



National
Operational
Guidance

Section

Escape routes



NFCC
Fire Central
Programme Office

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Contents

Escape routes 3



Escape routes

Escape routes are pre-planned routes to be used in an emergency situation, to take personnel away from danger to a safety zone.

Escape routes should be identified and communicated to all personnel before their deployment at a wildfire incident. An emergency evacuation procedure and an evacuation signal, which indicates that personnel should leave their area of work and use an escape route, should also be identified and communicated to all personnel before their deployment at the incident.

Escape routes should be:

- Pre-planned, to avoid confusion and panic
- Communicated to all personnel during initial briefings and through further communication throughout the incident
- Monitored throughout the incident and changed as required, with all personnel being informed of any changes as soon as possible

Escape routes should also be:

- Established at the earliest opportunity
- Kept as simple as possible - using the closest and clearest route
- Upwind of the fire
- Downslope of the fire
- Avoiding re-entrants and saddles

Consider marking, demarcating or illuminating escape routes where possible; this should help to ensure all personnel are made aware of them.

When parking vehicles and equipment, personnel should ensure that they do not block escape routes. It is good practice to identify and communicate an alternative route to provide a contingency should a primary escape route be compromised. It is also good practice for personnel to be deployed to review potential escape routes, to assess their suitability and to estimate the time taken to travel along the escape route to a safety zone.

Although an escape route may seem suitable during the initial stages of an incident, conditions and circumstances may change. The importance of continually monitoring the suitability of escape routes throughout a wildfire incident cannot be understated. The following are some examples of changes in conditions that may slow or impede progress along an escape route:



- Fire behaviour and firespread
- Condition of route or terrain
- Weather conditions
- Reduction in visibility (for example, due to smoke or darkness)
- Fatigue among personnel, which may increase the time taken to travel along an escape route