



National Operational Guidance

Section Introduction



NFCC
Fire Central
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Introduction

Incidents involving vessels in the marine and inland waterway environment are not commonplace for fire and rescue personnel; they can be complex to deal with, ranging from incidents involving small vessels to large sea-going vessels, and can include military vessels.

The scope of this guidance refers to fires on board vessels within the statutory responsibility of the fire and rescue service. If a casualty vessel is situated outside of the statutory responsibility (i.e. off-shore, mid-stream, mid-lake, outside 'the area' defined under the Act) it must be recognised it may eventually come alongside and become a statutory duty of the relevant fire authority.

A fire on a vessel is a hazard because of the way vessels are constructed, with difficult access and egress and the possibility of fire spreading beyond the compartment involved through conduction via metal bulkheads and air handling machinery.

To fight any vessel fire effectively, firefighters must be familiar with the basic details of:

- Vessel construction, design and terminology
- On-board fire protection and firefighting media
- General issues such as liaison with other authorities, emergency plans, responsibility for control of operations and safety precautions
- Vessel stability

Within this context, firefighters must have regard to the features of different vessels, and their present condition (e.g. loaded or unloaded) and they may need to adjust their operations accordingly.

This guidance assumes that the affected vessel can be brought alongside for the purposes of firefighting. Fire and rescue services should consider foreseeable risks within their area when planning to respond to incidents involving fires on board vessels.

For the purpose of this guidance a ship is considered to be any vessel over 30 metres in length or over 300 gross tonnes.

Fires on board smaller vessels and craft may also pose further difficulties, arising from, but not exhaustive to:

- Location
- Access
- Water supplies

- Construction
- Fire spread to neighbouring vessels/craft

Because of the specific nature of firefighting on board vessels, this guidance addresses specific hazards, control measures and firefighting techniques that will assist fire and rescue service personnel dealing with these types of fires.

For information regarding working in, on or near water see National Operational Guidance: [Water rescue and flooding](#).

The guidance should be read in conjunction with National Operational Guidance: [Fires and firefighting](#), [Transport](#) and other associated parts of the framework.



Legislation

Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (The Act) [England and Wales]

Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 (The Scotland Act) [Scotland]

Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 (The NI Order) [Northern Ireland]

Local Government Act 1972

Merchant Shipping Act 1995



Risk management plan

Each fire and rescue authority must develop their strategic direction through their risk management plan. To determine the extent of their firefighting capability, strategic managers will consider their statutory duties and the foreseeable risk within their area.

Work to identify risk and prepare operational plans should consider all stakeholders, including local emergency planning groups and the fire and rescue service risk management plan.



Responsibility of fire and rescue services

Fire and rescue services are responsible, under legislation and regulations, for developing policies and procedures and to provide information, instruction, training and supervision to their personnel about foreseeable hazards and the control measures used to reduce the risks arising from those hazards.

This guidance sets out to provide fire and rescue services with sufficient knowledge about the potential hazards their personnel could encounter when attending incidents. Fire and rescue services should ensure their policies, procedures and training cover all of the hazards and control measures contained within this guidance.