



Jack Kusters



Erik de Kunder



Jimmy Säfström

A common approach to heavy rescue ops

Heavy rescue incidents involving trucks buses and trains can happen anywhere and involve any fire department. For this reason an international training initiative called NATEL (New Approach To Emergency Lifting) has been set up by two training institutes, Heavy Rescue Sweden and the Provectus Academy.

Jack Kusters of Provectus Academy, a Dutch training institute for emergency services and partner of Heavy Rescue Sweden, explains that heavy rescue requires different emergency personnel, methods, techniques, and equipment. "Modern fire departments are well trained in facing extrications for road accidents with cars. However, in the case of heavy vehicle incidents their knowledge is often limited, and this can have fatal consequences."

A heavy rescue may be described as: moving or stabilising heavy objects, using special lifting equipment above and beyond the normal stabilisation equipment. Controlling the movement of a heavy object requires special knowledge, availability and correct use of equipment. Heavy rescue is completely different from a normal extrication operation.

NATEL started as a heavy rescue training program and has grown to become an international training platform. "We noticed that many rescuers and training centres agreed that there wasn't a proper programme for these type of incidents. Joining forces not only makes the programme better, it can also save money and build standardised procedures," says Kusters.

Erik de Kunder of the Provectus Academy was also involved with NATEL from its inception and he believes that the new training platform will be a success. "We want to share our knowledge, and therefore the programme will be improved on a regular basis, with the knowledge obtained and created by our members. The first course has just been developed and is ready to be introduced to students."

Jimmy Säfström of Heavy Rescue Sweden, explains the reasons behind developing the new approach for emergency lifting. "During an accident with a large bus several years ago, it became clear that there was limited knowledge on how to lift these large vehicles properly. The incident took the lives of nine people, of which six perished during the actual rescue operation. I was asked to develop training and started to research how to lift heavy objects. Five years, 96 new Scania trucks and 450 partial bus lifts later, we have acquired enough knowledge and have created an effective method to handle these situations.

"In some cases, I see students turning to the use of lifting cranes too quickly, in situations when the use of lifting bags would have been more effective. Often, they approach a situation from the wrong side, or do not stabilise correctly. These mistakes can be easily eliminated by the correct training."

Säfström believes that new technology makes more things possible, but many rescue professionals are simply not aware of new developments. Many departments lack proper or sufficient stabilisation and lifting equipment. However, with the new procedures, developed by NATEL, and proper equipment a bus can be lifted in 10-15 minutes, compared to the 45-60 minutes it took when the academy first started.

NATEL consists currently of three different training elements. A one-day workshop, a three-day training course and an advanced training course. The one-day NATEL workshop consists of an introduction to heavy rescue, in which the general challenges of the discipline are discussed.

The three-day NATEL training handles all important aspects of heavy rescue in more depth, and the advanced training is mostly practically focussed and emphasizes team dynamics during complex scenarios.

Both the workshop and the training involve theory and practice. Training sessions consist of hands-on scenarios in which buses, trucks and concrete are used.

In addition, NATEL has developed a quick reference book containing useful information which can help as an on-scene guide for responders.

The training programme teaches students to use a six-step framework to structure a heavy rescue operation:

- 1 Think
- 2 Stabilize and Block
- 3 Lift
- 4 Follow the load
- 5 Secure
- 6 Extricate

The first NATEL training course is scheduled for the first week of November 2009 in Wesel, Germany. This is a three-day event, and it is still open for access, but places are limited.

"The nice thing is that we can always improve our skills - that is why rescue work is not a job, it's a lifestyle! I hope that we can develop and create a platform for Heavy Rescue together," concludes Säfström.

To find out more about NATEL, e-mail: info@natel.info

After a large bus incident took the lives of nine people, it became clear that there was not enough knowledge about heavy rescue.

