



## Working on a digital platform

*Airwave is no longer just a network provider synonymous with the TETRA system it supplies to blue-light services. While its radio network is still a core part of the service it offers, Airwave has developed a wider range of solutions that are part of a broader, more innovative approach, designed to deliver information digitally and enable its emergency service customers to solve the problems that they face on the front line.*

Two examples of Airwave's progress in this area can be taken from the Fire & Civil Resilience (FCR) line of business. Mark Pearson, account director at Airwave explains: "Since fire and rescue (FRS) personnel work in some of the most dangerous conditions imaginable, they need to be proactive in their quest to prevent dangerous incidents. Airwave's focus has always been on providing front line staff with the tools to access, update and share critical information that can help improve the overall effectiveness of operations and ensure the safety of individual officers.

For the FRS industry, innovation has a crucial role to play. The firefighters working within the service face some of the most challenging incidents that society can offer and it is essential, both for their safety and to enable them to do their jobs, that they are working with the most up to date and efficient tools possible. Innovation means taking advantage of the most cutting edge products and in today's world that means

addressing the digital revolution and all the potential it can unlock. This innovation must not, however, be for its own sake. Any new service must be designed with the needs of its users at heart and must demonstrate directly how it will help FRS personnel work more effectively.

Key to the work of the FRS for example, is the ability to come to a complete understanding of all the circumstances surrounding an incident. This allows the sector and incident commanders to produce an accurate risk assessment and accordingly come up with suitable tactical measures to bring about a successful resolution to the incident. Without having a 360 degree view of all the variables in a situation, incident commanders run the risk of reducing the tactical options available to them.

FireCall and FireRisk have been developed in partnership with SEED Software to put the benefits of digital innovation into the hands of FRS personnel, allowing them to gain detailed risk assessments of



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## Airwave and the FRS

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incidents and respond in a way that ensures the safety of personnel and brings the incident under control as quickly as possible.

FireCall is a secure and resilient application which provides firefighters with sophisticated mapping and detailed location information, enabling accurate and pre-emptive risk assessment, through the provision of data. FireCall replaces existing paper-based and voice-based processes for handling up-to-date and accurate local hazard and risk information at and on the way to incidents.

Its data includes hydrant location, chemical data and autodata, the latter of which provides information about vehicles to assist when attending road traffic collisions. It enables FRS personnel to know exactly where they are and to navigate to incident; in addition digital mapping & Automatic Vehicle Location systems, AVLS, allow the control room to monitor the whereabouts and status of fire appliances at all times. This optimises the efficient deployment of critical life saving resources – helping to confirm arrival, provide an accurate and updated incident location as necessary, whilst offering an overall view of the arrangement of resources – and as a result, significantly improves the command and control of the incident.

FireRisk, meanwhile, is a mobile information application which enables the FRS to access up-to-date information on building risks at incidents by carrying out more proactive risk assessment checks on premises, and to do so with greater accuracy. It is designed to improve working practices by replacing existing paper-based processes for handling risk and fire inspections. FireRisk enables instant updating of premises records and the scheduling of regular checks. As a result, these tasks can be managed more accurately and effectively – the information is easily audited and the overall number of fire safety inspections fire officers can undertake can be increased due to time saved.

The easy-to-use forms support existing practices and as a result enables management to be more efficient in their time usage, giving them the opportunity to focus on training, team development and management-specific tasks. It also enables reporting to monitor and improve working practices, allowing for task monitoring and allocation while reducing the number of errors through its single data entry process. Its design is intuitive and easy to use, allowing FRSs to

adopt it without a lengthy retraining or learning process.

We are moving into a world where more and more information will be accessed digitally. Digital tools are revolutionising industries across the world and the FRSs are no exception; there is the potential to use digital innovation to access information instantly and support the people on the front line of the FRS. As FireRisk and FireCall demonstrate, not only does this approach create a much more efficient and effective working process but it enables fire officers to have access to a much wider variety of information. It is this feature that will do most to help ensure the safety not only of the FRS personnel but also of the general public they are tasked with protecting.

There is, moreover, another benefit from moving working process onto a digital platform, and that lies in helping to achieve a greener approach to fire risk management. The importance of the environmental (green) agenda to the public sector cannot be overstated. With all the major political parties looking at ways in which to make the UK's public sector greener, any tools that help meet this aim will grow in importance. By replacing wasteful paper-based platforms with digital devices, the FRSs can take a step towards greener working practices and help reduce the public sector's reliance on dwindling natural resources.

For any solution such as this to be a success, however, usability is vitally important. According to Airwave, it develops its products in close consultation with its customers to ensure that they solve real-world requirements and that they are easy to use. The solutions are accessed over hand-held PDAs (personal digital assistant devices) as well as from in-vehicle mobile data terminals (MDTs) devices familiar to FRS personnel who currently use them to access dispatch information over the Airwave network. The interfaces have been designed to be intuitive, and where possible automatic. FireRisk will, for example, collate and update routine and critical information even when not connected to a network, automatically synchronising with central systems once within range of a suitable network.

Mark Pearson concludes: "Innovation is only real useful when it addresses challenges in an efficient and effective way. We believe these two new applications provide that sort of innovation. Moving forward the greatest challenge for the fire and rescue services will be finding the best ways to collate and process information. Having the right equipment and systems installed will be imperative in ensuring this is done in the most successful manner."

Moving forward, digital innovations hold a lot of promise for the FRS sector. However digital innovation will only be of true benefit if it offers practical innovation as well – technologies that can help staff work more effectively and help save lives. The true benefits of digital is that, if the application is designed correctly it can do just that, while at the same time helping to reduce costs, rationalise bureaucracy and drive efficiencies.