



National
Operational
Guidance

Section

Phases of search, rescue and casualty
care



NFCC
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Phases of search, rescue and casualty care

A search and rescue can be broken down into four phases; not all incidents will require all four. The four phases, and how they are delivered using this guidance, are defined in the 'LAST' acronym:

- Locate – Locating a casualty is covered in the [Search](#) control measures
- Access – Accessing a casualty is covered in the [Rescue](#) control measures
- Stabilise – Stabilising a casualty is covered in the [Rescue](#) and [Casualty care](#) control measures
- Transport – Transporting a casualty is covered in the [Casualty care](#) control measures

The nature and complexity of the situation should determine the phases required and the scale of the operations. This in turn will determine the levels of resources, management and control needed.

The overall responsibility for search and rescue operations should rest with the appropriate lead agency. A competent person from the lead agency should be nominated as soon as possible at the incident to co-ordinate resources and activity for the search and rescue. The [JESIP principles for joint working](#) should be applied whenever there is a multi-agency response, regardless of the type, size or complexity of the incident.

Search, rescue and casualty care operations will usually fall into one of the following categories:

- In the built environment, such as a collapsed structure
- When using breathing apparatus (BA), such as a fire in a building; procedures are located in the [Foundation for breathing apparatus](#)
- In the natural or open environment, such as on unstable ground or for a wide area search
- Involving modes of transport or the transport infrastructure

Any search or rescue incident could involve working at height or be in a confined or complex environment.