

City of Rijeka Fire Brigade, Croatia



Ladder training exercise conducted as part of Croatian Fire Association 140 anniversary celebration program

Rijeka is the principal sea port and the third largest city in Croatia. It is located on Kvarner Bay, an inlet of the Adriatic Sea and has a population of 128 624 inhabitants. The metropolitan area, which includes adjacent towns and municipalities, has a population of more than 240 000.

Historically, because of its strategic position and its excellent deep-water port, the city was fiercely contested, especially among Italy, Hungary (serving as the Kingdom of Hungary's largest and most important port) and Croatia, changing hands and demographics many times over centuries. According to the 2011 census data, the overwhelming majority of its citizens are presently Croats, along with small numbers of Bosniaks, Italians and Serbs.

Rijeka is the main city of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County. The city's economy largely depends on shipbuilding maritime transport. In 2016, Rijeka was selected as the European Capital of Culture for 2020, alongside Galway, Ireland.

The City of Rijeka Fire Brigade has been proudly serving the citizens of the Rijeka since 1863.

During the very rich Croatian history, this part of country was under the occupation of several countries including the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and Italy. So was the fire service. This is the reason why Croatian Fire Service's roots are related mainly to Austria and Germany and a bit less so to Italy, which has had strong influence not only on the equipment used by the fire fighters but also on its development of strategical and tactical procedures. Basically, there are no differences between Austrian and German fire fighters compared with Croatian fire fighters in regard with the equipment they are using

on daily basis. Some differences can, on the other hand, be seen in strategical and tactical procedures. Also, Croatian fire fighters are a bit more open to change and adoption of new procedures.

Rijeka Fire Brigade has 143 members of which 128 members are divided in to four shifts. Shifts are changed in 12/24, 12/48 hours periods. During a year, in average Rijeka Fire Brigade responds to around 1 300 emergency calls. The emergency calls are received in the County Fire Emergency Call Centre, which is situated in Rijeka Fire Brigade. ▶



First attack vehicle made in 2002 by Ziegler, Germany for the City of Rijeka Fire Brigade



Memorial Fire Fighters Competition 'Fires of Rijeka' in the Rijeka City Centre

2015 Emergency Calls



► **In-the-line-of-duty fatalities**

Croatian professional fire brigades fall under the authority of the cities and municipalities. However, they are 60 percent funded by the national government with the balance of funding coming from cities and municipalities. Voluntary fire brigades also falls under the city and municipal authorities but they are funded from cities and municipalities.

Accordingly to the available data that reaches back to the beginning of 20th Century, during the past, six Rijeka Fire Brigade members have died in the line of duty.

Close to the end of World War II (WWII), allies were bombing Rijeka.

A lot of civilians died and also four members of Rijeka Fire Brigade. They were battling a fire on a ship in Port of Rijeka, when the ship was bombed. Besides them, two more Rijeka Fire Brigade members died in the line of duty; one heart attack and the other in a gas explosion in 2005. In memory of all of their members, Rijeka Fire Brigade has established the Memorial Fire Fighters Competition 'Fires of Rijeka', which is held each year in September.

High-rise fires

During its history, the members of the City of Rijeka Fire Brigade gained a lot of experience on several fields. As Rijeka is situated on the coast of Adriatic Sea, however, the sea

level is rising there wasn't much opportunity to expand the city, so a lot of high-rise buildings were built. Today, Rijeka has the largest number of high-rise buildings per square kilometre in Croatia.

This resulted in Rijeka's fire fighters special interest in high-rise fire fighting. During the brigade's past, a generation of fire fighters specialised in high-rise fire fighting and the current generation see's the need to improve and constantly improve their tactical procedures. One of their biggest problems is poor fire prevention principles in their high-rise buildings. The dry risers are often not working and the fire escape stairs are filled with a lot of stuff. This is the reason why special strategies and tactical approaches and procedures were adopted during the past and are still being developed today.

Marine fire fighting

Another important point of interest is marine fire fighting. Rijeka has the biggest port on the Adriatic Sea and in the city and surrounding area, there are three shipyards. One of them builds all types of new ships. Another one is dedicated to ship

rebuilding and renovation, while the third one is building smaller boats and yachts.

Industrial fires and hazmat

Also, the biggest Croatian oil refinery is situated nearby Rijeka resulting in the Rijeka Fire Brigade specialising in industrial fire fighting and hazardous materials (hazmat).

Road and rail accidents

As Rijeka is the largest port in Croatia and the third largest city, it provides for major traffic routes and junctions ensuing in a large number of motor vehicle accidents (MVAs) as well as rail accidents. Furthermore, there are a large number of tunnels in the surrounding area.

Wildfires

During the year there are a lot of wildfires, especially next to the railway Rijeka-Zagreb corridor. This type of incident can escalate to a county incident or even a national emergency. In this case, several fire brigades, both voluntary and professional will work together with other services such as civil protection units, the Croatian Army and mountain rescuers. Aerial support is provided by the Ministry of Defence to the ground forces. Croatia uses Canadairs CL-415 also known as Bombardier 415, which is an amphibious aircraft; Air Tractors and Mil Mi-8 MTV helicopters.

Rijeka Fire Brigade upholds very good relationships with industrial fire brigades. In case of a major incident, Rijeka Fire Brigade provides support for the industrial fire brigades. The Rijeka Fire Brigade, together with the industrial fire brigades, organise many training exercises to insure adequate preparedness in case of a real accident.

Diving unit

The Rijeka Fire Brigade's diving unit has been in operation since the late 70ies. Today, Rijeka Fire Brigade has diving unit that consist of 20 divers that are divided in to shifts so they can respond 24/7 in case of any incident.

Rope rescue

In 2004 rope rescue techniques were adopted into Rijeka Fire Brigade.



High rise fire fighting training



Compartment fire behaviour training

Today, the majority of Rijeka fire fighters are rope rescuers. It has recently become mandatory for each recruit fire fighter to pass a rope rescue course and they are trained by Rijeka Fire Brigade's certified rope rescue instructors.

Training

The County Fire Training Centre is mutual project between the County Fire Department Rijeka Fire Brigade. Several fire instructors from Rijeka Fire Brigade are working together with the County Fire Department on developing the training centre. This is relatively new project in its beginning stages and the idea is to get funds

from the European Structural Investment Fund to develop it. Up to now there is a CFire BrigadeT complex and USAR training.

In 2007, training in compartment fire behaviour training was initialised. All the brigade members have to pass the program on an annual basis at the County Fire Training Centre presented by Rijeka Fire Brigade instructors. The training centre also offers urban search and rescue (USAR) training. Members of Rijeka Fire Brigade were taught USAR techniques by French fire instructors and are now training other Rijeka Fire Brigade members. ▲