

Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis

Studia Politologica 20 (2018)

ISSN 2081-3333

DOI 10.24917/20813333.20.9

Barbara Węglarz

Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny im. Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie

Organisation of the National Rescue and Firefighting System in Poland

Introduction

The National Rescue and Firefighting System (NRFS) is an integral part of the internal security of the state. It is an open system, closely cooperating with the environment. Its creation was, on the one hand, a response to the growing cultural changes and related problems and, on the other hand, the need for coordinating and optimizing the operation of services, inspections and firefighters whose main task was to carry out rescue operations. The first records of the system appeared in the Act of 24 August 1991 on fire protection but it started to practically operate in 1995. The body being, to the greatest extent, the basis of the National Rescue and Firefighting System (NRFS) is the State Fire Service (SFS) with its forces, logistics and equipment. The legislation underpinning its operation is being constantly improved and revised, both in terms of carrying out rescue operations, and improving the cooperation of the services responsible for security. This last element is being assessed critically. In the literature, there are opinions on the fact that, in Poland, there is no efficient and coordinated system of security, and that the state is not prepared to deal with crisis. Against this background, the NRFS stands out, its organizational structure, the cooperation of the bodies functioning in it and efficient exchange of information make it an extremely important element in facilitating and sometimes even enabling efficient crisis management. The purpose of this article is to present information on the organization and functioning of the NRFS.

Genesis of the National Rescue and Firefighting System (NRFS)

The National Rescue and Firefighting System, organized by the State Fire Service began to function in Poland in 1995. Initially, its purpose was to protect the life, health, property and the environment. Its assumptions were implemented in particular through: fighting fires, other natural disasters, technical and chemical rescue. In

1997, the catalogue of tasks was expanded to include ecological and medical rescue, and in 2006, cooperation with the units of the National Medical Rescue System and the emergency notification system were added. In contrast, the main idea of the establishment of the NRFS was to create a unified and coherent system which will bring together interrelated rescue bodies in such a way that each action taken was effective.

Currently, the NRFS “is an integral part of the internal security of the state, including saving life, health, property or the environment, forecasting, detecting and combating fires, natural disasters or other local threats.” The system is based on the principle of being unchanged and adapting the basic tasks of rescue to the specifics of different kinds of events, including the mass and natural disasters. Its specific role is apparent primarily in situations when the saving resources and forces are insufficient, and the organization of rescue operations requires a change in priorities and simplifying procedures (www.straz.gov.pl).

Organization of the National Rescue and Firefighting System (NRFS)

In order to provide better coordination and operation of the NRFS, the system was organized on three levels: district, provincial and national. The district level is called the executive and the provincial and national play the supporting and coordinating role in situations requiring the use of the resources and forces, respectively outside the area of the district or province. The NRFS operates in two states, involving the supervision and the current response to the events using its own forces and the resources of municipalities and districts, as well as taking up rescue in emergency situations, when it is necessary to use provincial or national resources (Meres 2012: 10).

The body of the government administration responsible for the implementation of the state policy in the field of fire protection and performing the supervision over the functioning of the NRFS is the minister responsible for internal affairs. With regard to the system, its duty is to prevent the effects of natural disasters, as well as, in the case of them, keeping the Polish President and Prime Minister informed on the action taken (Art. 29, *Law...*). The powers of the Minister of Internal Affairs also include the determination, by regulation, of the detailed rules for the organization of the NRFS, mainly in the field of:

- 1) organization of the system at all levels;
- 2) fighting fires and other natural disasters;
- 3) chemical, environmental, medical and technical rescue;
- 4) dispatching rescue operations;
- 5) directing rescue operations;
- 6) holding documentation of events and the rescue operations of the NRFS;
- 7) organizing operational assistance;
- 8) organizing dispatching positions (Art. 14, par. 2, *Act...*).

On the other hand, coordinating the NRFS, defining its tasks and control, as well as the managing the system in emergency situations of threats to life, health or the environment is the responsibility of the Commander in Chief of the State Fire Service, the voivode or the governor, respectively, in the area of the state, province

or district (Art. 14, par. 3, *Act ...*). The last two (the voivode and the governor) are supported by the provincial or district emergency response teams (Art. 14, par. 4, *Act ...*). In contrast, to the extent determined by the voivode, coordinating the system at the municipal level is the responsibility of the municipality head (the mayor, president of the city). His tasks can be supported by the municipal fire brigade commander or the municipal commander of the Volunteer Fire Brigade teams (Art. 14, par. 5, *Act ...*).

The organizer and the base of the system is the State Fire Service (SFS) with its forces, equipment and logistics base (Leśniakiewicz 2011: 5). Currently (as at 31.12.2016), the following operate within the NRFS: the General Headquarters of the State Fire Service, 16 provincial headquarters of the SFS, 335 district/ municipal headquarters of the SFS, 500 (including 5 school units) fire and rescue units of the SFS, 4161 units of voluntary fire brigades, 4 plant fire departments. In addition, the system is supported on the basis of the agreements of service, inspections and guards, namely by: the Police, the Border Guards, the State Inspectorate for Environmental Protection, the Institute of Meteorology and Water Management, the National Atomic Energy Agency, the Mountain Rescue Posts, the Maritime Search and Rescue Service, the Air Ambulance Rescue as well as non-governmental organizations: the Mountain Volunteer Search and Rescue, the Water Volunteer Search and Rescue, the Tatra Volunteer Search and Rescue, the Polish Aero Club, the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association, the Polish Red Cross, the Polish Mountaineering Association (www.straz.gov.pl).

The NRFS at the National Level

The structure of the NRFS assumes that the central level supports rescue operations and coordinates them across the country in situations when it is required to use the forces and resources from outside the district where there is a specific event. Such an assumption is governed by the free movement of manpower and resources, regardless of the boundaries of provinces and the resource efficiency of the forces and resources in the whole country (Kogut 2015: 24).

At the national level, the system consists of the following bodies: the Central Headquarter of the SFS, forces and resources constituting the central operational assistance¹, the school of the State Fire Service, the national databases of the special equipment of the State Fire Service, fire protection research and development units, health institutions, guards and other rescue groups operating on the basis of civil law contracts (Skoczylas 2007: 98). In the Regulation of the Minister of the

1 It is worth noting that the forces and resources of the central operating assistance are also used outside the country. The main task of the central operating assistance is the elimination of the consequences of events and the prevention of hazards. The activities are most often conducted in the form of cross-border cooperation with other services and humanitarian aid. The bodies authorized to create the central operational assistance are the Commander in Chief of the SFS and SFS Commanders of the SFS schools. The specificity of this formation, apart from the undertaken tasks, involves a special preparation of the members of the formation and equipping them so that they could participate in the action without being supplied additional equipment and victuals for 36 hours.

Interior and Administration of 29 December 1999 on detailed rules for the organization of the national rescue and firefighting system, a special position is taken by the Commander in Chief of the SFS who is the central body of the government administration in the matters concerning fire protection and the organization of the NRFS at the central level. Its main tasks in this regard include, in particular:

- 1) updating data on the operational readiness of the central operational assistance and the bodies cooperating with it in the country and beyond its borders;
- 2) dispatching the forces and resources of the central operational assistance;
- 3) development of rules:
 - notifications and cooperation between bodies in the country in the conduct of rescue operations,
 - organizing rescue operations,
 - event registration,
 - organization and operation of ICT systems,
 - cooperation during rescue operations with broadcasters, radio and television programs and volunteers,
 - organization of communication with respect to alerting, notifications, dispatching and interactions for the purpose of rescue operations,
 - psychological support for people involved in rescue operations,
 - creating joint rescue teams by the NRFS bodies,
 - conducting rescue services' trainings,
 - increasing operational readiness,
 - analysis of events,
 - development of national databases of specialized equipment and extinguishing agents (Par. 4, *Regulation...*).

Dispatching the system units for rescue operations and alerting the cooperating bodies is done by the National Centre for Rescue Coordination and Civil Protection (NCRCCP) which also acts as an inter-department management centre. Its most important tasks include, in particular: coordination of the rescue operations conducted across the country and outside the borders by units included in the NRFS; dispatching the units included in the system in the country, as well as the rescue and firefighting system to rescue and train outside the country, as results from the agreements on mutual cross-border assistance; developing procedures in the context of hazards and alarming in case of their presence; synchronizing the process of preventing the occurrence of new and the spread of the existing risks; analysing the hazards resulting from the development of civilization and the forces of nature (Węglarz 2014: 454).

Activating the provincial and national level of support takes place upon the request of the person coordinating rescue operations through a control post –a district one with regard to the provincial level and a provincial with reference to the central level. In the event of hazards requiring the cooperation, at the central level, of the NRFS bodies and the bodies of other departments, the minister responsible for internal affairs is the coordinator. He is supported by the Team for Emergency and the Crisis Management Centre created on the basis of the NCRCCP (www.kpssp.pl/stwola).

The NRFS at the Provincial Level

The provincial level of the system is activated when the undertaken rescue operations require the use of forces and resources from outside the province. In the literature, it is assumed that its role is to support and coordinate. The body defining the tasks of the analysed NRFS level is the voivode. His core competencies in this area should be mainly: adaptation of the NRFS activities determined by the central government administration to the conditions of the province, setting the tasks and control of local authorities, and ensuring their cooperation with the organizational units of government administration. The voivodes' duties also include directing the activities of the NRFS with respect to the prevention and elimination of the consequences and hazards that threaten life, health, property and the environment. His cooperation and coordination with the authorities of the neighbouring countries with respect to cross-border assistance when the event also includes part of the area of a neighbouring country is also important. For the actions taken by the NRFS forces to be fast and efficient, voivodes must first approve rescue plans for their regions and programs for the operations of provincial units (services, institutions, guards and other organizational units). At the time of events that threaten people's lives or health, voivodes have the right to determine the objectives and priorities of rescue operations, the logistical support for the forces and rescue and auxiliary means of the system. In an emergency, the duty of voivodes is to provide the minimum requirements for the survival of people in the areas that have been affected by the disaster (Skoczylas 2007: 93).

The provincial level of the NRFS consists of: the provincial head quarter of the SFS, the provincial operational assistance², training centres of the SFS, the provincial crisis management team, the national bases of the specialized equipment of the SFS, services, inspections, guards, the institutions and bodies which voluntarily undertook to cooperate within the framework of the NRFS under civil contracts. The cooperation of these bodies is the result of prior agreements with voivodes (Skoczylas 2007: 93).

The provincial commander of the SFS also has significant expertise in the NRFS. He provides the organization and proper functioning of the system, primarily through:

- 1) developing risk analyses and operational security and provincial operational plans;
- 2) establishing the protected areas for the specialized rescue teams and the NRFS bodies provided to carry out tasks outside their own area of actions;
- 3) updating data on the operational readiness of the operational assistance in the province and within cross-border aid;

² Operational assistance is created in provinces, its primary activity is the elimination of the consequences of events. Its formation, maintaining standby and appropriate training should be the responsibility of provincial commanders. Operational assistance should be equipped with such equipment that they could operate freely during actions for at least 12 hours.

- 4) availability of the forces and resources of the specialized rescue teams and operational assistance in the province;
- 5) establishing the rules of notification and cooperation between the bodies in the province during rescue operations.

Dispatching the system units for rescue operations takes place through the SFS provincial emergency coordination post of also cooperating with the crisis management centres of voivodes and the combined administration. The procedures of operations and activating the rescue and firefighting system at the provincial level, in relation to particular types of hazards, are determined under provincial emergency plans. It includes the technical and organizational ways to address any risks that require the investment of considerable forces and resources, and those that may be present on the borders of districts or provinces (www.kpsp.pl/stwola).

Among the tasks of the NRFS, the following should be mentioned: cooperation with the State Medical Rescue Service. Together, they form the Emergency Notification System (ENS). The ENS bodies are: provincial emergency communication centres (RECC), emergency communication centres, the SFS remaining control posts, the Police control posts supporting emergency numbers, individuals cooperating with the ENS (Kała 2011. *Z CPR-em...*: 42) and social rescue organizations. The responsibilities of the SPR include, primarily, the current analysis of the rescue resources, accepting emergency calls, dispatching forces and resources, coordinating and monitoring rescue operations, and initiating emergency response procedures. The authority controlling the operation of the system in the country, in particular through the analysis of its activities in provinces and initiating projects in the field of the ENS, is the Commander in Chief of the SFS. In contrast, the organization and coordination of the ENS in provinces is the responsibility of voivodes supported by the provincial and district commanders of the SFS. The RECC is a common control post for the managing by the commander of the provincial SFS and the post of the medical coordinator of emergency medical services. It can be incorporated with the posts of the operators of emergency numbers. The RECC constantly updates and analyses information on rescue bodies in the province, in particular during: conducting rescue operations and emergency medical operations, rescue trainings or operational readiness inspection of the NRFS bodies. The system is also an invaluable means for managing rescue operations, because it allows: access to the current information about the rescue resources, assisting rescue operations with respect to dispatching other resources, the use of databases and emergency plans and their analysis. Where appropriate, the RECC notifies other RECC and rescue groups and the services from the province in the event ENS (Kała 2011. *Wojewódzki...*: 44–45).

The NRFS at the District Level

Districts are the basic units of the functioning of the NRFS. It is considered the executive level due to the fact that it is precisely at this level that most of the tasks of the system are carried out. The structure of the NRFS in individual districts depends on the type of hazards and the network of rescue units. Dispatching the system units for rescue operations and alerting the cooperating bodies take place through the

control post of the commander of the district SFS which cooperates with the emergency posts of local government mayors and presidents (Kurzępa 2013: 180-181). If the forces and measures of the rescue and firefighting system in the area of the district are insufficient (e.g. due to a sudden increase in the scale of the events, simultaneous existence of the events, a lack of specialist units) or the event coverage extends beyond the area of the district, a higher level of the rescue and firefighting system is activated (www.straz.gov.pl).

The district NRFS level is composed of the district headquarter of the SFS, the fire protection units incorporated into the system, the district crisis management team, other services, inspections, institutions and bodies integrated into the system, as well as specialists in emergency cases included in the system under civil law contracts (www.osprzemeszno.pl). The bodies included in the NRFS at the district level perform the basic and specialized rescue operations - if they have the forces and resources to start them. When they are not sufficient, the district or national bodies of the NRFS are activated. Effective responses and actions require the preparation of a mandatory emergency plan which should include the basic tasks and procedures in case of hazards. The body preparing the document is the commander of the district SFS, and it is approved by the governor (Par. 5, *Regulation...*).

The district commander of the SFS is responsible for the organization of the system at the district level through:

- 1) developing risk analyses and the analyses of operational safety as well as district emergency plans;
- 2) updating data on operational readiness and high operational readiness;
- 3) moving the forces and measures of the NRFS to temporary locations;
- 4) determining:
- 5) the NRFS bodies' network and the protected areas;
- 6) the method of notifying in the event of a sudden or extraordinary hazard;
- 7) notification, alarming and cooperation rules for the bodies during rescue operations;
- 8) implementing the dispatching system of forces and measures for rescue operations (Par. 4, *Regulation...*).

Ensuring the implementation of the NRFS rescue operations at the district level is the responsibility of the governor who: agrees on the manner and scope of the cooperation of the bodies in the system, approves rescue plans and the programs of the operations of the district inspections, services and guards, as well as other organizational units of the district. The powers of the chairman of the district board also include the determination of the NRFS tasks and monitoring their implementation. He also budgets the money enabling bodies' effective rescue operations. His carrying out the tasks is supported by the district crisis management team, appointed and chaired by the chairman. In crisis situations, extraordinary threat to life, health, property or the environment the governor has an obligation to determine the objectives to achieve and identify priority rescue operations, providing logistical support for participating in the activities of individuals and the minimum requirements to allow the survival of the population. He also observes and controls the progress in carrying out the assigned tasks (Skoczylas 2007: 60-61).

The basic element of the NRFS at the district level is the control post of the district commander of the SFS (Skoczylas 2007: 66). The SFS dispatchers serve there, with SFS duty orderlies as well as the designated officers who meet the qualifying standards for the above-mentioned bodies (dispatchers or duty orderlies). The rules also regulate the issues concerning the organization of the posts, where necessary, to ensure that the first of all of the bodies meet the requirements of safe and healthy work requirements (for handling emergency calls and supporting or coordinating rescue operations; the technical, social, hygienic and sanitary support), and the technical equipment and ICT systems ensuring the implementation of tasks. The control posts should also be provided with:

- 1) devices that will enable recording the contents of alerts, the waiting time for establishing a connection, the acceptance and handling the call and the correspondence at the control post;
- 2) automated systems to ensure alerting or dispatching forces and resources, and keeping abreast of the operational readiness;
- 3) equipment and apparatus for obtaining and processing information for rescue operations;
- 4) emergency and guaranteed power supply (Par. 52–53, *Regulation...*).

The tasks performed by the control post include, in particular:

- 1) in taking, qualifying and forwarding alerts, if necessary;
- 2) dispatching forces and resources for events;
- 3) supporting and coordinating rescue operations;
- 4) current analysis of:
 - a) information about the dangers from the monitoring systems for the NRFS bodies,
 - b) operational readiness,
 - c) intervention time (including the time of: dispatching, arrival, performing and completing rescue operations),
 - d) course of rescue operations,
 - e) material and equipment reserves of the given NRFS body;
- 6) informing superiors and the relevant public authorities on the types of hazards, the forecast of their development and the scale and location of the event;
- 7) activating procedures aimed at increasing the manpower or the introduction of high operational readiness in the organizational units of the SFS;
- 8) launching emergency evacuation plans of dispatchers and duty orderlies and the technical equipment;
- 9) cooperation with the control posts, emergency call centres and other crisis management centres or teams;
- 10) cooperation with rescue groups that perform tasks outside the country;
- 11) use of maps, information systems and the tools needed for analysing and forecasting hazards, as well as creating and updating the tactical and operational databases utilized when organizing and conducting rescue operations and to support decision-making processes;
- 12) use of emergency response plans and the documentation used in the organization, conducting and analysing rescue operations, the organization

of operational assistance or implementing procedures in the field of crisis management;

13) storage of the documents and data concerning the course of rescue operations.

One of the basic assumptions of the organization of the control post of the commander of the district SFS is to ensure consistency and continuity within the created rescue system, which requires not only unified equipment standards, emergency procedures and documentation, but also a reliable communications system providing efficient reporting and dispatching rescue and their interaction while managing rescue operations, as well as informing the public about hazards. The managing station is also an integral part of the District Crisis Management Centre (PCMC). The service is performed by: a duty orderly, a duty orderly assistance, ambulance dispatchers, and, if necessary, members of a freelance operational group. The control post functions also as a technical and information database of the PCMC, with the following activities:

- 1) constant interaction with dispatchers and alerting operational assistance and the NRFS forces and bodies in the conduct of activities, as well as performing other tasks carried out and related to rescue operations in the municipalities being the area of the direct influence of the given Rescue and Fire Fighting Unit (JRG),
- 2) using digital maps, maps of operational assistance and operational plans,
- 3) providing appropriate information for those directing the rescue operation,
- 4) using supporting documentation,
- 5) cooperation with specialists in the field of rescue,
- 6) using various types of communication (paging, selective calling, alerting operators, mobile communications, wireless and wired),
- 7) using emergency calls, e-mails and faxes,
- 8) using the equipment necessary to record phone conversations and analyse the exit and residence time of the dispatched forces and measures for rescue operations (Skoczylas 2007: 66–67).

Concluding remarks

The primary aim of creating the NRFS was to protect the life, health, property and the environment by fighting fires and other natural disasters and coordinating emergency services. After more than 20 years of operating, both theorists and those working within the system argue that the tasks have been largely achieved. Good assessment and effectiveness of the NRFS result primarily from its organization at three, closely interacting with each other, levels. The basis are the activities conducted at the province level. Only when the resources and forces available to the province are insufficient or if the event is outside its area, the provincial or national level is activated. The good communication and flow of information between all levels and other services involved in the incident are worth emphasizing, as well as the competent authorities of the public administration. It could be stated, however, that the crucial reason for the success of the NRFS is focusing more on the effectiveness of actions than on rigid theoretical procedures and guidelines.

Bibliografia

- Kała Dariusz. 2011. "Wojewódzki CPR". *Przegląd Pożarniczy*. 2 : 44–45.
- Kała Dariusz. 2011. "Z CPR-em na bieżąco". *Przegląd Pożarniczy*. 5 : 42.
- Kogut Bogusław. 2015. Krajowy System Ratowniczo-Gaśniczy. Aspekty prawne, In J. Konieczny, M. Schroeder. *Krajowy System Ratowniczo-Gaśniczy 1995–2015. Postępy organizacyjno-prawne, logistyczne i taktyczno-ratownicze*. 24. Inowrocław–Poznań: Garmond.
- Kurzepa Bolesław. 2013. *The Act of 24 August 1991 on Fire protection. Comment*, 180–181. Toruń.
- Leśniakiewicz Wiesław. Skulich Janusz. Królik Ireneusz. Jopek Tadeusz. Dobosz Zbigniew. Zalech Jacek. Borkowska Violeta. 2011. "Analiza potencjału ratowniczego Ochotniczych Straży Pożarnych włączonych do Krajowego Systemu Ratowniczo-Gaśniczego". *Komenda Główna Państwowej Straży Pożarnej*. <http://www.straz.gov.pl>.
- Meres Zbigniew. 2012. Geneza, powstanie i funkcjonowanie Krajowego Systemu Ratowniczo-Gaśniczego. In *Współczesny wymiar bezpieczeństwa w aspekcie zmienności zagrożeń – ratownictwo 2011*. T. Marek. K. Bogdan. (ed.). Katowice: WSZOP.
- Rozporządzenie Ministra Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji dnia 18 lutego 2011 r. w sprawie szczegółowych zasad organizacji krajowego systemu ratowniczo-gaśniczego (Dz.U. z dnia 3 marca 2011 r.).
- Skoczylas Józef. 2007. *Prawo ratownicze*. 60–63, 93–98. Warszawa: LexisNexis.
- Węglarz Barbara. 2014. Ochotnicze Straże Pożarne w Krajowym Systemie Ratowniczo-Gaśniczym. In *Infrastruktura krytyczna w procesie zarządzania w sytuacjach kryzysowych*. A. Gałęcki, A. Kurkiewicz, S. Mikołajczak (ed.). 454. Poznań: WSB.

Abstract

National Firefighting and Rescue System (NFRS) has been created to protect population, property and environment within the territory of the Republic of Poland by the following activities: extinguishing fires, fighting against the local threats, chemical and ecological rescue operations, technical rescue operations and first medical aid. NFRS, as an integral part of the internal security system of the country, is financed by the Government. The Chief Commandant of the State Fire Service is the central body of the state administration responsible for organization and managing the NFRS. The system operates on three administrative levels corresponding with the administrative structure of the country: district (main executive level, where interventions are carried out by the district's resources), regional (coordination and assistance to the rescue operations when resources in the district are insufficient) and national (rescue operations assistance and coordination when resources in the region are insufficient). The main purpose of this article is to present : tasks performed by the NFRS (National Firefighting and Rescue System), functioning of the system at three levels (district, regional and national), cooperation of the NFRS with subjects like Police, Border Guard, units of Voluntary Fire Brigade and many others.

Keywords: National Rescue and Firefighting System (NRFS); rescue; security of the state; State Fire Service (SFS)