



Fire Brigade Provides Timely Aid to Refugees

Kassel Fire Brigade

Kassel, Germany

How do a country's emergency response organizations deal with an influx of refugees? Not easily. It is a complex situation that could overwhelm a government's resources. When thousands of desperate refugees fled the horrors of civil war in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan to seek asylum in Europe, Germany proved to be an ideal destination because it was willing and uniquely prepared to help the refugees resettle. Most notably, the Kassel Fire Brigade leveraged its special operations capabilities to very successfully and effectively coordinate the arrival of refugees in the city and county of Kassel.

To prepare for such an undertaking, the fire brigade took several important steps to build up its emergency response technology foundation. Key to this effort was Kassel's joint command and control center, which leverages industry-leading computer-aided dispatch (CAD) software from Hexagon's Safety & Infrastructure division to alert and dispatch emergency personnel, route to operational sites, and deliver critical information on-site.

Annually, the center coordinates more than 110,000 responses with 18 rescue stations, five emergency medical services locations, one rescue helicopter, and 115 fire brigades with 407 vehicles. The center serves 440,000 citizens in an area covering nearly 540 square miles that includes 30 cities and municipalities.

Coordinating Relief Efforts

As refugees poured into Germany and other European countries, the logistical challenges quickly mounted, including providing shelter, beds, food, sanitary facilities, and basic medical care. And that meant Kassel Fire Brigade needed to work closely with public safety agencies, medical services, and relief organizations throughout the Kassel region.

Known for its innovation and highly skilled employees, Kassel Fire Brigade has been a Hexagon customer for more than two decades. During that time, the fire brigade has continually added to its technology arsenal. To help coordinate information and resources among all the agencies involved in managing the refugee situation, it adopted Hexagon's major event management software for emergency operations centers and mobile command staff.

The web-based solution enables users to coordinate and integrate information and resources among decentralized organizations, and also works seamlessly with the fire brigade's CAD system to provide fully integrated emergency and incident management, including dispatching. The software soon became the lynchpin of the fire brigade's emergency management operations.

Mobilizing Resources Rapidly

Armed with these tools, Kassel Fire Brigade has managed the refugee crisis by efficiently sharing assignments and information among organizations, enabling the brigade and its collaborators to set up accommodations for refugees in a short amount of time. One situation, in particular, required rapid response.

“We had to provide shelter for 400 people within less than eight hours, including weatherproof shelter, beds, food, sanitary facilities, and basic medical care,” said Karsten Hose, incident commander at Kassel Fire Brigade. “This is where the logistical processing and documentation capabilities in Hexagon’s solution played a crucial role in tackling this challenge.”

Thanks to the software, the fire brigade was also able to provide aid to refugees across multiple relief sites in the region.

Creating an ‘Excellent Technology Base’

With technology from Hexagon, Kassel Fire Brigade can mobilize its action plans and communications methods for major event management in a central operating view that all appropriate agencies can access, regardless of where users were located. Since the system launched, Kassel Fire Brigade has developed and visualized processes that have led to more widespread sharing of information, especially in crisis situations.

“By visualizing a situation clearly and comprehensively, and providing the user with greater situational awareness, Hexagon’s application provides an excellent technology base,” Hose said. “With one system, all information is available in the special operations room, the control center, and on-site – such as the refugee relief aid sites. This aspect was a great selling point for the users.”

Comprehensively Sharing Information

Hexagon’s software has enabled Kassel Fire Brigade to combine situational information, maps and geospatial data, and organizational plans and information via the web for visualizing an entire event or operation, and, importantly, the roles and responsibilities of all teams involved.

“There have been clear, understandable, and well-structured visualizations of legal requirements tied to the national service regulations for fire brigades in Germany, as well as the Hesse state law for fire protection and disaster control, and the individual challenges of each event, particularly those events pertaining to the refugee crisis,” Hose said.

Notably, the value of the software goes beyond the refugee crisis by preparing Kassel Fire Brigade to handle numerous major events and disaster scenarios.

“Crisis situations are generated automatically and categorized in certain alert categories in Hexagon’s major event management system,” said Joseph Werneke, head of the command and control center and an incident commander with Kassel Fire Brigade.

Categories include fires in special facilities such as industrial sites, hospitals or schools; chemical accidents; and large-scale traffic accidents. The agency can manually add extreme weather events, such as storms and floods, and major public events, like city festivals and sporting events.

“Each month, we are creating an average of 15-20 events,” Werneke said. “The entire workflows are visualized and structured clearly. Comprehensive and up-to-date information can be accessed immediately by whomever needs it.”



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Joseph Werneke

Head of the Command & Control Center & Incident Commander,
Kassel Fire Brigade

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Hexagon’s Safety & Infrastructure division provides software for smart and safe cities, improving the performance, efficiency and resilience of vital services.

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