

The fire services activity



The principal aim of Fire Service teams involved in the earthquake emergency was to rescue as many of the victims trapped under the rubble as possible. Operations were carried out in compliance with health rescue protocols to reduce the risks for both victims and rescuers to the utmost. The Firefighters of L'Aquila were the first to start rescue operations wherever they could. Using all available resources they dug without interruption through heaps of debris in the hope of rescuing those who had survived the collapsed structures.

The Department of Fire and Rescue Services and Civil Defence immediately mobilized the Firefighters serving in neighbouring provinces and regions. Those rescue teams left their fire stations only a few minutes after the tremors and joined their colleagues of L'Aquila in search

and rescue operations. In the following hours the Fire Service teams of far-away cities and provinces were also mobilized.

The first hours were the most important ones to locate and rescue trapped survivors. Operations were carried out with extreme caution and care in order not to further damage structures or injure victims trapped underneath.

Firefighters dug with mechanical excavators where possible, but they used shovels for the most part. The work was very arduous and the rescuers' safety was jeopardized by the aftershocks which shook the structures which were already heavily damaged by the initial quake.

Fire Service teams worked in shifts and were relieved every three days. The never-ending requests for assi-



The work of the USAR teams has allowed the rescue of a 20 aged girl, 42 hours after the earthquake. In addition to people rescue activity, the same

team was later involved in the search of all assets necessary to make public offices work again.



stance also came from the suburbs surrounding L'Aquila and neighbouring municipalities. In the first hours after the initial earthquake the Fire Service dog units worked non-stop, carrying out more than 250 search operations and leading to the discovery of many survivors under the rubble.

Search dogs worked in cooperation with USAR (Urban Search and Rescue) teams equipped with specialized equipment such as vibraphones, thermal imaging infrared cameras, reinforced concrete cutting rotary saws and concrete saws. At the same time a "peer-to-peer" psychological support unit was mobilized to assist all Fire Service teams directly affected by the disaster, especially those belonging to the province of L'Aquila. "Peer" in this case means a Firefighter ready to help a colleague under



particular emotional stress caused by traumatic events. All health problems concerning Firefighters were addressed by the Fire Health Service. A Crisis Unit was set up in order to ensure medical assistance to Fire Service personnel in the earthquake-hit area and to monitor hygiene and health conditions in the Fire Service tent camps. At the end of the search and rescue activities, Fire Service operations were directed to assist the local population by recovering personal belongings in damaged buildings, securing and shoring buildings and infrastructures, and restoring road networks of devastated towns and villages. The Fire Service devoted much care and attention also to the emergency storage of hazardous chemicals and radioactive sources present in medical labs and industrial facilities heavily damaged by the tremors.