



# SERVICE STANDARD 3.1.8

## CRITICAL INCIDENTS

ITEM	DESCRIPTION
Version Number	2.0
Related Protocol	Critical Incidents Protocol
Owner	Executive Director, Operations
Contact	Director, Response and Coordination
Approved Date	26 February 2019
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### 1 Purpose

- 1.1 A critical incident is any incident or revelation that might have a serious, adverse effect on the interests of the community, the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS), its stakeholders or members.
- 1.2 If mishandled, such events can create unnecessary anxiety, threaten public confidence and possibly lead to loss of members or further crises. If well handled, however, their adverse effects can be minimised, and the opportunity can be taken for people to be helped and for the organisation to learn and improve.
- 1.3 One of the major problems during any critical incident is misinformation. A critical incident will often generate confusion that can result in announcements or actions that are insensitive, inappropriate or even dangerous.
- 1.4 Resolving a critical incident in the best way possible involves making sure supervisors and managers are given good factual information as quickly as possible, so that they can make appropriate decisions and provide the needed support expeditiously.
- 1.5 This Service Standard and the related Critical Incident Protocol, details a systematic approach to dealing with critical incidents.

### 2 Definitions

- 2.1 For the purposes of this service standard, the following definition applies:
  - a. **Critical Incident:** is defined as any event, which causes significant disruption to effective operations, creates significant danger or serious injury, or fatality to a member of the NSW RFS. A Critical Incident may also include any event that has, or may reasonably cause the public to lose its confidence in the NSW 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 NSW RFS member while undertaking NSW RFS official duties.
    - > The death or critical injury of a NSW RFS member or immediate family<sup>3</sup> not undertaking official duties but by nature of the circumstances may have significant impact on the NSW 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 NSW RFS) involved in the incident.
  - Where any vehicle involved in the incident requires tow due as a result of the extent of the damage.
  - Significant damage to object other than motor vehicle, as result of incident with NSW RFS vehicle, vessel or aircraft.
- The death or critical injury of a non NSW RFS member (including member of the public) as a direct result of actions taken by the NSW RFS in the management or suppression of a fire or operational incident.
- As directed by the Commissioner/Deputy Commissioner.

Note:

<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 is any Mother, Father, Son or Daughter

<sup>4</sup> Injury is any injury requiring treatment by a health professional such as an ambulance officer, nurse, doctor (includes needle-stick/sharps injuries and/or any contamination by human blood or body fluid)

Note: Generally, a critical incident will arise from a Notifiable Incident as defined in *OMP 4.03.01 Notifiable Incidents*. If in doubt advice, should be sought from the State Duty Operations Officer (SDOO) in the first instance.

### 3 Policy

- 3.1 The Director Response and Coordination is responsible for the development, review and currency of a Critical Incident Protocol for the NSW RFS.
- 3.2 The Critical Incident Protocol will be endorsed by the Executive Director, Operations, and approved by the Commissioner.
- 3.3 All On Call / Duty Officers or Managers upon becoming aware of an incident that may be a Critical Incident must notify the Operational Communication Centre immediately, and make a notifiable incident.
- 3.4 The SDOO shall be responsible for activation of the Critical Incident Protocol.
- 3.5 Following each activation of the Critical Incident Protocol, the Manager, Emergency Management Coordination, shall be responsible for reviewing the actual events against the protocol and provide a report to the Director including any recommendations for protocol change.
- 3.6 If required actions shall be taken to ensure that the Critical Incident is investigated in an appropriate manner and that all appropriate recommendations from that investigation are reviewed and if appropriate promptly implemented.

### 4 Related Documents

- [Rural Fires Act 1997](#) - Section 13(2)(l)
- [Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)
- Critical Incident Protocol

## 5 Amendments

AMENDMENT DATE	VERSION NO	DESCRIPTION
17 October 2001	1.0	Initial release
26 February 2019	2.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Repeals and remakes SS 3.1.8 v1.0</li><li>➤ Change of title to 'Critical Incidents'</li><li>➤ Updated to align with current processes and to provide for a Critical Incident Protocol</li></ul>



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



# Critical Incident Protocol

April 2019

## *Authorisation*

Service Standard 3.1.8 Critical Incidents – Critical Incident Protocol

Date Prepared 22 March 2019

Date Authorised 10 April 2019

**Contents**

- 1. Purpose ..... 3**
  
- 2. Critical Incident (CI) Event (NSW RFS Related) ..... 3**
  - 2.1 Immediate Response (within 10 - 30 minutes of incident) ..... 4
  - 2.2 Secondary Response (within 1-2 hours) ..... 5
  - 2.3 Third Response (within the first 24 -72 hours) ..... 5
  - 2.4 Ongoing Response (72 hours- ongoing) ..... 6
  - 2.5 Media Release/ Internal Communications ..... 7
  
- 3. Overseas Travel ..... 7**
  
- 4. Evaluation ..... 7**
  
- 5. Contacts ..... 7**

# Critical Incident Protocol

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## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this protocol is to establish, implement and maintain procedures for the management of a critical incident involving members of the NSW RFS or event that may have potential to bring disrepute or undermine confidence of the NSW RFS. This protocol is prepared, and approved in accordance with Service Standard 3.1.8 Critical Incident.

Effective management of Critical Incidents can be broken down to the following elements:

1. Response and Immediate Actions
2. Notifications
3. Investigation and Case Management
4. Stakeholder engagement and communications

A critical incident (CI) is defined as any event which causes significant disruption to effective operations, or which has the potential to significantly impact on the reputation of the Service. Such events include but are not limited to:

- The death<sup>1</sup> or critical injury<sup>2</sup> of a NSW RFS member while undertaking NSW RFS official duties.
- The death or critical injury of a NSW RFS member or immediate family<sup>3</sup> not undertaking official duties but by nature of the circumstances may have significant impact on the NSW 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 NSW RFS) involved in the incident
  - Where any vehicle involved in the incident requires tow due as a result of the extent of the damage
  - Significant damage to object other than motor vehicle, as result of MVC with NSW RFS vehicle, vessel or aircraft.
- The death or critical injury of a non NSW RFS member (including member of the public) as a direct result of actions taken by the NSW RFS in the management or suppression of a fire or operational incident.
- As directed by the Commissioner/Deputy Commissioner.

*A CI event may also include any event that has, or may reasonably cause the public to lose the confidence the NSW RFS and its members.*

*Note:*

<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 is any Mother, Father, Son or Daughter

<sup>4</sup> Injury is any injury requiring treatment by a health professional such as an ambulance officer, nurse, doctor (includes needle-stick/sharps injuries and/or any contamination by human blood or body fluid)

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## 2. Critical Incident (CI) Event (NSW RFS Related)

*Defined as: an incident occurring during a NSW RFS related incident (or event) or while a NSW RFS member is engaged in NSW RFS related duties.*

## 2.1 Immediate Response (within 10 - 30 minutes of incident)

### (a) Immediate Actions

- (i) Identification of the nature of the incident and determine location.
- (ii) Immediately notify the appropriate emergency services.
- (iii) Determine level of risk for individual members to attend scene to render assistance.
- (iv) Notify members seeking to render first aid of situation and potential risks.

### (b) Notifications

- (i) Immediate notification to the OCC and reported as a notifiable incident by the District Duty Officer, On Call Officer or Business Unit Manager.
- (ii) Operational Communications Centre (OCC) to ensure immediate notification to the State Duty Operations Officer (SDOO).
- (iii) SDOO to arrange to get membership details including next of kin for distribution as appropriate.
- (iv) SDOO to confirm details and provide initial notification to the Operational Notifications Group.
- (v) SDOO to follow up message with telephone contact with the Executive Director - Operations, or in the absence of EDO to the Director, Response and Coordination.
- (vi) SDOO maintains contact with the Incident Controller/District Manager and updates Operational Notification Group as situation changes.
- (vii) The emergency contact (next of kin) to the member involved is notified by:
  - A. In the event of death, the NSW Police Force
  - B. All other events the respective District Duty/On Call Officer/Business Unit Manager

### (c) Investigation and Case Management

- (i) The Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner shall assign a Critical Incident Coordinator (CIC) to manage and oversight the critical incident.
- (ii) The CIC shall ensure the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner are well informed throughout the critical incident.
- (iii) The CIC shall establish a Critical Incident Coordination Group (CICG) comprising of those Directors or Sectional Managers (e.g. Regional Services, Emergency Management, Engineering, Professional Standards and Workplace Health and Safety) likely to be involved in the ongoing investigation or case management of the critical incident.
- (iv) The CIC shall establish a messaging protocol (eg. Group Message) within the CICG.

## **2.2 Secondary Response (within 1 - 2 hours)**

### **(a) Immediate Actions**

- i. The SDMO will liaise with the CIC for an appropriate response, subject to what is permissible given the situation.
- ii. The Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner shall authorise any media release or statement.
- iii. SDOO to arrange for the Critical Incident Support Services (CISS) and Chaplaincy to dispatch immediately (first 1-2 hours) to provide support to those affected by the incident.

### **(b) Notifications**

- i. Incident Controllers/Managers, are to identify and support those members directly impacted by the incident and provide necessary assistance. Assess and notify the need for support and counselling with CISS and Chaplaincy for those directly and indirectly involved.
- ii. NSW RFS Executive Directors shall be informed and provided a precis of events by the CIC. Executive Directors shall release resources to the CICG as appropriate to the situation.

## **Investigation and Case Management**

- i. SDOO to facilitate any logistical arrangements (including use of NSW RFS Owned Aircraft where appropriate) to facilitate next of kin attendance during critical incident.
- ii. The CIC shall convene a meeting of the CICG and consider:
  - a. Investigation actions (eg. Level 3 ICAM, PSU, Police)
  - b. Regulatory Liaison immediate and ongoing (eg. Police, SafeWork, NTSB)
  - c. External assistance (eg. Legal, Technical, or Support services)

### **(c) Stakeholder Engagement and Communications**

- i. All Media shall be managed by the State Media Duty Officer (SDMO) on (02) 9898 1855.
- ii. All NSW RFS media releases or public statements prepared and approved by the Commissioner/Deputy Commissioner shall be disseminated by All Staff email to keep internal stakeholders informed.

## **2.3 Third Response (within the first 24 - 72 hours)**

### **(a) Immediate Actions**

- iii. HSW Manager to arrange debriefing sessions with CISS for members most closely involved and at risk. Manager CISS to provide advice and CISS peers for debriefing sessions.



- iv. HSW Manager to complete relevant reporting requirements (eg. WHS incident report and insurance forms), and provide assistance to members or families where required to complete this task.
  - v. Confirm availability of support services including emergency accommodation in need for immediate relatives.
  - vi. HSW Manager to follow up with affected member, or next of kin of affected member to ensure all appropriate support arrangements have been put in place, and provide any additional support as is reasonable.
- (b) **Investigation and Case Management**
- i. The CIC shall ensure commencement of investigative processes and facilitate any investigative processes.
  - ii. The CIC shall ensure the preparation of appropriate Ministerial Briefings for approval of the Commissioner.
  - iii. The CIC shall ensure a HPE folder is created and that all records including emails are attached. Access shall be restricted to Directors, applicable Regional Manager and Response & Co-ordination Managers.

## **2.4 Ongoing Response (72 hours - ongoing)**

- (a) Manager to provide follow up contact to the individual's emergency contact within 72 hours and offer CISS and Chaplaincy services and other support services as appropriate.
- (b) Manager to identify any other person who may be affected by the incident and provide access to support services (for example local staff/volunteers).
- (c) Corporate Communications (Including Media) to draft follow up information to be disseminated both internally and externally to the NSW RFS.
- (d) At this point key responsibilities will be transitioned to the local Manager. These include:
  - (i) notification to local members of arrangements relating to funeral or memorial services, as appropriate;
  - (ii) maintain contact with affected parties and continue to provide support and to monitor the need for counselling services in conjunction with CISS and Chaplaincy;
  - (iii) monitor members for signs of delayed stress and the onset of post-traumatic stress disorder; providing specialised treatment as necessary through CISS;
  - (iv) plan for and be sensitive to anniversaries;
- (e) The CIC shall maintain responsibility and oversight of:
  - (i) assistance with longer term matters e.g. inquests, legal proceedings;

- (ii) notification of relevant departments within the service which may need to follow-up records such as Finance;
- (iii) Manager Health and Safety to notify emergency contact with regard to payment of entitlements and arrange for any outstanding matters to be resolved within 4 weeks of the member's death (if applicable).

## **2.5 Media Release/Internal Communications**

The NSW RFS recognises that each critical incident is unique and the dynamics of each situation will need to be assessed when it occurs. To protect the privacy of individuals and to ensure the provision of accurate information, the NSW RFS has developed an agreed approach to media management and engagement.

The SDMO and Manager Media will oversee and facilitate the timely dissemination and response to media related enquiry, noting any media releases will be approved by the Commissioner/Deputy Commissioner.

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## **3. Overseas Travel**

*Defined as: an incident while a member is deployed overseas.*

In the event of a critical incident affecting our members overseas, the above protocol will apply in addition to the following:

- (a) Where developed enact the specific Operational Critical Incident Action Plan for the applicable overseas deployment.
- (a) Where critical incident has occurred to an NSW RFS member in NSW RFS capacity but not related to an operational National Resource Sharing Centre (NRSC) deployment;
  - (i) The deployment of an appropriate senior officer to the country of event and perform such actions as required to support the family.

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## **4. Evaluation**

Following the Critical Incident, a meeting is to be facilitated by the CICG with the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner to evaluate the critical incident, effectiveness of the management plan and ensure lessons learned are enacted where appropriate.

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## **5. Contacts**

State Duty Operations Officer (SDOO)	(02) 8741 5400 (24 hours)
State Media Duty Officer (SDMO)	(02) 9898 1855 (24 hours)