



National
Operational
Guidance

Control measure

Gaining access to a vehicle in water



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

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Control measure knowledge

Opening windows, doors or taking any action that alters the weight of a vehicle in water will affect its stability and buoyancy. The removal and safety of casualties should be the primary concern during a rescue from a vehicle in water but altering the stability or buoyancy of a submerged or partially submerged vehicle that has not been suitably anchored should be avoided where possible.

Stabilisation should be prioritised in flowing water. Removal of weight from a vehicle, for example by removing a casualty, may cause sudden uncontrolled vehicle movements and present a hazard to both casualties and personnel. Working near an unsecured vehicle should be avoided.

If an opening needs to be made, personnel should consider how this will affect the vehicle's stability and do so from a position of safety. The use of hydraulic rescue equipment may be necessary but the effect of the application of force, safety restraint systems and sudden movements of the vehicle or parts of the vehicle should be considered.

When removing structural elements of a vehicle in flowing water, large or heavy objects should be secured, or the hazard to downstream responders considered.

Strategic actions

Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Consider the possibility of air pockets maintaining the buoyancy of a vehicle in deep water
- Consider hydrology and vehicle stability whilst gaining access to vehicles in water