

International USAR teams share best practice

Specialist urban search and rescue skills like breaching, cutting, shoring, high angle rescue, triage of casualties and technical search, were just some of the capabilities honed by eight WA Fire and Rescue Service firefighters at the 49th International Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) course.

Their proficiency was put to the test when the group participated in 10 days of training conducted by members of the Singapore Civil Defence Force Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (DART).

The West Australian contingent included six firefighters attending this type of training course for the first time, and two station officers who were refreshing their USAR skills.

Station Officer Danny Katnich said the group gained a great deal from the experience.

“We quickly settled into 10 days of theoretical and practical application of USAR skills at the world class Singapore training centre,” Danny said.

“The effort, enthusiasm and professionalism that the WA contingent brought to the course was a credit to all involved.

“It was really worthwhile and the knowledge gained will benefit participants and enhance their suitability for any possible future international deployments.”

Danny added that communication was at times challenging.

“There was a diverse group of nationalities on the course, with representatives from Russia, Bangladesh, Taiwan and Singapore,” he said.

“Being assigned to teams with firefighters from several countries, all with varying levels of English from none to very limited, did pose some challenges.

“Overall the language barrier was handled well though, and the Google translate capability on the iPhone came in handy for more complicated conversations.”

Firefighter Matt Folini also found the course both hugely demanding but rewarding.

“There was a good balance between classroom sessions and applying skills on the training grounds which were well set up



Firefighter Jarrad Miller undertakes a vertical rescue while training at the international USAR course in Singapore.



The integrated USAR team communicate plans during a training exercise.

to provide very realistic and exacting USAR scenarios,” he said.

“In addition to working with the international firefighters, we also had the opportunity to discuss and share many valuable experiences about USAR, as well as a range of firefighting and rescue techniques from around the world.”

The training culminated in a 36 hour exercise where the skills practiced over previous days were put to use in life

like scenarios. Participants were tested under extreme conditions that included little or no sleep and oppressive heat.

Matt said the firefighters came away from the course with great respect for the way Singaporean firefighters and members of DART conduct their business.

“They were great role models, always training hard, refining skills and looking for better techniques in firefighting and rescue,” he said.