

# The critical role of humanitarian logistics

Getting help and resources to where they are most needed is a complex task

According to the **Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2018**, an estimated 201 million people in 134 countries needed international humanitarian assistance in 2017. Imperial Logistics Chief Strategy Officer Cobus Rossouw says that there is a dramatic back story around the complex logistics of getting essential supplies and lifesaving medicines to those in need as quickly as possible.



## Speed is crucial

"The first responders that we usually see in news accounts of disasters and conflicts play a critical role in re-establishing the health infrastructure and getting the first medical aid treatment underway; but how do the medicines and medical products actually get to the disaster-affected area and who is working behind the scenes to achieve this?"

Humanitarian logistics is a branch of logistics that specialises in organising the delivery and warehousing of supplies during natural disasters and emergencies, Rossouw explains. It is a field in which Imperial Logistics group company Imres has established a global reputation.

"Imres has a long, proven track record of supporting non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governments and aid agencies in executing their emergency relief programmes. Over more than 35 years, the Netherlands-based business has been sourcing and distributing the pharmaceuticals, medical consumables, medical kits and hospital equipment that preserves lives after natural and man-made disasters, disease outbreaks and violent conflicts," he states.

## Life-saving response

The 2004 tsunami that hit large parts of densely-populated South East Asia and parts of East Africa and killed 230,000 people was one of the biggest natural disasters that the world has experienced in recent years. Rossouw recounts the disaster from Imres's perspective: "It was Boxing Day 2004. At 7:58 local time, a seaquake

with a magnitude of 9.3 hit the Indian Ocean about 160km west of Sumatra. Directly after the disaster occurred, the designated NGOs went in to assess the situation. Almost simultaneously, they contacted Imres on the company's emergency response line. As it was Boxing Day, no one was in the office; but Imres's core response team was notified and went to the office immediately to prepare whatever was needed to get the right products to the right destinations.

The core response team consists of logistics, warehouse and sales employees that are trained for these types of situations, he explains.

"The enormous scale of the tsunami quickly became clear, and the first Interagency Emergency Health Kits (IEHKs), which Imres always has in stock, were made ready for transport. Within 24 hours, the first IEHKs were at the required destination. In the following days, a total of 84 complete IEHKs were transported to several parts of South East Asia and East Africa."

Rossouw explains that the Interagency Emergency Health Kit (IEHK) is a standardised kit of essential medicines, supplies and equipment deployed by United Nations agencies and other partners that respond to large-scale emergencies. "This prepacked kit is designed for use when there is a disruption of medical supplies in an emergency situation. It efficiently fills the gap until the medical supply mechanisms are restored. One kit is designed to meet the basic health needs of 10,000 people for approximately three months."

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