

# Torrential rains and floods



**GREECE:** A severe wave of bad weather swept through most regions of Greece in October, causing serious problems with heavy rainstorms, extensive floods and even landslides, writes Fire Lieutenant *Catherine Sfyri*.

The areas most hit by the rain, from October 7-21, were the counties of Thessalonica, Halkidiki, Magnesia, Fthiotida, Attica, Messinia and Laconia, the city of Halkida, as well as the islands of Crete, Rhodes, Andros and Skiathos.

The Greek Fire Service received more than 1,700 calls for help. Over 250 rescue teams were formed, consisting of 600 firefighters,

including members of the Special Disaster Management Units, with special equipment, rescue boats and helicopters. All firefighting personnel in the areas involved were on standby and back-up forces from neighbouring areas were dispatched.

The operations carried out involved evacuating elderly people from their homes, carrying school children to safe places, releasing drivers and passengers trapped in their vehicles by rising water or who were stuck in the mud, as well as pumping out flooded basements.

This was the first time that so many different areas of the country were hit

so hard by such a calamity, and in such a short period of time.

Apart from people's lives being at risk, hundreds of households and extensive farmland suffered serious damage; traffic was cut off for many hours on the national roads; and central bridges were unusable owing to severe flooding and landslides.

The Government declared an emergency situation for the disaster areas and announced the immediate allowance of special benefits to flood victims for temporary housing and living expenses. A special damage restoration programme will be applied shortly to the bridges and the roads.

# Radio scheme cuts hoax calls

**UK:** In October, a joint scheme run by London Fire Brigade (LFB), which responds to around 80 hoax calls a week, and London radio station Capital FM, has targeted the problem of hoax calls head on, writes *Izzy Kington*.

The scheme worked by playing hoax calls on air during the breakfast show, and encouraging callers to ring Crimestoppers (a UK charity) if they recognised any of the voices.

Initial reports claim that during the period the scheme was running, hoax call rates were down by a quarter compared to the previous year. In Sheffield, where the project was piloted in 2004, hoax calls were cut by about 50 per cent.

Capital FM's breakfast show broadcasts to approximately 800,000 adult listeners a week, in Greater

London and slightly beyond. Katie Henderson from Capital Radio, has championed the scheme: "Capital ran the campaign every Monday in October, in our peak breakfast news bulletins. We ran a different call in each bulletin – so over the campaign we played out around 15 on air. We also put up all the calls on our website for listeners to hear in their own time. And as well as the calls, we've played out interviews with fire officers and control room staff, telling listeners why hoaxers put lives at risk every day."

Organising the scheme involved close liaison between the radio station and the Fire Brigade, as each had their own criteria: "LFB asked us to remove specific place names or shop/pub names which we did. Meanwhile (...) the voices needed to be clear enough

for us to play on air. Also we preferred calls where the hoaxer was speaking a lot," says Katie.

The scheme has had such an impact that she has since been approached by Surrey Fire Brigade and the Metropolitan Police to discuss similar schemes. She has advice for organisations around the world who may want to try the idea out for themselves: "The key to success is good quality, clear calls which will really stand out on air, so choose them carefully. Be prepared to supply the radio station with as many facts and figures as you can. Can you back up the facts by putting people up for interview? Try to think of as many different angles that you'd like to promote, so the radio station has lots of different angles to run with."

## in brief

**BAY OF BENGAL:** At least 63 people died and hundreds were missing in India and Bangladesh after severe monsoon storms.

**DUBAI:** Colonel Rashid Thani Al Matroushi, Director of Dubai Civil Defence, was standing in the Federal National Council elections. He has called for a crisis management and prevention committee to be set up, according to reports, and wants to introduce legislation to protect lives, property and the environment.

**ECUADOR:** Forty-seven people died in a bus crash in a mountain road near Quito; 17 children were among the victims. Poorly maintained vehicles and blind curves on the mountainous roads in this region contribute to the many crashes in this area.

**GUATEMALA:** More than 42 people were killed when a bus left the road in heavy fog and rain, crashing into a 100m ravine.

**INDONESIA:** A massive rubbish dump collapsed in September, burying several people and killing at least three of them.

**JAPAN:** Nine people were killed and more than 200 injured when Typhoon Shanshan struck south-west Japan, causing torrential rain that led to flash floods and landslides.

**PHILIPPINES:** A bomb which detonated in front of Makila town hall during a festival killed 12 people.

**ITALY:** Hundreds of people were injured and one person died after two metro trains collided during the morning rush hour in Rome. The fire department had to extricate several people trapped in the wreckage.

**RUSSIA:** Ten people died and a two-storey building was destroyed in an explosion at Cherkizovsky market in Moscow. Various causes of the blast have been mooted, including a faulty gas cylinder or a makeshift device.