



National
Operational
Guidance

Control measure

Effective search management



NFCC
National Fire
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Control measure knowledge

Areas requiring search

An effectively managed and co-ordinated search will ensure that a systematic and methodical approach is applied to the search area.

A primary search may be brief, for example in the case of a single unlocated casualty, or protracted and complex if it is for a missing person.

Splitting search areas into manageable boundaries early in the incident will contribute towards effective search management. It will also assist in improved identification of the areas that require clearing by search activity.

Information sources, such as building plans, maps and geographic information systems (GIS), can help to co-ordinate searches. These visual aids can:

- Be used to illustrate areas that require searching
- Be annotated to indicate what areas have been searched
- Help to brief personnel
- Reveal hidden areas or access and egress points

A central search command point can be established to co-ordinate search elements, such as search information, communications and resources. This will normally be managed by the police, apart from building searches. Incident commanders should liaise with the police search adviser (PoISA) through joint briefings.

Personnel should landmark any recognisable features to provide orientation and support effective briefing.

Depending on the level of control required, incident location or complexity, the incident commander may establish a forward control point (FCP) to co-ordinate activity and information closer to the identified scene of operations.

Planning

Planning for the search and the required resources should begin en route, using maps, information from the fire control room and other emergency responders, and any available Site-Specific Risk

Information (SSRI). Planning should also consider what may be required to assess the incident, any hazards and the necessary controls to carry out operational activity safely.

When allocating tasks, incident commanders should brief personnel on the working environment, hazards, tasks and communication methods. Briefings may benefit from the use of visual aids, such as suitably annotated plans or maps.

If the missing person is not immediately located, the use of appropriate search phases should be considered; primary, secondary and tertiary. These phases may increase levels of concentration, planning and the amount of resources and equipment required throughout, to methodically cover areas that require searching.

Defining the search area

To carry out a co-ordinated search plan, the best way of defining and subdividing the search area should be considered. If searching in the open environment, physical barriers such as rivers, drains and fences can be used to define search 'boxes'.

Establish clearly defined parameters for the search area and subdivide into appropriate sizes, depending on:

- Structure
- Terrain
- Natural features
- Type, size and number of modes of transport to be searched
- Type, size and number of buildings to be searched
- Available resources
- Line of sight
- Access and egress, including any restrictions or limitations
- Visibility and weather conditions

Once designated and briefed, search teams should confirm their understanding of the search area and provide regular updates to the incident commander. The search plan should be constantly reviewed based on the elimination of areas that have been searched, the resources available and the environment that emergency responders are working in.

Areas that have been searched

To prevent duplication of effort and potential delays in covering unsearched areas, there should be effective search co-ordination as the incident progresses. Live information sharing and debriefing of teams, on their progress against objectives and the extent of the areas they have covered, should be carried out and the results recorded. This may be achieved using communications, such as radios, and centrally identifying areas, rooms or properties that have been cleared.

Any areas that have not yet been searched should be prioritised and identified to subsequent or additional search teams as part of their brief.

A search co-ordination function can be used to manage the information, by helping to identify the areas that have been searched. This may be assisted by:

- Gathering information and annotating it on a search plan
- Using an agreed system to visually indicate the areas that have been searched
- Co-ordinating information received from callers via the fire control room
- Gathering debrief information provided by and to personnel

It should be recognised that a missing person may be avoiding being found and may intentionally move into an area that has already been searched.

Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Provide personnel with the means to effectively co-ordinate, record and communicate search information

Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Co-ordinate the search plan based on who is being searched for, the search area, conditions and resources available
- Implement a co-ordinated search plan, define parameters and sub-divide the area where necessary
- Brief search teams on search plan, search area and casualty information
- Liaise with police search advisers (PoISA) and other emergency responders
- Consider establishing, or having a presence at, a central search command point



- Consider establishing a forward control point (FCP)
- Constantly review the search plan based on the progress being made
- Identify sources of information that may assist with search planning or defining the search area
- Debrief teams following search activity and record outcomes to be shared with subsequent or additional search teams