



National Operational Guidance



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

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Hazard - Insufficient resources: Water rescue

Hazard Knowledge

Personnel without the required specialist skills have limited equipment and training to perform water rescues. Attempting rescue may be hazardous without the right level of expertise and specialist equipment. Personnel may face difficult, morally challenging situations and may have to make decisions in extremely hazardous, emotionally charged and fast-moving environments. They may face an uncontrolled situation where hazards are not yet identified and information is incomplete.

What is reasonably practicable to achieve will depend on the circumstances and demands of the incident and the available resources balanced against the identified hazards and evaluated risks.



Control measure - Specialist resource: Water rescue and flooding

Control measure knowledge

The hazards associated with water-related incidents dictate that personnel working near, in or on water and in hazard control zones should be suitably trained, equipped and briefed to effectively carry out all reasonably foreseeable tasks following a suitable risk assessment.

The capabilities of personnel should be understood in the context of the approved rescue techniques trained for and adopted by the fire and rescue service. Teams should not operate in a way that they are not equipped or trained for.

To determine capability and distinguish roles and responsibilities on the incident ground it is important that, wherever possible, all teams and personnel from respective responding agencies are identifiable. The incident and attending personnel can be managed more effectively and efficiently if responders are easily identifiable using standard and agreed methods.

The following is a nationally accepted method of identifying resources at water incidents:

- Water safety and rescue (first responder): Yellow water rescue helmet
- Water safety and rescue (technician): Red water rescue helmet

- Rescue boat operator: Red water rescue helmet
- Team leader: White water rescue helmet

Arrangements should be established to rescue responders committed to the risk area if required. Resources requested should reflect any emergency arrangements established. Establishing a predetermined attendance for water rescue emergencies may be necessary to ensure a swift and appropriate response to incidents of this nature.

Fire and rescue services may not have sub-surface rescue capability and additional resources may be required to perform a sub-surface recovery. Some sub-surface search resources may be available and should be mobilised when required.

Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Establish a policy that determines acceptable actions during water rescue incidents
- Consider the need for specialist water rescue resources in line with their risk management plan
- Make arrangements for the request of specialist water rescue resources

Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Use appropriately trained responders at incidents involving water
- Use an appropriate system of identification for water safety, search and rescue teams
- Request the attendance of personnel with the required skill levels
- Use approved specialist volunteers, individuals or teams
- Consider requesting specialist underwater search and recovery dive teams



- Consider the use of specialist equipment to help locate underwater casualties