

Abstract

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## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE CENTRES

The Government decided on 21 June 2000 to divide Finland into 13 emergency response centre areas. The goal of this reform was to shift responsibility for different authorities' emergency activities to the state and to make all emergency services available with the single European emergency call number 112. The emergency response centres will begin operating in stages by 2006.

This audit investigated the achievement of objectives for the emergency response centre reform and the effects of the emergency response centre trial on the establishment of emergency response centres.

### Location of the Emergency Response Centre Unit

The Ministry of the Interior's decision to locate the Emergency Response Centre Unit in Pori was in line with the Government's decision on a regional policy programme. From the viewpoint of regional policy, the decision to locate the unit (16-20 posts) in Pori has a fairly small effect. The fact that the Emergency Response Centre Administration's 13 emergency response centres will operate in different parts of the country has a larger significance.

The State Audit Office emphasizes that the grounds concerning the reasonable extra costs of locating the Emergency Response Centre Unit in Pori and the estimate of long-term savings compared with the Helsinki region should have been explained more clearly in the location decision.

### Guidance and management systems and cooperation between authorities

The State Audit Office considers it important for the Emergency Response Centre Unit to provide guidelines concerning the emergency response centres' internal procedures, technology and personnel policy to make them uniform throughout the country. In connection with the specification of management centre operations it is important to pay attention to cooperation arrangements between the separate emergency response centres and provincial management centres.

One problem in authorities' cooperation related to the development of the emergency response centres was different interpretations of concepts in the field and to some extent outmoded technical terminology.

### Facilities and communication systems

According to the Emergency Response Centre Act, the emergency response centres' activities should be arranged so that they can continue to operate in exceptional circumstances. This has been interpreted as meaning that the emergency response centres should be located in sheltered facilities. This solution differs from standard European practice and is more reliable but it is also more expensive. The emergency response centres are worried that costly construction and new technology may affect funding for other activities. The rise in construction costs will also increase rent and property management costs. The Emergency

Response Centre Administration has proposed that in provinces with more than one emergency response centre, some of the emergency response centres could be built in above-ground sheltered facilities.

In the opinion of the State Audit Office, decisions regarding the division of the country into emergency response centre areas and the location of the emergency response centres did not give sufficient consideration to the suitability and adaptability of existing facilities or the safety of facilities. Preparedness for cooperation between the provincial management centres and the emergency response centres in exceptional circumstances may result in the emergency response centres having extra facilities which increase rent costs in normal circumstances.

Communication systems and their operation as well as the unification of information systems were considered to involve a certain amount of risks.

The biggest problem with regard to communication systems was the obsolete state of the police radio network. This will no doubt be remedied when the official radio network is ready.

A key criterion in dimensioning personnel resources has been the population in the emergency response centre area. A risk factor in this regard has been the increase in the number of received reports to a significantly higher level than anticipated.

Duty work at emergency response centres was considered physically and mentally tiring. Working in underground facilities was considered to have its own detrimental effects and to require adjustment. One factor which tended to increase stress was the growth in the number of reports in the social welfare field.

Recruiting competent personnel requires changes in training. At present the training of duty officers does not correspond to the division of tasks.

#### Financial and operational objectives

The goal is to cover the costs of the state-maintained emergency response centre system with a corresponding reduction in the costs of municipal emergency response centres, which will be achieved by reducing municipalities' state grants, the shifting of the police's operating funds and the reduction of state grants for the establishment of municipal emergency response centres. The operating costs of the state's emergency response centre system are estimated at around €3.6 million (FIM 200 million) a year.

In the opinion of the State Audit Office, the estimated costs of the emergency response centre system have not been investigated thoroughly enough. The emergency response centres' property and personnel costs will increase the annual operating expenses of the state's emergency activities more than has been anticipated. The emergency response centres' operational ability has been improved more than financial benefits. Operational benefits have been noted mainly from the viewpoint of customers, but in general the achievement of operational benefits has not been ensured sufficiently. More attention should be paid to developing qualitative indicators and reporting methods.

The State Audit Office recommends that study be given to whether it would be more economical if the emergency response centres operated as separate payment points and the

Emergency Response Centre Unit took care of financial administration and reporting once the Emergency Response Centre Administration's establishment stage has been completed.

The goal of a single emergency call number 112 has not yet been accomplished, since the Helsinki region is still outside the reform. In addition the police still have their own emergency number 10022.