

Scottish Ambulance Service – major incident response boosted

The Cabinet Secretary for Health & Wellbeing, Nicola Sturgeon, visited the Scottish Ambulance Service on Wednesday and met the specially trained teams who deal with large scale and hazardous incidents.

Investment of £4.3 million over the last three years has allowed the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) to significantly enhance its capabilities for counter terrorism and major incidents. The SAS has developed three Special Operations Response Teams (SORT) in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen, comprising 106 specially trained paramedics and ambulance technicians.

The teams are now trained and equipped to work inside the inner cordon alongside police and fire and rescue services at large scale hazardous incidents. They have all completed an intensive training course that enables them to operate in chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives (CBRNE) incidents and other accidents that involve hazardous materials. A further 500 staff across Scotland have been trained in standard CBRNE/Hazmat response procedures.

The training includes additional clinical skills, risk assessment, forensic awareness and decontamination procedures. It covers the use of specialist personal protective equipment including self-contained breathing apparatus. Additional training in water rescue techniques means that ambulance staff can play a key role in flooding incidents.

The training has been supplemented by a wide range of specialist equipment, including state of the art forward command vehicles and unique six-wheeled all-terrain vehicles,

designed specifically for use by the SAS.

Nicola Sturgeon, Cabinet Secretary for Health & Wellbeing, said:

“It is important that all emergency services in Scotland are prepared to deal with large scale, hazardous incidents wherever they occur. The Scottish Ambulance Service is at the forefront of the country’s emergency response and I am pleased that the Scottish Government has funded expert training for three teams of paramedics and technicians who are now equipped to play an enhanced role in assisting patients during any serious incident.”

Pauline Howie, Chief Executive, Scottish Ambulance Service said:

“Our SORT personnel are highly trained so that they can provide best quality clinical treatment to patients at the scenes of major incidents. The training and new equipment, such as breathing apparatus, means they can now go into toxic or hazardous environments. The ability to work inside the inner cordon alongside other emergency responders will result in quicker access to patients and a much higher level of clinical care and triage at the scene.”

David Garbutt, Chairman of the Scottish Ambulance Service Board, said, “I am delighted that the combination of new equipment, training and skills now provides a much closer integration of SAS personnel with other emergency services at major incidents. It is a significant development of our role and comprehensively supports the Scottish resilience strategy.”

The three Special Operations Teams are managed by the SAS’ National Risk and Resilience Department. When the teams are not training, exercising and working with other partner agencies, they support day to day emergency operations, responding to 999 calls.