



National
Operational
Guidance

Hazard

**Animal in water, on ice, or on
unstable ground**



NFCC
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Hazard - Animal in water, on ice, or on unstable ground

Hazard Knowledge

An animal may appear to need to be rescued from water, ice or unstable ground. Many animals, such as dogs in water, may be able to extricate themselves and should be encouraged to do so. It may also be the case that an animal can be safely left in position, if the water surrounding it will recede or subside in a reasonable period of time.

If an animal welfare charity or other specialist confirms that the animal needs to be rescued, or if there is a danger that members of the public may try to intervene, the fire and rescue service may need to respond to the incident. However, it may not be viable to rescue the animal, for example, if it is in swift water.

It may be very challenging to access, control and rescue an animal from water, ice or unstable ground. Maintaining an egress route throughout the incident may also be difficult.

An animal could be entangled below the surface of the water, ice or unstable ground, for example by tree roots or debris. The animal's limbs could also be in an unexpected position. Both of these possibilities should be investigated prior to attempting extrication, in order to avoid further injury to the animal.

Animals may be numbed by the temperature of the water, ice or unstable ground they are submerged in; they may not react to the impact of tools being used to extricate them. This could result in serious injury to the animal.



Control measure - Extrication of animal from water, ice or unstable ground

Control measure knowledge

Animals can swim to varying degrees, but may tire quickly and may not swim in a safe direction.

It may be possible to rescue smaller animals with a reach option, using specialist equipment such



as nets or graspers. Emergency responders should exercise extreme caution when trying to get an animal, such as a dog, into a boat; suitable restraint and containment equipment should be used at all times.

By using inflated hoses, throwlines or other means, large animals, such as equines and bovines, can be driven or guided towards their herd, higher ground or another place of safety. This may need to be done if there are multiple animals in a flood situation, where it would not be feasible to rescue each animal. Equines and bovines will require a shallow incline to exit water, but may have to be extricated using manual manipulation or mechanical techniques.

If an animal has walked onto ice and fallen through it into water, it may be necessary to form a channel to use as a rescue path, using ice-breaking equipment. Carrying this out prior to attempting a rescue will help emergency responders trying to lead or herd the animal to a place of safety.

If carrying out an animal rescue on or near unstable ground, including mud flats, the provision of rescue paths for access and egress need to be carefully planned and implemented.

Before extricating the animal from water, ice or unstable ground, check that it is not entangled below the surface. Its limbs should be checked, to ensure they are not in an expected position. Failure to do these checks before moving or lifting the animal could result in further injury to it. If it has been entangled, the hazard knowledge and control measures for dealing with an [Entangled animal](#) will apply.

Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Consider providing appropriate specialist equipment for rescuing animals from water, ice or unstable ground

Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Consider using appropriate specialist equipment for rescuing an animal from water, ice or unstable ground
- Ensure that caution is exercised when using tools to extricate an animal submerged in water,



ice or unstable ground

- Check the animal for entanglement or unexpected limb positions prior to extrication