



# RFS

## 3.1.8A Critical Incident Protocol

# Document control

## Release history

Version	Date	Summary of changes
1.0	10 Apr 2019	Initial release
2.0	8 July 2025	Reviewed to reflect current practice, organisational alignment and branding

## Reviewed by

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## Related documents

Document name
<a href="#">Transport Safety Investigation Act 2003</a>
<a href="#">Service Standard 3.1.8 Critical Incidents</a>
<a href="#">Operational Guideline Notifiable Incidents</a>

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# 1. Purpose

The purpose of this Critical Incident protocol is to establish a structured and systematic approach for responding to RFS Critical Incidents. By having a clear procedure in place, the RFS can reduce confusion, enhance communication and streamline decision-making during high-stress situations. This protocol forms part of and should be read in conjunction with Service Standard 3.1.8 Critical Incidents.

This Critical Incident Protocol outlines essential components for an effective response, including incident management, response actions, stakeholder engagement, communication planning, member support services, and review and improvement processes. The protocol is designed to align key actions with the various phases of a critical incident response:

1. Immediate response (Within first 30 minutes)
2. Short-term actions (Within 1 to 2 hours)
3. Mid-term actions (Within 24 hours)
4. Long-term actions (Within 7 days)
5. Ongoing actions
6. Critical incident review
7. Critical incident during overseas travel / deployment

## 2. What is a Critical Incident

A critical incident is any event which causes significant disruption to effective operations, significant danger or serious injury, or fatality to a member of the RFS. A critical incident may also include any event that has or may reasonably cause the public to lose confidence in the RFS and its members.

Such events include but are not limited to:

- The death<sup>1</sup> or critical injury<sup>2</sup> of a RFS member while undertaking RFS official duties.
- The death or critical injury of a RFS member or immediate family<sup>3</sup> not undertaking official duties but by nature of the circumstances that may have significant impact on the RFS operations or business.
- A motor vehicle, marine, or aviation incident during a response to, or operating at, an incident where the following has occurred:
  - Death or critical injury<sup>4</sup> of any persons (non RFS) involved in the incident.
  - Where any vehicle involved in the incident requires towing due to extensive damage.
- Where an aircraft is involved in a serious incident or accident as defined by the *Transport Safety Investigation (TSI) Act 2003*.

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<sup>1</sup> Death includes confirmed and unconfirmed

<sup>2</sup> Critical injury is any injury sustained where life expectancy is unlikely

<sup>3</sup> Immediate family refers to a member's parents, spouse/partner, and children

<sup>4</sup> Injury is any injury requiring treatment by a health professional such as a paramedic, nurse, doctor, and includes needle-stick/sharps injuries, and/or contamination by human blood or bodily fluid.

- Significant damage to object other than motor vehicle, as result of incident with RFS vehicle, vessel or aircraft.
- The death or critical injury of a non RFS member (including member of the public) as a direct result of actions taken by the RFS in the management or suppression of a fire or operational incident.
- Damage, destruction, or negative impacts to the community or environment as a direct result of actions taken by the RFS in the management or suppression of a fire or operational incident.
- As determined by the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner or DSO.

### 3. Immediate response (within first 30 minutes)

The immediate response focuses on ensuring all members are safe, appropriate emergency support is provided and relevant RFS personnel are notified of the incident.

#### 3.1. Immediate on-site actions

The Officer in Charge (OIC) is to:

- a. Identify the nature of the incident and gather information including who is involved, what has happened, how has it happened, the location of the incident
- b. Immediately notify the appropriate emergency services for assistance
- c. Immediately notify the Operational Communication Centre (OCC) and report as a notifiable incident. The OCC will notify the District Duty Officer (DDO) or On Call Officer (OCO) and other roles as identified in the Operational Guideline Notifiable Incidents.
- d. Determine the level of risk for individual members to attend the scene to render assistance
- e. Notify members seeking to render first aid of the situation and potential risks
- f. Continue to manage the initial emergency if possible e.g. out of control fire
- g. Preserve the scene where possible.

#### 3.2. Immediate RFS actions

The DDO or OCO arranges for a District staff member or other appropriate staff member to attend the incident site.

The OCC is to ensure immediate notification to the State Duty Operational Officer (SDOO).

The SDOO to arrange the following:

- a. Maintain contact with the Incident Controller/District Manager and provide initial notification and regular updates to the Senior Executive team
- b. Contact the Director State Operations (DSO) to advise them of the Critical Incident. This role essentially becomes the Critical Incident Coordinator for the event
- c. Notify the State Safety Duty Officer so the relevant Regulator can be notified, if required
- d. Notify the Mental Health Escalation Officer so Mental Health Support arrangements can commence
- e. Notify the State Duty Media Officer (SDMO) to monitor/manage any social media of the incident and develop an appropriate RFS response, subject to

what is permissible given the situation

- f. Notify Director Fleet & Infrastructure, in the event the incident involves plant and equipment such as heavy vehicle recovery, marine vessel recovery, contractor mobile plant
- g. Notify General Counsel of the incident
- h. Obtains membership details of impacted members (including next-of-kin) for distribution as appropriate.

The member's emergency contact (or next of kin) is notified of the incident by:

- The NSW Police Force in the event of death, and
- The DDOO/OCO/ Business Unit Manager, in the event of all other incidents.

## 4. Short-term actions (within 1-2 hours)

Within the first 1-2 hours the following should occur:

- DSO to update Deputy Commissioners. Deputy Commissioners shall release resources to the Critical Incident Team as appropriate to the situation.
- SDMO manage any media release or statement, as required and approved by the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner Field Operations.
- State Safety Duty Officer to prepare for a Safety Advisor to attend site (if safety related)
- Fleet & Infrastructure to plan for recovery of plant or equipment or assessment of the site for investigation purposes
- Mental Health Escalation Officer to ensure the deployment of support services appropriate for the incident including chaplaincy, psychological and peer support.

## 5. Mid-term actions (within the first 24 hours)

Within 24 hours the Director State Operations (DSO) will establish a Critical Incident Team (CIT) comprising of the following roles:

- Deputy Commissioner Operational Coordination
- Deputy Commissioner Field Operations
- Deputy Commissioner People and Corporate Services
- Deputy Commissioner Strategic Capability
- Director State Operations
- Director, Area Commander or line manager of the member(s) involved in the critical incident
- General Counsel
- Director Health and Safety
- Director Communications and Strategic Engagement
- Manager Safety
- Manager Media and Communications.

The CIT is to meet within the first 24 hours and confirm the following:

- Update on any members receiving treatment for any injuries sustained and confirmation the relevant insurer has been advised of the incident by DHS
- Update on mental health support provided to the affected members
- Update on family support services to affected family members, ensuring appropriate arrangements have been made, e.g. for travel and accommodation.
- Update on WHS Regulator notice requirements and actions taken by the Regulator
- Update on the Media Communication Plan
- Preparation of appropriate Ministerial Briefings for approval of the Commissioner
- Update on the legal implications of the critical incident
- Update on the logistics regarding the critical incident e.g. plant and equipment recovery, plant and equipment mechanical assessments
- Set up a critical incident folder in the approved recordkeeping system (currently CM) and share the details with the critical incident and investigation teams
- Confirm the incident investigation team. This may include subject matter experts (SMEs), fire investigators, safety team or operational staff, as relevant to the incident type
- Schedule further Critical Incident Team meetings

## 6. Long-term actions (within 7 Days)

Longer term actions following the critical incident include:

- Mental health support provided to all affected members with follow up as required
- Injury Management Coordinators commence contact with affected parties and the insurer and assist in managing injuries resulting from the incident
- Investigations into the incident commence with regular critical incident team meetings to progress the investigation as required
- DSO to ensure any Ministerial Briefings are prepared and approved by the Commissioner

## 7. Ongoing actions

The District Manager or Business Unit Manager will oversee the ongoing management of the incident and activities will be transitioned to the local Manager, supported by the relevant Area Commander / Director. These activities may include:

- Notification to local members of arrangements relating to funeral or memorial services, as appropriate
- Maintaining contact and regular communication with affected members and continue to provide regular updates on investigation or other relevant matters. Depending on the critical incident type, internal and external (e.g. NSW Police Force, the Coroner's Office or regulators) may continue for many years
- Monitor and review the need for Mental Health Support Services and arrange as appropriate
  - Plan for and be sensitive to anniversaries.

The DSO will continue to work with the relevant CIT members to provide assistance with longer term matters such as inquests, Regulator investigations, legal proceedings etc.

## 8. Review of critical incident

Following the critical incident, an After Action Review (AAR) is to be conducted to identify any aspects of the critical incident process or the effectiveness of the protocol that could be improved. DSO is responsible for the AAR and action of any observations or lessons arising from the AAR.

## 9. Overseas incidents

Service Standard 3.1.9 Critical Incidents and this Protocol continue to apply where reasonably practicable, when a critical incident occurs while a member is deployed overseas.

In these circumstances and in addition to the above, the following may apply:

- Where one has been developed for the specific deployment, enact the Operational Critical Incident Action Plan
- Where the critical incident has occurred to an RFS member operating in an RFS capacity, but is not related to an operational National Resource Sharing Centre (NRSC) deployment, an appropriate senior officer is to be deployed to the country of the incident to perform the actions required to support the member and their family and any other affected members. This Senior Officer will be nominated by the Commissioner.



## Appendix 1 Duty Officer contact information

Role	Contact Number
State Duty Operations Officer (SDOO)	(02) 8741 5400 (24 hours)
State Media Duty Officer (SDMO)	(02) 9898 1855 (24 hours)
State Safety Duty Officer (SSDO)	(02) 8741 5400 (24 hours)
Mental Health Duty Officer	(02) 8741 4971 (24 hours)

## Appendix 2 Critical Incident Response Plan Summary

Action Required	Responsible Officer	Notes
<b>Immediate actions (within the first 30 minutes)</b>		
Scene safety: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Notify emergency services</li> <li>– Ensure safety of members in attendance</li> </ul> Render first aid and manage potential risks	OIC on scene	
Details of notifiable incident provided to OCC and provide names of affected members	DDO	
OCC notify SD00	OCC Supervisor / Senior	
SD00 to obtain membership and NoK details of affected members. Ensure Mental Health Services (CISS) have been advised	SD00 OCC Supervisor DDO	NoK will be notified by NSW Police, in the event of death of an RFS member  Otherwise, DDO or SD00 will notify
SD00 to provide notification to the Operational Notification Group with all known details regarding the incident	SD00 OCC Supervisor	
SD00 maintains regular contact and updates with DDO	SD00 & DDO	
DSO establishes the Critical Incident Team (CIT), if the incident warrants, and provide incident information	DSO	
<b>Short-term actions (within 1-2 hours)</b>		
State Duty Media Officer will liaise with DSO on appropriate media release information	SDMO	Commissioner / Deputy Commissioner must approve any media release relating to the incident

Action Required	Responsible Officer	Notes
Incident Controllers / Managers to identify and support those members directly impacted by the incident	IC / DM	
Ongoing support from Mental Health Services	MMHS / PSO DO	
Ongoing updates provide to Executive Directors	DSO	
SDOO to facilitate NoK attendance during the critical incident	SDOO	
Safety to notify regulatory authorities	DHS / MS	
CICG consider establishing an investigation team	CICG	
<b>Mid-term actions (within first 24 hours)</b>		
Ongoing Mental Health Support provided to members	MMHS	
Reporting requirements (incident and insurance) completed	MHW & MS	
Regular updates provided by the investigation team, as required	MS	
Complete investigation report provided to CICG	DHS / MS	
Complete relevant briefings, as required	CICG	
Transition ongoing monitoring and support to local Manager	DSO	





# RFS

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#### State address

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