

Summary

Motivation and goal

Since 1933 the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS) possesses fire statistics. The publication of the fire statistics aims to provide information yearly about the role and activities of the Dutch fire-brigade. If the fire statistics actually give an adequate insight into the functioning of the Dutch fire-brigade is not up for discussion. The continued existence of the CBS fire statistics as important source of information is of value to the fire-brigade, public leaders, policy makers and scientists.

This formed the motivation for the Ministry of Security and Justice (VenJ) to, together with the CBS, the Dutch Union for Fire-brigade care and Disaster Control (NVBR) and the Trade Union Fire-brigade Volunteers (VBV), take the initiative to start the project Improvement of the Fire Statistics. This research is the first step in this project. The aim of this research is to provide an overview of the needs of the different clients of the fire statistics.

Method

In the next figure the method followed in this research is shown:



The method in this research has worked as a funnel: from a broad exploration of the needs regarding the fire statistics through various interviews and an online survey, to more depth with different GDR-sessions. The last step of the research was the validation of the research results by means of two expert sessions and a series of validation-interviews.

Most important findings

The research can be summarized in the following three main conclusions:

First, the research shows that the current fire statistics do not fulfil the needs of the clients. The most mentioned reasons for the limited usefulness of the fire statistics are that the numbers only provide a limited insight into reality because not all the fire-brigades provide information. Moreover, the fire-

brigades partly provide incomplete or incorrect data. Also, what holds for most respondents is that the statistics are not up-to-date enough to be able to use them in the execution of their job.

Second, it has been determined that the information needs of the clients of the fire statistics have changed over time, and therefore do not fit the current fire statistics anymore. In line with the developments within the fire-brigade domain there is increasingly more need for information about the ‘foreside’ of fire-brigade work: risk control and operational preparation. At the same time, within the existing themes (fire, aid and management) there is a need for information that better matches the current laws, regulations and daily practice of the fire-brigade.

| | | |
|------------------------|-------|-----------|
| | | |
| | Calls | Costs |
| | Fires | Personnel |
| | Aid | |
| Current main structure | | |

| Risk control | Operational preparation | Incident control | Conduct of business |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Fire prevention | Professionalism | Call | Finance |
| | | Basic firecare | Personnel |
| | | Specialistic deployment | Material |
| | | | |
| Advised main structure | | | |

Third, it has become clear that the current information structure does not suffice to reach useful fire statistics; neither the current nor the introduced themes and subjects can be given a reliable and valid interpretation via the current information structure. The current information structure has the following three bottlenecks:

1. Via the commander not all information can be asked, because he simply does not have all of the information available (i.e.: damage amount, function of the object, etc.).

2. Via the commander no in depth information can be collected, because not every commander has the right expertise (i.e.: information about specialist deployment).

3. The commander can provide certain information (mostly basic information about the deployment) but is not always motivated to do this accurately.

Bottleneck 1 and 2 can be resolved by using various sources, both within and outside the fire-brigade, when composing the fire statistics. The starting point is that the role of the fire-brigade when delivering information limits itself to information on the activities of the fire-brigade. Preferably the rest of the information is collected via other sources. The information about the activities of the fire-brigade is provided via the existing registration systems as much as possible. In depth information about the activities of the fire-brigade is provided by specialists.

Bottleneck 3 asks for a change of mentality on behalf of the commanders. Besides the fact that a lot of the demotivation amongst the commanders is already taken away by only asking them for the information they possess, the commanders must become intrinsically motivated to provide the CBS with accurate information. Here an important fact is that the extent to which the provider of the information benefits from an accurate registration, determines for a great deal the quality of the information. Different ways can be thought of to directly confront the commander with the value of an accurate registration.

Some recommendations

On the basis of the research Berenschot has done some recommendations regarding the improvement of the fire-brigade statistics:

- Connect to existing registration systems as much as possible

A lot of information about the fire-brigade can be made available relatively easily from emergency room systems, existing databases, fire research teams, etc. Also, a lot more information from the registration systems of (chain)partners could be utilized. The advice is to, after finalizing this phase, make an inventory of which information is available and which definitions are already in use, and to subsequently elaborate a usable definition book and information structure. It could be the case that prioritising, due to a too long questionnaire, is not necessary anymore if a lot of statistics are available from other sources.

- Use current arrangements as much as possible

Within the fire-brigade there are a large number of national and regional initiatives, in which definitions have been fixed. These definitions are however not always determined nationally, which makes statistics insufficiently comparable. Due to the binding character of the CBS statistics it is important to join the branch: the new statistics can be a useful tool to realize national uniformity.

- Clarify the goal of the fire-brigade statistics from the CBS

The information needs of the different clients vary strongly. In our opinion, the aim to attune the fire statistics to the information needs of the clients still has insufficient body, as a result of which the

function of the statistics can be stretched to a national database. In our view the national database should be organized and maintained by “the Dutch fire-brigade”.¹ If the CBS wants to prevent her role from expanding in the meantime to “the supplier of a national database for the Dutch fire-brigade” we advise to more clearly define the overarching goal of the CBS fire statistics than is now the case.

In our opinion, this discussion is not a part of the project ‘Improvement Fire Statistics’ but an assignment for the CBS. However, the results of this strategic discussion are of course determining for the rest of the project.

- Disaster control and crisis management

(The coordination of) Disaster control and crisis management is not the “property” or “monopoly” of the fire-brigade, but it does deliver an important contribution to this joint task of the emergency services. Currently there is hardly any statistical information available on this. If there are no plans at the CBS for separate statistics for this theme, we advise to create insight into the number of GRIP3- and GRIP4-incidents under for example Incident control in the main structure, including the specific deployment of the fire-brigade.

¹ The expectation is that it will take years for “the Dutch fire-brigade” to realize such a national database.