

FIRE CASE STUDY

Transportation



M5 Motorway, Bristol

November 4, 2011

Statistics

Type of fire

Hydrocarbon

Ignition Source

Vehicle collision

Duration of fire

Rescue operations continued for over 24hrs

Number of casualties

7 people died, plus 51 people injured

Cost to industry

Final financial value is unknown however, cost of life, insurance claims, the use of the services, repair to the infrastructure and disruption to commuters.

References

Wales On Line. 2011.[Online]. [Accessed 8 November 2014]. <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/m5-crash-inquest-firework-smoke-7004153>
M5 Crash Footage - Sky News Coverage 04/11/2011 BREAKING NEWS PILE-UP 2011.[Online]. [Accessed 8 November 2014].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3ifRI VH7es>

Event

On the evening of Friday November 4, 2011 large plumes of smoke almost thick fog like drifted onto the motorway near junction 25 Bristol area of the motorway. The speed of driving in the UK on motorways for this section of road is 70mph and is therefore assumed most commuters were travelling at or around those speeds heading into the smoke / fog generated from a number of bonfires and firework displays. The result of poor visibility, panic braking and swerving vehicles collided involving 34-vehicle fire on the southbound carriageway.

Large section of the motorway were closed both ways between junction 23 and 26 as the emergency services battled to save lives, control the fires and where possible extinguish them.

"The smog was so thick that motorists on the northbound carriageway likened it to having a tin of paint thrown over their windscreens"

Mail online 2011.[Online]. [Accessed 8 November 2014] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2521285/Firework-display-contractor-cleared-causing-M5-crash.html>

Lessons Learned

An enquiry into the event concluded that although there were large firework displays being held at Taunton Rugby Club it was impossible to foresee and risk, assess against the fog and smoke from the display mingling. The event is therefore a tragic accident where emergency services were tested.

Lessons learned by the emergency services are duly noted from previous events and as such the sharing of best practices was apparent and that all agencies had a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Only a few minor points came from the enquiry these being;

- The unauthorised Fire & Rescue talking head hampered the media strategy. It is being dealt with internally.
- No command point in the earliest stages of the incident. Recommendation raised during the Police debrief to investigate the availability of more easily and rapidly deployable vehicles capable of providing a command base in the first hours