) and UCC, anticipated that the participants who needed to validate the S-HELP platform were busy people with limited availability to take part," she added.

To overcome this, project co-ordinator Dr Neville made a series of explanatory videos available to all exercise participants prior to attending each exercise. A practice version of the S-HELP platform was also posted online, well in advance of the exercises.

"As a result, all participants were very familiar with the S-HELP project and this gave them the ability to use the platform during the exercise with little assistance.

"A full set of exercise injects were designed and prepared for each exercise and these included audio-visual injects, which were fed into the exercise as news bulletins and social media injects. These built on each other as the exercises progressed. The first news inject, which was used to set the scene and outline the scenario, was made available online to the participants a few days before the exercise.

"This was to take account of the fact that many such incidents do develop over time. The online news inject, together with the online project description and the online training version of the platform, allowed the participants to engage

decision support tool-set.

As each exercise progressed, every effort was made to incorporate the lessons learned from evaluation to evaluation. Subsequent to the final exercise those issues that had been identified were incorporated as required.

The demonstrations and evaluation exercises were positive experiences both for the project team and for all those who took part in the exercises. It demonstrated a beyond "the state of the art" decision support system. The overall outcome both facilitates and encourages further exploitation of the S-HELP Platform beyond the life of the project.

Dr Karen Neville and Dr Andrew Pope (Development Co-Lead) will commercialise the tool-set and are in discussions with agencies in Ireland, Germany and Israel to pilot the tools.



*Prof David Alexander of University College London was the keynote speaker at the final S-HELP event workshop in Dublin's Wood Quay Venue on 27 January. He explored current international approaches and practices for emergency management.*

*The S-HELP Regional and Interregional Mass Flooding Exercise was held on 25 November 2016 at the Regional Co-ordination Centre in Cork.*

**FINAL WORKSHOP**

The final S-HELP event workshop, which was organised by Future Analytics Consulting Ltd, was held in Dublin's Wood Quay Venue at the end of January. The keynote speaker Prof David Alexander of University College London explored current approaches and practices for emergency management, in addition to highlighting international approaches.

"Prof Alexander is one of the foremost authorities in disaster planning and to demonstrate the S-HELP platform to an expert of his calibre was an interesting opportunity for UCC's S-HELP development team," she noted.

"The demonstration was conducted 'live' and in real time. That session highlighted the national and international experiences of crisis management. Whilst the theme had a health focus it also included reference to other security incidents."

The workshop's afternoon session focused on the options for commercialisation of the S-HELP platform. The current and



*Magen David Adom (MDA), Israel's national aid society and blood bank service, is one of the partners in the S-HELP group.*

**OBJECTIVES OF THE 'S-HELP' PROJECT**

*The central aim of the three-year S-HELP project has been to develop a holistic-framed approach to healthcare preparedness, response and recovery in large-scale and/or cross-border emergency situations.*



*The €3.5m S-HELP project was funded by the EU's Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development.*

The project's Decision Support System (DSS) will provide a unique mechanism to assist stakeholders and end-users to work together for co-ordinated, effective and evidence-based decisions at all stages of emergency management. More precisely it aims to:

- *Define an interoperability standard to enable communication and co-ordination across different geographical areas and cultural settings.*
- *Facilitate a collaborative end-user and support partner-driven solutions to meet the needs of different users from Ireland, the UK, Sweden, Israel, Austria, and beyond.*
- *Define and apply an interoperability standard for multiple agencies jointly responding to a disaster.*
- *Advance the design and application of current available solutions, to improve preparedness, response and recovery in emergency situations.*
- *Deliver decision-supporting tools for emergency preparedness, response, recovery, tested, evaluated and enhanced through end-user designated emergency scenarios.*

***International Partners***

- *Magen David Adom, Israel*
- *Future Analytics Consulting Ltd, Ireland*
- *HSE, Ireland*
- *Lunds Universitet, Sweden*
- *Public Health Agency (PHA) Northern Ireland*
- *Technische Universtiät Graz (TUGraz), Austria*
- *Universität Wien, Austria*

future involvement of Irish end-users in EU projects and related research, in addition to an academic research perspective was outlined by Prof Lokesh Joshi from NUI Galway.

Dr Michael Murphy, EI, Security NCP, provided an update on a series of ongoing EU projects, deadline dates for submissions, and the funding options available, while the role of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) across a range of EU Projects was presented by the PSNI's Jonathan Middleton, International Programmes Manager.

**POSITIVE FEEDBACK**
"The large attendance of end-users from the different levels of government, including the north-south co-ordinating groups in Ireland and staff from the National Office of Emergency Management, demonstrated a significant interest in the S-HELP project," Dr Neville noted.

"Both attendees and guest speakers expressed a very positive impression of the S-HELP platform and the high standard achieved at the final event workshop. The S-HELP project has successfully developed and validated decision support tools for cross-border emergencies.
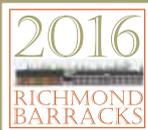
"It has gone beyond a mere technical solution to ensure effective ownership, sharing and co-ordination. The solution is designed to ensure flexibility, minimise information overload and to provide a support system and an invaluable quality of information."