



# 3.1.1

## Communications

### 1 Preamble

The New South Wales Rural Fire Service expects its staff to be efficient, economical and ethical in their use and management of Government provided communication devices.

Communications devices are provided for business use. Limited personal use is also permitted as part of the Service's commitment to the development of a responsive and flexible Service in which there is a recognition of family and community responsibilities and their impact on work.

### 2 Policy

#### 2.1 Communication Devices

This policy is mainly concerned with telephones. The provisions contained in this policy however, are equally applicable to any other communications device provided by the Service for business use e.g. facsimiles and pagers.

#### 2.2 Aim

The aim of this policy is to provide concepts and guidelines for NSW Rural Fire Service employees to use to ensure they meet their responsibilities and obligations when making use of Service owned communications devices.

#### 2.3 Benefits

A well designed and implemented policy on the use of communication devices that leaves little room for ambiguity will benefit the Service, its employees and the NSW public sector as a whole.

- (a) Employees benefit by being provided with enough flexibility to meet their immediate personal requirements.



- (b) The community as a whole benefits from the Service's effective use of employer resources.
- (c) The Service benefits through the use by staff of communications devices only on essential matters.
- (d) The Service also benefits through appropriate controls on the costs of usage of communication devices.

## 2.4 Policy Principles

This policy recognises:

- (a) communication devices in the Service are provided for business use;
- (b) every employee has a responsibility to be ethical and efficient in their official or private use of Service property and services;
- (c) every employee has a responsibility to be productive in the use of their work time;
- (d) employees are also private citizens with individual personal needs and obligations;
- (e) employees may need to make use of employer communication devices for personal purposes;
- (f) there is a reasonable limit to which employer communication devices may be used for personal purposes; and
- (g) these guidelines clearly outline the rights of all staff on the use of communication devices.

## 2.5 Responsibilities include:

**Employees:** In using employer supplied communication devices, all employees share a responsibility to ensure:

- (a) people and business have optimum and equal access to Government services;
- (b) official resources are used ethically;
- (c) they apply due economy and efficiency in use;



- (d) steps are taken to protect confidentiality that are appropriate to both the information involved and the type of device being used; and
- (e) they are personally accountable in their use of work resources.

**Managers:** Managers and supervisors are responsible for:

- (a) ensuring that employees are aware of and understand the policy
- (b) monitoring and, where necessary, enforcing policies
- (c) providing leadership by example

**Chief Executive:** The Commissioner has the responsibility of engendering a commitment to the values espoused by this policy and ensuring adequate controls are in place to administer the policy.

Controls may include systems for:

- (a) random audits
- (b) appropriate approvals (including delegation of authority)
- (c) disclosure of usage
- (d) maintaining accurate records
- (e) monitoring records
- (f) access control (e.g. STD and ISD bars)

Any controls should be subject to any relevant privacy legislation and/or guidelines.

## 2.6 Industrial Instruments

Industrial instruments such as awards often contain conditions relating to the use of communications devices, particularly telephones. They can also provide for accredited union delegates to be given reasonable access to facilities such as communication devices. Nothing in this policy over-rides the rights contained in industrial instruments or other procedures.



## 3 Principles and Guidelines

Employees should also ensure that mobile communications devices which are easily stolen, such as pagers, mobile telephone and laptop computers, have in-built security features such as password or personal identification number protection and that these features are activated.

Information regarding access to any agency's communication system, such as dial-up phone numbers and E-mail address lists, shall be considered as confidential information and should not be divulged without authorisation.

### 3.1 Unlawful Use of Communications Equipment

- (a) The use of any telecommunications systems to make or send fraudulent, unlawful, or abusive information, calls or messages is prohibited. Employees are to report any threatening, intimidating, or harassing telephone calls or electronic messages to an officer authorised under agency policy to receive such reports or to their manager.
- (b) Any employee identified as the initiator of fraudulent, unlawful, or abusive calls or messages is subject to disciplinary action and possible criminal prosecution.
- (c) All employees should be aware that it is illegal to record telephone conversations unless authorised under relevant legislation to do so.

### 3.2 Mobile Telephones

- (a) The use of mobile or cellular telephones is a rapidly growing area of communication device usage. Mobile telephones can be used to connect to the Internet, facsimiles and electronic messaging systems. They provide benefits that can significantly add value to service delivery.
- (b) However, control of mobile telephones brings its own set of problems. **Mobile telephones incur substantially higher call charges than ordinary telephone services and are not to be used where it is possible to use ordinary telephones.** All calls to and from mobile telephones are time charged. Users of mobile telephones are expected to keep all calls as short as possible. Where it is necessary to make a call to a mobile telephone from an ordinary telephone, the caller also has a responsibility to keep the calls as short as possible.
- (c) The guidelines for personal use and travel related use in this policy apply equally to all types of telephones.



- (d) Allocations and standards of phones for individual officers are to be approved by the appropriate Executive Director having regard to the individuals service requirements.
- (e) Managers have a responsibility for monitoring the use of mobile telephones and should ensure measures are in place covering the following:
  - (i) **business need:** mobile telephones are provided only in circumstances where there is a demonstrated business need;
  - (ii) **accountability:** individuals are accountable for all calls from any mobile telephone assigned to them, and are required to certify billing records.

Any officer in possession of a mobile phone issued by the Service, may utilise the phone for private calls on a limited basis, provided the Service is reimbursed for the cost of such calls.

Reimbursement is to be made monthly and within 20 working days of having received a copy of the monthly phone account. Reimbursement procedures for individual Directorates are the responsibility of the Executive Director, however payment is to be made to the Accounts Receivable Officer in Financial Services.

- (iii) When staff are travelling away from their home base, the following guidelines apply:

Overseas – when on approved overseas travel, staff are expected to meet all private costs in using communication devices from their travel allowance. The Service will meet charges for business usage made overseas.

Within Australia – when on approved travel within Australia involving overnight stopovers, employees may use communication devices to place brief calls to their homes or families to communicate safe arrivals and changes in itinerary.

- (iv) **motor vehicle use:** the use of a hand held mobile telephone while driving is an offence under the Motor Traffic Act. Employees must pull off the road and park before using a hand held mobile telephone. NSW public sector agencies will not be responsible for any fines incurred by employees improperly using mobile telephones. Involvement in an accident while using a hand held mobile telephone could negate any insurance claim. Managers should authorise the installation of hands-free mobile telephones



in Service owned vehicles where an operational need can be clearly demonstrated. Alternatively, mobile telephones should be linked to a message bank.

- (v) **security:** employees who are users or custodians of mobile telephones understand that mobile telephone calls can be intercepted, and that extra precautions must be taken to secure mobile phones as they are easily stolen (such as activating in-built security features).
- (f) In many circumstances the use of a pager or text transmission could be both more convenient and more economical than the use of a voice mobile telephone call.
- (g) Managers should be conscious of possible health concerns over the use of hand held mobile telephones. There is no clear evidence that the use of digital or analogue mobile telephones poses long-term health hazard, but research in this area is continuing. Where an employee expresses legitimate health and safety concerns, the Manager should favourably consider a request to provide a personal hand-free kit.

### 3.3 Semi-Official Telephones

- (a) Semi-official telephones are private telephones used for official business and located at the principal place of residence of an employee. These telephones have been designated semi-official because the employee concerned is required to be contacted or is required to contact others in connection with the duties of their position, as and when required, outside normal working hours. They may also be provided in situations where flexible working practices involve a significant amount of work being carried out by an employee working from his or her principal place of residence. The telephone number must be communicated to all persons entitled to have contact with the employee.
- (b) Executive Directors can approve reimbursement of expenses associated with a private telephone service installed at the residence of an employee who is required to be contacted or is required to contact others in connection with the duties of their position, as and when required, outside normal working hours. Expenses reimbursed are limited to the fee charge on connection of an approved semi-official telephone service, the annual base rental charged for the service, the cost of official STD and ISD calls as detailed on the telephone bill and an agreed percentage of local calls.



- (c) In cases where a semi-official telephone is not installed, employees have a right to be reimbursed for any essential official telephone expenditure from a private residence or mobile telephone. To substantiate claims, a diary should be kept of any local calls and the itemised STD and ISD bills produced.
- (d) Semi Official telephones will no longer be approved for staff having access to official mobile telephones out of business hours, *in such cases where mobile coverage exists at their place of residence.*

### **3.4 Communication Device Usage Attracting Other Than Local Charge Rates**

- (a) Executive Directors are required to approve requests for use of employer communication devices which attract other than local use charge rates (such as STD and ISD access for telephones and fax) on a case-by-case basis. Employees may be required to pay for such usage as reflected on system reports and billing statements. The retention of a personal log noting the date and purpose of all such usage is encouraged for audit purposes.

### **3.5 Fee Based and Subscription Services**

- (a) Access to services that charge fees (e.g. 1900 or 0055 telephone numbers) are barred unless a need has been identified and authorised by an Executive Director. All requests and decisions relating to the authorising of such access must be documented and retained to facilitate scrutiny or audit.

### **3.6 Personal Use of Communication Devices**

- (a) Employees using employer supplied communications device for personal reasons should ensure that such use is infrequent and brief.
- (b) Employees must not use employer communication devices for the purposes of subscribing to and accessing fee-based services that will be for personal use only.
- (c) Employees may not facilitate or permit the use of employer supplied communication devices by persons not authorised by the Service, unless urgent business or personal circumstances would reasonably require such use.



- (d) Using employer communication devices for activities that might be questionable, controversial or offensive, such as gambling, transmitting inappropriate jokes, etc, is forbidden and may lead to disciplinary action being taken against the employee concerned. Employer supplied communication devices must not be used for the transmission of any non-business related written material to political organisations.
- (e) Personal use of employer supplied communication devices is not considered private, and employees using these devices do not have the same personal privacy rights as they would using private communication devices. This means employees reasonably suspected of abusing personal use of employer communications devices may be asked to explain such use (which may be monitored as part of an agency's responsibility to implement appropriate control mechanisms).

## 4 Who is responsible for implementing this Policy?

Executive Directors, Directors, Managers

## 5 Legislation and references

- Service Standard 1.1.7 Code of Conduct and Ethics

## 6 Amendments

- Clause 2.4 new dot point (g) 25 January 2008
- Clause 2.5 dot point (d) addition of the word "and"
- Clause 3.2 dot point (e)
- Various clauses: update term "Assistant Commissioners" to "Executive Directors"

## 7 Document owner

The owner of this Policy is the Executive Director Administration & Finance.