

## 3.1.8

# Handling of Crisis Events

## Rationale

- 1.1 A crisis event is any incident or revelation that might have a serious, adverse effect on the interests of the community, the Service, its stakeholders or members.
- 1.2 Examples of crisis events might include:
  - a serious accident involving firefighters;
  - a motor vehicle accident (MVA) involving a Service vehicle;
  - a Service vehicle overrun by fire;
  - injury or damage occasioned by Service activities; or
  - members of the Service suspected or found to be involved in criminal activities.
- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 One of the major problems during any crisis is misinformation. A crisis will often generate rumours that can result in announcements or actions that are insensitive, inappropriate or even dangerous.
- 1.5 Resolving a crisis in the best way possible involves making sure the right people are given good factual information as quickly as possible, so that they can make appropriate decisions and provide the needed support expeditiously.
- 1.6 This Service Standard details a systematic approach to reacting to a crisis situation, using the principles given above.

## 2 Standard

- 2.1 The associated Crisis Handling SOPs set out in detail all relevant procedures.
- 2.2 Any event or revelation that might constitute, or lead to, a crisis should be reported to the appropriate persons as soon as possible.



- 2.2 Actions shall be taken to ensure that, as far as possible, all appropriate aid immediately needed by those directly involved in the crisis is made available to them.
- 2.3 Actions shall be taken to ensure that, as far as possible, all reasonable, appropriate aid subsequently needed by those involved in the crisis is made available to them.
- 2.4 Actions shall be taken to ensure that the crisis is investigated in an appropriate manner and that all appropriate recommendations from that investigation are reviewed and if appropriate promptly implemented.
- 2.5 Actions shall be taken to ensure that a media strategy is immediately put in place that appropriately portrays the known facts, respects the privacy and sensitivity of those directly involved, promotes the safety and effectiveness of members of the Service, and protects the interests of its stakeholders.

### **3 Who is responsible for implementing this Standard?**

There is a shared responsibility, detailed in the associated SOPs.

### **4 Issue**

This Service Standard was considered by the Rural Fire Service Advisory Council on 17 October 2001.

### **5 Legislation and references**

- s13 (2) (l) Rural Fires Act, 1997
- s15, s16 Occupational Health and Safety Act 1983

### **6 Amendments**

### **7 Document owner**

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



# Crisis Handling S.O.P.s



THE NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT

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# Crisis Handling SOPs - 2001

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### Definition:

A crisis event is any incident or revelation that might have a serious, adverse effect on the interests of the Service, the community it serves, its stakeholders and/or its members. Examples of crisis events might include, but are not limited to,

- a serious accident involving firefighters,
- a motor vehicle accident (MVA) involving a Service vehicle
- a Service vehicle overrun by fire
- injury or damage occasioned by Service activities,
- a threat being made against the Service, or
- Members of the Service suspected or found to be involved in criminal activities.

# S.O.P. # 1

## Notifications

### Scope

This SOP covers the notifications that are required when a crisis event occurs.

### Procedures

- Any member who becomes aware of a crisis event shall immediately notify it to the applicable Fire Control Officer, (or an equivalent Senior Officer of the Service if the crisis event happens outside the scope of a Rural Fire District activity).
- The Fire Control Officer, or equivalent Senior Officer, shall immediately notify any crisis event to the NSW Rural Fire Service, State Operations Service Support Centre (SSC).
- Upon being advised of a crisis event, the SSC is to obtain all available, relevant information from the person notifying it. In particular:
  - What has happened
  - Who it involves
  - Where and when it occurred
  - Any known details of how or why it occurred
  - Whether anyone else has been notified (e.g. the local FCO).
- The SSC is to immediately notify the State Operations Duty Operations Officer.
- The SSC is to immediately notify the Duty media Officer.
- The Duty Operations Officer may, after considering the nature of the crisis, direct the SSC to ascertain further information and to notify the relevant persons in a priority order.
- The Duty Operations Officer will notify the Assistant Commissioner, Operations who will in turn advise the Commissioner.
- All radio and telephone messages are logged by the SSC
- The following may also need to be advised:
  - The applicable Regional Manager
  - The applicable Fire Control Officer/s (if not already aware of it)
  - The Brigade Member/s family/ies (the role of the District Fire Control Officer)
  - Critical Incident Support Services
  - The Service's Senior Chaplain
  - The Manager, Engineering Services (for Service vehicle/s involved in a motor vehicle accident or fire overrun)
  - The Safety and Welfare Manager (by pager or mobile phonest for Service Vehicle/s involved in a Motor Vehicle Accident or fire overrun)
  - The Manager, Fire investigation
  - The Executive Director, Corporate Services (by e-mail for any substantial workers compensation claim). A written briefing will be prepared by the District Fire Control Officer

or Senior Officer and be forwarded to the State Operations, Duty Operations Officer as soon as possible but no later than the following morning. The Duty Operations Officer will then provide a full briefing to the Commissioner

## **Definitions**

- A crisis event is any incident or revelation that might have a serious, adverse effect on the interests of the Service, the community it serves, its stakeholders and/or its members. Examples of crisis events might include, but are not limited to, a serious accident involving firefighters, a motor vehicle accident involving a Service vehicle, a Service vehicle overrun by fire, injury or damage occasioned by Service activities, a threat being made against the Service, or members of the Service suspected or found to be involved in criminal activities.

# S.O.P. # 2

## Responsibilities

### Scope

This SOP details “who is responsible for doing what” in a crisis event.

### Procedure

- The Fire Control Officer responsible for the District in which the crisis event has occurred, (or an equivalent Senior Officer of the Service if the crisis event happens outside the scope of a Rural Fire District activity) is responsible to ensure that:
  - All appropriate immediate support is made available to those involved.
  - The event is notified immediately to the State Operations Service Support Centre (SSC).
  - Evidence relating to the crisis event is preserved intact for investigation.
  - Requests for information from the media are referred to the Duty Media Officer.
- The Service Support Centre (SSC) is responsible to ensure that:
  - The notifications indicated in SOP 1 are made.
  - Updated information is passed to the State Operations Duty Operations Officer and other relevant persons as instructed by the Duty Operations Officer.
  - Information about the crisis event is recorded and a portfolio of copies of that information is collected to assist with investigation.
- The Commissioner is responsible to ensure that any barriers to providing timely and appropriate support to those involved in the crisis are removed, and that the Minister is kept informed of the crisis and associated developments.
- The Duty Operations Officer is responsible to ensure that information about the crisis event is passed promptly to appropriate persons, and that all communications and information about the crisis event is recorded and collected for briefing and investigation purposes.
- The applicable Regional Manager is responsible to ensure that the Fire Control Officer and/or other Officer/s directly concerned with the crisis are supplied with sufficient support to enable them to continue operations safely and effectively. This may include arranging for supplementary or relief personnel from other Districts.
- The Duty Media Officer is responsible to ensure that factual, sensitive and responsible information is made available promptly to the media.
- Critical Incident Support Services, the Senior Chaplain and the Executive Director Corporate Services are responsible to ensure that all applicable welfare support available from them is provided appropriately to those involved in the crisis event.

### Definitions

- Nil



# S.O.P. # 3

## Media Liaison

### Scope

This SOP covers media liaison activities during a crisis event.

### Procedure

- Media liaison relevant to a crisis event shall only be conducted by the Commissioner, the Director Corporate Communications and/or persons directly delegated that task by either of them.
- The Fire Control Officer responsible for the District in which the crisis event has occurred, (or an equivalent Senior Officer of the Service if the crisis event happens outside the scope of a Rural Fire District activity) is responsible to ensure that:
  - All known details of the crisis event are passed immediately to the State Operations Service Support Centre (SSC) .
  - All persons under their control refer all requests for information from the media about the event to the (state level) Duty Media Officer. \*
  - Any rumours or misinformation about the event are notified to the Duty Media Officer.
  - Appropriate resources and information is made available to the Media Unit to allow them to operate during the crisis.
- The Duty Media Officer is responsible to ensure that:
  - The Commissioner is kept informed of all information to be released to the media.
  - A suitable media strategy is established promptly
  - A suitable local liaison officer is appointed or Media Officer attends the incident if deemed appropriate.
  - The safety of members of the general community and the Service is not compromised by misinformation that tolerates, condones, promotes or glorifies unsafe practices.
  - The privacy and sensitivity of those directly involved is respected and protected.
  - The objectives of the Service are upheld.
  - The interests of the Service's stakeholders are protected.
  - Other members of the Service who are likely to be approached by the media concerning the crisis are advised about media policy and procedures regarding the event.

*\* **Note:** Requests for information not directly related to the crisis may still be provided under Fireground SOP 38.) The criteria for determining what is "not directly related to the crisis" would be an answer of "yes" to the question, "Would I normally supply this particular information if the crisis event had not occurred?"*

### Definitions

- Nil

# S.O.P. # 4

## Investigation

### Scope

This SOP covers the investigation of a crisis event.

### Procedure

- All crisis events shall be investigated and a report of the investigation provided to the Commissioner, normally within one month of it being requested.
- The Commissioner, or a person delegated by the Commissioner, shall assign the investigation and detail its terms of reference in writing.
- The internal investigation of a crisis event shall not be conducted so as to be at cross purposes to any external investigation carried out by any authority or person having such a function (Police, Workcover, etc). The internal investigation shall cooperate with any such external investigation and make all relevant information collected available to it.
- When a crisis event involves a serious accident to a firefighter, the investigation shall be conducted in accordance with NSW Rural Fire Service Accident Prevention SOPs under SS 1.1.4. The investigator is to be at “arm’s length” from the people involved in the accident.
- When a crisis involves any other event primarily concerning volunteer members, the investigation shall normally be coordinated by the appropriate Regional Manager, or other person appointed by the Commissioner. Where applicable, the matter is to be investigated consistent with Service Standard 1.1.2. (Discipline) or 1.1.3. (Grievances).
- When a crisis involves any other type of event, the investigation shall normally be coordinated by the applicable Assistant Commissioner, or other person appointed by the Commissioner. The investigator is to be at “arm’s length” from those involved.
- When a crisis event involves a specific aspect of the Service, the Manager responsible for that aspect shall be included in the investigation team. For example:
  - If it involves a vehicle or equipment, the Manager, Engineering Services shall be included.
  - If it involves a training activity, the Manager, Training Services shall be included.
- An investigator might be called to give evidence during legal proceedings associated with a crisis event. The Service, however, is not to expect or purport that the investigator will, in addition to explaining their findings, also justify or defend the actions of the Service or explain the response of the Service to his/her investigation.

### Definitions

- Nil