



National Operational Guidance

Section Introduction



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

Developed and maintained by the NFCC



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Introduction

This guidance has been developed to assist fire and rescue services in identifying hazards and implementing control measures for operational incidents that involve the following environments.

These are some of the most complex situations that personnel work in and may involve a combination of these contexts, which can be in the natural or built environment.

This section of guidance relates to environments personnel can operate in. For further guidance for search and rescue of casualties refer to [Search ,rescue and Casualty care](#).

Height

Falls from height can result in fatalities and major injuries. Usual causes are falls from ladders or through fragile roofs. Personnel could be exposed to falls in operational or non-operational environments.

The purpose of the work at height regulations is to prevent death and injury caused by a fall from height. It places duties on employers, including the fire and rescue service, to ensure that all work at height is risk-assessed, properly planned, appropriately supervised and carried out in a manner that is, so far as is reasonably and practicably safe.

Confined spaces

Fatalities and serious injuries occur every year to people while they are working in a confined space, and to people trying to carry out rescues without appropriate training and equipment.

Legislation clearly defines a confined space; operating in these environments requires core and specialist skills, including techniques for working at height. Other environments that do not satisfy the definition of a confined space may be just as challenging, owing to varying degrees of difficulty in access and egress. Dealing with these environments will require similar skill sets and equipment as those for confined spaces.

The guidance is based on the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) approved code of practice. It describes the preferred or recommended control measures that should be used, in order that fire and rescue services comply with the confined spaces regulations and the duties imposed by the [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act](#).

Above ground and below ground structures

For this guidance, above ground structures generally exclude buildings, unless the condition of the building requires the use of work at height equipment. For example, if stairways or lifts have been compromised, requiring the use of aerial appliances, rope rescue or similar to resolve the incident. Gaining access to structures such as wind turbines and scaffolding will nearly always require specific work at height equipment.

Incidents involving below ground structures may also require specialised techniques and equipment, including those needed for work at height and in confined spaces.

Any of the above may involve a collapsed or unstable structure and could include a combination of hazards.

Buildings under construction

Large-scale incidents involving any structure, during construction or in use, are uncommon, which makes it difficult for fire and rescue services to gain experience and test procedures. However, the fundamental principles of operational response should remain the same. All personnel who liaise with contractors or infrastructure managers should consider training in the skills and techniques required.

Although certain hazards will be common to all incidents, the environment in which they occur will vary. This is particularly the case during construction, where access and intervention will require specific strategies and procedures.

Unstable or collapsed structures

Fire and rescue services may be called to attend incidents involving unstable or collapsed structures. The National Resilience urban search and rescue (USAR) capability has designated tactical advisers (TacAds) who may be able to provide appropriate advice and resource for these types of incidents.

The issue for attending fire and rescue service personnel is that unstable or collapsed structures are unpredictable. They are also resource intensive and arduous to work in.



Intraoperability and interoperability

When reference is made to working with other agencies, refer to the [JESIP Joint Doctrine](#) for further information.

To make an effective response, each fire and rescue service needs a consistent approach that forms the basis for common operational practices and supports intraoperability with other fire and rescue services, and interoperability with other emergency responders, infrastructure managers and users.

Fire and rescue service boundaries may result in more than one service attending an incident; a joint approach is therefore essential. Understanding the typical hazards faced by incident commanders in these environments and adhering to the relevant control measures will ultimately lead to improved public and firefighter safety.

At an incident, the highest priority for fire and rescue services will always be the safety of the public and emergency responders. Effective and informed action can reduce hazards and help ensure the safety of the public and responders.

During an incident at a fully functioning structure, such as a road or rail tunnel, fire and rescue services may have the additional pressure of maintaining business continuity, especially where the incident has a significant impact and wide disruption is likely. Business continuity should be considered and discussed with other emergency responders, taking in to account the impact the incident has on the local community and economy.

At any time during or after an operational incident there may be a need to carry out some form of investigation. Other organisations may have to carry out their own investigations. For further information refer to Operations: [Compromised investigations: Poor scene preservation](#).



Risk management plan

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

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.