



3.1.4

Remote Area Firefighter Fitness Testing

1 Rationale

- 1.1 The NSW Rural Fire Service (“the Service”) has a duty of care to ensure that its members tasked to remote area firefighting operations are physically capable of undertaking the tasks allotted to them.
- 1.2 Remote Area Firefighting Teams (RAFTs) are expected to participate in fieldwork requiring above-average endurance and superior conditioning. Their work can include occasional demands for extraordinarily strenuous activities in emergencies under adverse environmental conditions and over extended periods.
- 1.3 The Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) has recommended that members’ capacity to medically and physically perform fire related tasks be assessed. The testing of Service remote area firefighting personnel is the first step in this process.
- 1.4 The primary purpose of the introduction of RAFT testing is to highlight medical conditions and physical fitness standards that, if not otherwise detected, could impact adversely on a RAFT member’s ability to perform the tasks associated with that type of firefighting and thus compromise the safety and welfare of both themselves and other RAFT members.

2 Standard

- 2.1 By 1 September in each year, Service members wishing to be deployed as part of RAFTs must have passed a medical examination or (after the first year) provided a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q) and



successfully completed an annual Task Based Assessment (TBA) to the arduous level.

- 2.2** The process will be open and transparent, with all applicants treated equally and tested to the same standard. (Refer also to 2.13).
- 2.3** In the first instance, members should complete a “Consent Form” agreeing to a medical examination (refer Appendix 1).
- 2.4** Members have the choice of undertaking the medical assessment with a doctor of their own choice or they may elect to use a doctor organised through the Service. (Service-organised doctors may not be available in all areas.)
- 2.5** The physical examination format prepared by HealthQuest, a statutory health Corporation reporting to the NSW Minister for Health, has been selected. This is the same format used by State Forests and the Department of Environment and Conservation. HealthQuest is also able to identify medical practitioners in city and country areas.
- 2.6** Medical practitioners will provide a completed fitness classification form to State Operations at Head Office. Other medical information from the medical examination will remain confidential and be retained by the medical practitioner.
- 2.7** Any personal data collected by the Service during the testing processes will remain within Head Office and will be used to assess a member’s suitability for deployment as part of a RAFT.
- 2.8** Members who believe they are disadvantaged and unable to demonstrate their fitness due to a personal physical characteristic may request a review of their personal circumstance. If deemed appropriate, an alternate TBA may be proposed to assess fitness for RAFT deployment in consultation with the member, State Operations staff and the medical practitioner.
- 2.9** Regional Operations Officers, in conjunction with district/team/zone managers, will identify areas where a RAFT is considered an appropriate firefighting resource. Existing RAFT personnel will be consulted during this process.
- 2.10** Members within the identified districts/teams/zones that express an interest in joining a RAFT must, in the first instance, apply to their district/team/zone manager.



- 2.11 Existing RAFT personnel should advise their district/team/zone manager of their intention to become part of the RAFT expansion project and undergo the physical examination and Task Based Assessment (TBA).
- 2.12 Regional Operations Officers in association with district/team/zone managers will then select a number of people in each district/team/zone for stage one medical examination. It should be noted that the selection process is district/team/zone based. It should also be noted that not all districts/teams/zones will have RAFTs.
- 2.13 Selection as a prospective RAFT member will be based on possession of a range of skills and qualifications as well as physical attributes.
- 2.14 At a time suitable to the majority of district/team/zone members, a medical examination will be arranged at the Service's expense.
- 2.15 Copies of the HealthQuest medical examination package will be made available by district/team/zone managers to prospective RAFT personnel electing to use their own medical practitioner (at the Service's expense). Members opting to use their own medical practitioner will be able to make arrangements with their district/team/zone manager for payment of the medical practitioner's account. The Operations Officer, State Operations will facilitate district/team/zone reimbursement for these expenses.
- 2.16 Members certified by the medical practitioner as suitably physically fit will then be invited to participate in a TBA at Regional level. The TBA consists of a 4.8km walk over level ground carrying a 20.4kg pack or weight vest. The walk is to be completed in 45 minutes or less.

3 Who is responsible for implementing this Standard?

Operations Officer State Operations, Regional Operations Officers, District Team/Zone Managers

4 Issue

This Service Standard was considered by the Corporate Executive Group on 21 April 2004 and issued by the Commissioner on 21 April 2004.



5 Legislation and references

- The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000
- Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) (2002) Guidelines for Health and Fitness Monitoring of Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Workers, AFAC, Melbourne
- NPWS Interim Guidelines for Fire Fighter Health and Fitness September 2003
- Whitlock C and Sharkey B (2003) Work Capacity Test – Administrators Guide, National Wildfire Coordinating Group, Missoula USA

6 Amendments

7 Document owner

The owner of this Service Standard is the Executive Director Operations and Regional Management.

APPENDIX 1

REMOTE AREA FIREFIGHTING TEAM (RAFT) HEALTH AND FITNESS PROGRAM CONSENT FORM



I (*name*)

of (*address*)

Rural Fire District: _____ Brigade: _____

acknowledge and agree that I:

- (a) Will be participating in the NSW Rural Fire Service's RAFT Health and Fitness Program, which is required before I can participate in RAFT firefighting activities.
- (b) Am required to undertake a medical assessment (initially and at recommended intervals).
- (c) (*please cross one of the boxes below to indicate your preference**)
 - I am intending to organise my own medical assessment at a doctor of my choice, having collected the medical package from my district/team/zone manager. I understand that the completed Firefighter Medical Assessment Classification Form is to be returned to the Operations Officer, State Operations, Locked Bag 17 Granville NSW 2142.
 - I am intending to use the doctor organised by the NSW Rural Fire Service.
- (d) Am required to complete and sign a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q) in the years between medical assessments. The results of these will be recorded (including signatures) and the PAR-Q will be returned to the participant.
- (e) Am required to complete and sign an informed consent form before undertaking the Task Based Assessment (TBA).

Signature: _____

Date: _____ / _____ / _____

"Personal information which is collected when you complete and submit this form will be used to assess your suitability for deployment as part of a RAFT. The information contained in this form (including health information) and which is received from any medical practitioner as part of the assessment process will be stored in the NSW Rural Fire Service's database called "Firezone". All persons with access to [your personal information must comply with Service Standard 1.1.14 on Personal Information and Privacy. You may review and amend your information in Firezone by contacting your District/Team/Zone Manager."