

DARTing into disaster



Volunteers caught up in a violent robbery and carjacking scenario.

FOLLOWING NATURAL DISASTERS SUCH AS EARTHQUAKES, TSUNAMIS AND HURRICANES, FALLEN TREES CLOSE ROADS, CAUSE FLOODING, DAMAGE BUILDINGS AND BRING DOWN POWER LINES, DELAYING RESCUE OPERATIONS. The secondary impact can be even more far reaching; fallen trees damage vital emergency buildings such as hospitals and food distribution centres, they bring down power lines, disrupt water supplies and block major road and rail links. Understandably perhaps, there has been a tendency to view fallen trees simply as obstructions, a problem to be removed as quickly as possible, using whatever local resources are available, which often translates to untrained and inexperienced NGO staff, volunteers or unskilled labour carrying out highly dangerous 'hack and burn' clearance operations using a collection of hastily procured tools ranging from machetes to chainsaws.

This lack of professional knowledge and experience can result in little or no attention being given to the inherent dangers of either clearing these trees or of the potential value of the timber itself. Not only does this approach risk the health and safety of everyone involved, it also destroys a potentially valuable commodity that, if processed correctly, could retain economic value and be saved or recycled as part of the reconstruction process.

This is where the DART International UK team of qualified, highly trained, skilled and adaptable arborists comes in (DART standing for Disaster Arborist Response Team).



Volunteers carry out an aerial rescue of an injured colleague.

Launched at the Arb Show 2014, many of our readers will by now be familiar with DART International. Set up as a professional arborist team of trained volunteers in the aftermath of some of its members responding to Typhoon Haiyan that hit the Philippines in November 2013, Dart International UK is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). Although marketing itself as an arborist team, they are a response team, made up of many different people with equally as many different skills, which are utilised in their response work internationally.

The Arb Show proved to be the first of several show appearances, with trustees and supporters criss-crossing the country to attend the APF, the Emergency Services show and Saltex, meeting potential sponsors, talking to arborists and raising awareness of what they are trying to achieve.

The response from the arb world and industry in general has been overwhelming. As word gets around, more deployment volunteers

are coming forward, together with equipment donations, advice and generous offers of support from some of the biggest names in the business, including Glendale, Lifesaver, Lyon Work & Rescue, Buxtons, DD Hammocks, Stein and Makita.

"According to the UN, international aid work has now become one of the world's most hazardous professions," said Mike Metcalfe, the charity's training and operations manager. "Crime and civil disorder go hand-in-hand with all major natural disasters and international aid workers are increasingly at risk from violent attack, kidnapping or worse. Fortunately, those risks can be significantly reduced by improving our volunteers' situational awareness and understanding of how certain actions, or failure to act, can jeopardise their collective safety and security. As trustees of the charity, we believe that safeguarding our volunteers, making them fully aware of the risks and providing them with the appropriate training is our primary responsibility."

The first batch of response team volunteers completed safety and security training in July this year and DART is now turning its thoughts to getting further training dates in the diary, looking at maybe holding some collaborative events with other disaster relief organisations, such as SARAID.

Gary Bailey, chairman of the training team, said, "Whether it's intentional violence towards aid workers in Syria or health risks surrounding the Ebola crisis in West Africa, the hazards of aid work have been headline news recently. DART International doesn't operate in conflict zones, but working in post-disaster environments will always carry a degree of risk associated to civil unrest and criminality. Fortunately, many of those dangers are avoidable or, at the very least, can be significantly reduced through safety and security training and operational security management.

"Safeguarding our response team volunteers is a fundamental concern of the charity and, with that in mind, 16 responders from all over the UK completed their mandatory pre-deployment safety and security training back in July. The course included travel safety, security management, personal security issues, helicopter handling drills, advanced first-aid and much more. Just as importantly, it gave the volunteers an opportunity to work together as a team, exchange ideas and get to know the people they'll be working with in the future."

On the final day, four training scenarios were carried out to test the



DART volunteers on completion of the course.

training received over the previous days. Scenario one was an aerial rescue (NPTC CS38) from a mature beech tree on the site and provide first-aid; scenario two was an RTC where a casualty had a pelvic fracture along with a broken femur, casualty had to be extracted from the vehicle and airlifted from a nearby landing zone; scenario three was an illegal roadside checkpoint where the occupants of the vehicle were robbed and threatened with weapons; and the final scenario was talking to the press during a deployment.

Gary added, "Our next safety and security course is likely to be a winter training event early in 2015 and we very much hope some of our trained responders will return to help us run the course and broaden their own experience."

One of the volunteers on the packed programme, Joe Lambert of Leicestershire, said, "It was a fantastic weekend and I feel I've learned a lot; not just for an overseas deployment, but skills for everyday life."



Volunteers apply first-aid to the casualty of a road traffic accident.

With the typhoon season well underway, DART's current focus is on raising funds and preparing for that all-important 'proof of concept' deployment to demonstrate its potential and put it firmly on the disaster relief map.

For those who have already completed safety and security training and are still keen to deploy (personal circumstances permitting), DART International advises that a watchful eye is kept on the news, storm alert websites monitored and some thought given to your personal preparations – equipment, vaccinations, etc. DART is a rapid response organisation and the call for volunteers is likely to be very short notice. If you're willing and available to deploy, there will be limited opportunity to hunt for personal kit or catch up on jobs!

It would be fair to say that DART International is amazed by how far they have already progressed. As Mike says, "The DART project is developing apace at the moment and we, the trustees, are working hard to try and keep up with developments. We have been in

Manchester and Milton Keynes meeting with organisations who are also keen to offer their support and have been looking at possible ways of working with the Forestry Commission, in their incident management and emergency response organisation here in the UK.

"All in all, the DART project is galloping, but at least it's galloping in the right direction! With the professional experience, energy and support we are receiving, we can make a real difference to the lives of victims of natural disasters."

If you are interested in finding out more about DART International UK, their website contains a wealth of information. You can also download the volunteer enrolment form from the website, in both PDF and Word formats.

www.dartinternational.co.uk