



National
Operational
Guidance

Section

Principles of learning from incidents



NFCC
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Principles of learning from incidents

Ensuring that lessons are learned from previous incidents, so that occurrences can be prevented in the future, is central to the health, safety and welfare of people working for the UK fire and rescue service.

The service can continue to improve its operational performance and improve safety if learning from incidents is continual, and the lessons are shared effectively and widely. This is particularly important in an environment where a decline in the number of operational incidents could lead to a decline in operational experience.

Learning from incidents goes beyond simply identifying what went well or what might have gone wrong. While this information is useful in determining how things should be done, learning has truly been achieved only when some form of change is implemented that ensures actions will be different in the future.

Learning should also consider the organisational vulnerabilities that are identified during monitoring, audit and review processes. Effective learning from incidents also gives the opportunity to reflect on and understand the information, and take action to reduce risk. It involves the organisation embedding changes so that, even if there are staffing changes, measures to prevent reoccurrence stay in place.

Fire and rescue services can use this good practice guide as a benchmark against which to measure their existing systems and arrangements.

More information on operational learning is available in the [Corporate guidance for operational activity](#)



The importance of learning

Fire and rescue service operations can be hazardous. If hazards are managed and controlled, the risks to personnel, public and the environment can be minimised. It is not possible to eliminate all risk, but it must be reduced to as low a level as is reasonably practicable. How 'practicable' is defined is subjective and should be based on a risk-benefit analysis for each situation.

To help reduce risk, knowledge learned from incidents should be shared with all fire and rescue

services and the wider sector, where appropriate. A continual and shared learning process will help fire and rescue services to resolve incidents, cope with future changes in the operational environment, develop, innovate and improve the safety of all personnel and, therefore, provide the best service to the public.

The National Operational Guidance for [Corporate guidance for operational activity](#) highlights the issues that chief fire officers or chief executives should consider when planning their health and safety duties and responsibilities.

An active learning culture will generate the raw material for learning from incidents. Taking action that leads to effective change encourages additional reporting. However, if action is not taken and change is ineffective, and in the worst case individuals are blamed, reporting is likely to decline and formal learning from incidents will be challenging.

The National Fire Chiefs Council [Leadership Framework](#) supports the development of learning cultures within fire and rescue services and sets out the behaviours expected from leaders in such environments.

The delivery of National Operational Learning activity is supported the standard. Governance and corporate ownership

Learning should be an integral component of management structures and processes. For an organisation to become a learning organisation, senior leadership teams should encourage and participate in learning, seek to understand the process in which true learning is achieved and actively promote it.

Chief fire officers should nominate an Operational Learning Strategic Lead.



The Operational Learning Strategic Lead

The Operational Learning Strategic Lead should have appropriate seniority and influence to lead an Evaluation Board and nominate a Single Point of Contact (SPoC).

The roles and responsibilities of the Operational Learning Strategic Lead are detailed in Appendix A.



The Single Point of Contact

The Single Point of Contact (SPoC) should have access to the appropriate seniority and influence to deliver the learning activities identified in this guide and manage the subsequent learning outcomes that arises from them, as well as outcomes received from and submitted to the wider sector.

The roles and responsibilities of the SPoC are detailed in Appendix A.



Defining operational learning

Operational learning is the responsibility of the Operational Learning Strategic Lead and the SPoC, who should use the learning activities identified in this guide to capture, categorise, evaluate, allocate and share outcomes arising before, during and after any incident in local, regional and national processes.