



Steve Wilcock
Marshal Eye

Reimagining How Organisations Respond During a Fire Event

Having attended many large-scale fires during his career within the Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service, Steve Wilcock noted that the usual suspects would emerge during investigations. Poor fire strategy, poor preparedness, lack of training and poor communications.

These problems have always been around; however, a new issue has surfaced—the loss of resilience due to flexible working arrangements. Response teams fluctuate throughout the day as staff come and go. As we move into the digital age, more and more staff are hybrid working. This increased significantly and bedded in during the COVID-19 pandemic. A fire can happen at any moment; having the appropriate people in the right place at the right time, with the correct information, is becoming increasingly more challenging to plan for.

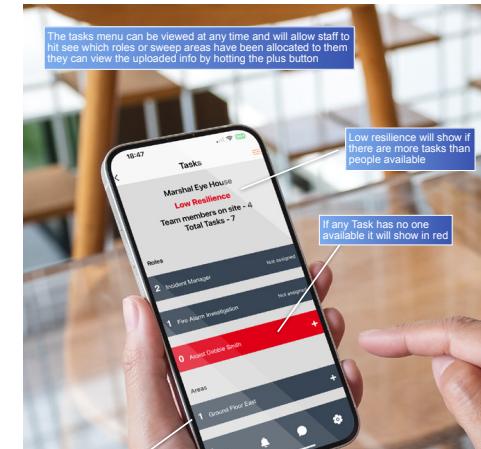
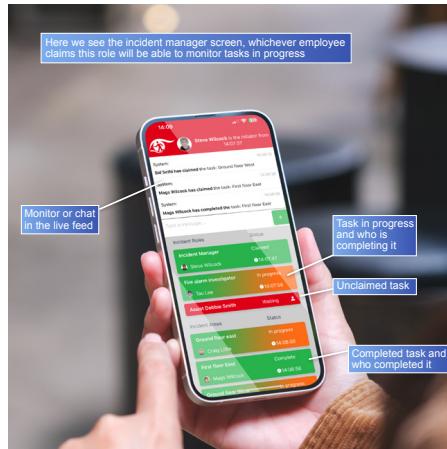
Steve, who runs a fire training company in the Northwest, had an idea in early 2023 to combat this problem by re-imagining how staff would respond in buildings. He believed that in a digital age, he could build an App that would flip the process; rather than having Fire Marshals pre-nominated for specific tasks, staff could claim tasks digitally at the point of a fire event. This 'opt-in' model would alleviate the planning process to ensure there was always coverage. A significant advantage of this approach is that the

app would present the claimant with key information required for the task. This might be instructions on operating a fire panel, a sweep area/walking route or even information on assisting a wheelchair user.

Steve put together a blueprint for his idea and started the development of Marshal Eye; it was an opportunity to tackle the historical communications issue, too. Steve notes that when fire alarms activate, Fire Marshals are expected to instigate an evacuation without any other cue; they are in an information vacuum. This can be daunting, and often, there is pressure from colleagues who may be resistant to evacuation due to the disruption and the assumption that it is another false alarm.

When presented with the first cue, such as a fire alarm, we make assumptions about what we think is happening based on previous experience; it is often assumed that alarms are false, known as confirmation bias.

With this in mind, a live message feed was included in the project brief to allow conversations across the team to determine the situation within the building. If an evacuation is deemed appropriate, this is instigated through the App; all the tasks will change to red, making them claimable; they change to amber when in progress, and green when completed. All users will



be in touch continually with live messaging from the incident manager right through to people in refugees. The process of adopting a role or task also creates accountability.

Incidents can be cancelled quickly, avoiding disruption that comes with unplanned evacuations. The 2023 Autumn edition of Daedalus featured an article about the impact of false alarms costing the UK economy almost £700m a year. Marshal Eye seeks a modern-day solution to remedy the problem through rapid de-escalation or escalation for confirmed fires.

The fire response teams in buildings are spread out geographically due to the nature of the role, which means they are isolated from each other; Marshal Eye puts them together in a digital space. The app will give much more confidence with live information.

As soon as any incident is closed, an update appears on every user's screen, and a full PDF report is emailed out; the administrator can select which staff to receive this report. It comprises a summary performance top sheet that includes how long it took to decide to evacuate, the time taken for all tasks to be claimed, and how long it took to clear the building, timed to the second. The rest of the document is a full-time stamped narrative log of all activities. This information has never been available before and will be invaluable during debriefing and evaluating the staff response.

As the project unfolded, it became obvious there was potentially a wider use for the app for different critical incidents. The functionality to add different incident

types and sound alerts within the admin screen was included. This could be to request a first aider, an intruder alert, a lockdown (Schools) or another critical event. This will massively speed up sourcing medical equipment, i.e. a defibrillator or an EpiPen.

The App can carry out a fire evacuation practice without using the alarm. This will allow the fire response teams to practise walk-through evacuations without disrupting the full mandatory evacuations. Full drills must be carried out as all employees need to be exposed to these to ensure they understand what is expected of them in the case of fire.

The 'Task' menu screen allows operators to view tasks that must be performed and all loaded files, such as sweep plans or PEEPS. In a recent update, the tasks menu now has a number indicating how many people are currently in the building who can perform each task; if there is no one available, it will be highlighted in red with a low resilience warning. You will also get a low resilience comment if there are fewer people than there are tasks available.

At the time of writing, Marshal Eye is in use and on trial in several organisations and schools. Steve is committed to the continual development of his App and is adamant that as we move into a digital age, evacuation strategies have to move with the times.

Visit www.marshall-eye.com to find out more.