

by Richard Storey

## Operational Assurance

Allen Head with SARA personnel and fire incident commander



photo: Robin Goodlad, RNLI

## Water rescue – time to get serious and work together

After the experiences of this summer, during which whole communities had their homes and businesses ruined by flooding, it is not surprising that water rescue has become an issue for urgent debate. **Richard Storey** contends that if flooding cannot be prevented then, as a nation, we will need to find better ways of protecting lives

### FLOODING, IT SEEMS, IS TO BECOME

endemic across England and Wales. Depending on which pundits we choose to listen to, the cause is either climate change or poor flood defences or a combination of the two. To make matters worse, government seems intent on driving through a major house building programme which will result in thousands more houses being built on floodplains.

With floodplain dwellers seemingly likely to find buildings and contents insurance increasingly difficult to obtain, are we not creating a two tier home owning community? Properties prone to flooding will be blighted, with the resulting effect that these properties will end up in the ownership of those unable to afford to buy elsewhere.

When they become flood victims they will be least financially able to deal with their uninsured losses. Is this a sensible housing policy for the 21st century? Far better, surely, would be to either allocate funds to a national inland flood defence programme (unlikely to happen) or, better still, build our new homes

away from low lying ground and floodplains. That way we start to minimise the high cost in material and human suffering occasioned by the flooding we are now told to expect (interspersed by years of soaring temperatures and drought conditions).

### RNLI Input

In the meantime we need to deal with the problems which already exist. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution, despite being a wholly voluntary funded organisation, has been taking the initiative to bring a degree of consistency to water rescue procedures and signage. This is an area in which a plethora of guidance for the public has made it unnecessarily confusing for those caught up in rescue situations. It has also made it more difficult for them to respond as quickly as they might. At present water rescue notices for the public vary around the coast as well as between coastal waters and inland waterways.

Not only this, but a number of tragic drownings both in the recently flooded areas