



Service Standard 3.1.8

Critical Incidents

Version	3.0
SOPs	Critical Incidents Protocol
Policy Owner	Deputy Commissioner Operational Coordination
Policy Contact	Director State Operations
Approval Date	7 July 2025
Next Review	7 July 2030

1 Purpose

- 1.1 A critical incident is any event which causes significant disruption to effective operations, or significant danger, serious injury, or fatality to a member of the RFS. A critical incident may also include any event that has, or may reasonably impact on the reputation of the RFS or cause the public to lose confidence in the RFS and its members.
- 1.2 If mishandled, such events can create unnecessary anxiety, threaten reputation and public confidence, and lead to loss of members, as well as other cascading effects or further consequences. If handled well, however, the opportunity can be taken for people to be helped and for the organisation to learn and improve. This is done with the acknowledgment that the wellbeing of our members is of the highest priority.
- 1.3 One of the major challenges during any critical incident is the timeliness and accuracy of information. A critical incident can 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 ensuring supervisors and managers are given factual information in a timely manner to aid them in making appropriate decisions and providing effective and efficient support.
- 1.5 This Service Standard and the related Critical Incident Protocol details a systematic approach to dealing with critical incidents. The Critical Incident Protocol forms part of and should be read in conjunction with this Service Standard.

2 Policy

- 2.1 The Director State Operations (DSO) is responsible for reviewing and maintaining the currency of this Service Standard and the Critical Incident Protocol.
- 2.2 In accordance with the RFS policy framework the Critical Incident Protocol will be endorsed by Deputy Commissioner Operational Coordination (DCOC) and approved by the Commissioner.

- 2.3 In accordance with Operational Management Procedure 4.03.1 Notifiable Incidents, and upon becoming aware of an incident that may be a critical incident, the Duty Officer /or Manager must notify the Operational Communication Centre (OCC) **immediately** as a notifiable incident.
- 2.4 The State Duty Operations Officer (SDOO) or State Operations Controller (SOC) shall be responsible for activation of the Critical Incident Protocol notification process.
- 2.5 The DSO or SOC (if activated) will convene a Critical Incident Team (CIT) to manage the incident. Further information on the CIT can be found in the Protocol.
- 2.6 The DSO or SOC (if activated) will consult with the Director Health and Safety (DHS) regarding the formation of a Critical Incident Investigation Team (CIIT). DHS is responsible for the CIIT.
- 2.7 Wherever possible, the CIIT should be established immediately to ensure the early security of evidence and provide support to the members involved in or witness to the incident. This will ensure that the members are supported throughout the duration of the process and have a point of contact as the matter progresses.
- 2.8 The CIIT should include officers from the relevant areas of the RFS, including subject matter experts appropriate to the nature of the critical incident. Where possible, preference should be given to those with operational investigation experience.
- 2.9 Following each activation of the Critical Incident Protocol, the DSO shall be responsible for reviewing the event against the protocol and provide a report to the DCOC including any recommendations for change to the protocol.

3 Definitions

- 3.1 For the purpose of this Service Standard, the following definition applies:
- a. **Critical Incident:** any event which causes significant disruption to effective operations, or significant danger, serious injury, or fatality to a member of the RFS. A critical incident may also include any event that has or may reasonably impact on the reputation of the RFS or cause the public to lose confidence in the RFS and its members.
- Such events include but are not limited to:
- The death¹ or critical injury² of a RFS member while undertaking RFS official duties
 - The death or critical injury of a RFS member or immediate family³ 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 injury⁴ 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
 - Significant damage to object other than motor vehicle, as a 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.

Notes:

¹ Death includes confirmed and unconfirmed.

² Critical Injury is any injury sustained where life expectancy is unlikely.

³ Immediate Family refers to a member's parents, spouse/partner, or children.

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

- b. **Critical Incident Investigation Team (CIIT):** a team established by the Director Health and Safety to investigate the critical incident
- c. **Critical Incident Team (CIT):** the team established by the Director State Operations or State Operations Controller (where activated) to manage the critical incident.

4 Document control

Release history

Version	Date	Summary of changes
1.0	17 Oct 2001	Initial release titled 'Handling of Crisis Events'
2.0	26 Feb 2019	Repealed and remade SS 3.1.8 v1.0 Change of title to 'Critical Incidents' Updated to align with current processes and to provide for a Critical Incident Protocol
3.0	7 Jul 2025	Updated to reflect current practice, organisational alignment and branding. Concurrent review of 3.1.8A Critical Incident Protocol and OMP 4.03.01 Notifiable Incidents

Approved by

Name	Position	Date
Peter McKechnie	A/Commissioner	7 July 2025

Related documents

Document name
Rural Fires Act 1997
Work Health and Safety Act 2011
3.1.8A Critical Incident Protocol
Operational Guideline Notifiable Incidents