# Discussion Starter
# SECURITY: An Elite Anti-Fire System for the 2012 Olympics

Learning Legacies

### *Computer Says No*

LOCOG came under fire (if one can excuse the pun!) recently, for failure to budget appropriately for Security provisions for the Games. Such a provision would have included significant provision for fire-related activity. Although LOCOG have now revised their original budget to better cater for security and fire concerns, they may have been relying additionally on the major financial investments that the Government had recently made in the development of a £1bn network of fire centres, powered by impressive IT systems costing a cool £2m.

### *Anti-Terrorist Technology*

Designed in the wake of the September 11 attacks, the £423m Merton anti-fire centre constitutes one of nine centres across the country that has been designed to be able, for the first time ever, to co-ordinate a national response to a terrorist attack or natural disaster.

The regional centres were designed to have the capability to pinpoint the locations of fire engines and direct the nearest crews to problems. They would also use new technology to filter out hoax calls and ensure calls were answered at peak times, rather than having to rely on the Metropolitan Police for back-up.

### *Computer Says No*

Unfortunately for LOCOG (and any organisation interested in anti-fire and anti-terror response, for that matter), the computer system that constituted the hub of the Anti-Fire Centre operations will not be operational in time for the 2012 Games.

### *Technological Failures*

The computer software - which would also link England's 45 fire control rooms - is not ready as a result of what one MP called a "debacle", and what Brian Coleman, Tory Chairman of the London Fire Authority refers to as '*...an IT cock-up to end all IT cock ups*.'


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He went on to comment that '*Those of us who saw it coming several years ago kept telling the Government they were not in a position to deliver this before the Olympics. Nor is there any evidence that the software works. It's not going to be unsafe, the current system will see us through'.*

The London "regional control centre" has already been criticised for its lavish design - it reportedly boasts a £25,000 coffee machine. It also houses 72 CCTV cameras and can withstand a nuclear attack; all of which would be useful, no doubt, if someone could successfully switch on the computers.

MPs are now investigating what the Fire Brigades Union refer to as a "*gross waste of public money*", which could eventually result in a bill of £1.4 billion. The National Audit Office says the software project will end up being £240 million over budget. Former Fire Minister Shahid Malik, however, argued that the system did not constitute part of the emergency preparations for the Games, with a spokesperson commenting that: *'This change in the schedule has no significant impact upon*

*security arrangements for the Olympics. The Olympic village will operate as an independent unit with its own communication centre covering police, ambulance and fire resources.'*

The delay has also caused a loss in available employment for the Merton area, undoubtedly a blow given the rising unemployment caused already by the recession. Merton Council leader David Williams believes that "*The disappointment from a Merton perspective is the centre appears to be close to physical completion, but the opportunity to generate some local employment opportunities has been lost for the foreseeable future*." - and that, interestingly, the Government are contradicting their earlier claims, made in 2007, by claiming that the Games do not need these systems. Earlier Government statements identified "*the need for world class systems to be in place for the 2012 Olympics*".

The new centres were designed to replace Britain's 46 existing fire control rooms at a cost of approximately £1bn, with the IT system – currently inoperable – claiming a cost of £200m.

## START THE DISCUSSION

- Consider the social, environmental and economic factors that might have contributed to the failures outlined in this case study.

## FIND OUT MORE

**London Fire Brigade**

**http://www.london-fire.gov.uk/index.asp**

## *CREDITS*



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