



National Operational Guidance



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

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Contents

Qualities of effective communication 3



Qualities of effective communication

Effective communication is when information has been exchanged and is understood in the way it was intended. Quality, relevance and clarity of interpersonal and radio communication is essential, for example when relaying information on the incident ground and to fire control rooms. Refer to National Operational Guidance: [Operations](#).

Qualities of effective communication include:

- **Style:** A commander should judge which style to adopt in order to optimise the information exchange necessary for a given situation. For example, in pressurised situations an assertive style will convey urgency.
- **Credibility:** Information is received and confirmed as being from a reliable and credible source before being acted on. For example, using social media to emphasise the advice and information that if shared across social media platforms would benefit community response and resilience.
- **Clarity:** Avoids ambiguity by using commonly understood terms. This is especially important when working with other agencies or members of the public as some terminology may have different meanings. Following a structure will also help to communicate a clearly.
- **Relevance:** Information is relevant, appropriate, and concise and keeps to the point. This is essential during high pressure situations. Incorrect information can overload the receiver and the meaning can be lost; information should only be exchanged with relevant individuals. For example, providing relevant and informative communications to the public to ensure their compliance with a decontamination process.
- **Timeliness:** Communications should be made at an appropriate point in time. To avoid distractions from critical tasks consider how urgent the information is and the current task demands of the receiver.
- **Understandable:** Understanding is confirmed to prevent misunderstanding and differences in shared situation awareness.
- **Questioning of assumptions:** Assumptions are questioned as senders and receivers of information may have assumptions about the information. Commanders should question and clear up assumptions to ensure what they say is what the other person hears and understands.
- **Assertiveness:** There is a clear benefit to being assertive to clarify meaning and test assumptions. Confidence and status can affect the ability to be assertive under pressure. It is important for a commander to be able to distinguish between being passive, assertive and aggressive. If a commander is passive, they may fail to represent their views effectively so that others take note of them. If a commander is aggressive, they may ignore the views of



others, be defensive and act in a superior manner. However, an assertive commander will respect the views of others and remain objective. Features of assertiveness are asking questions to acquire information, and advocating a particular point of view.

- **Actively listen:** The environment at an incident can make it more difficult to communicate. Noise, adverse weather conditions and heightened levels of activity can be distracting and make listening difficult. It is important to concentrate on content rather than delivery, as preconceptions about the status of the person who is communicating may also affect listening. Commanders should not interrupt or complete the sentences of the other person. They should be supportive and patient with them. To listen actively, a commander should adopt positive body language, make eye contact, ask questions and paraphrase.
- **Matched words and behaviour:** People are constantly communicating, even when not using words. When verbal and non-verbal messages match, it helps people to make sense of the message. For example, a calm approach reinforces a reassuring message.