



National  
Operational  
Guidance

## Control measure

**Situational awareness: Approaching  
an unstable or collapsed structure**



**NFCC**  
National Fire  
Chiefs Council

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### Control measure knowledge

Gathering information to inform situational awareness should help to identify the safest approaches to an unstable or collapsed structure. This should include consideration about the potential for secondary collapse, structural stability and the need for physical protection of emergency responders and casualties.

#### Secondary collapse

Emergency responders should be briefed about a safe approach to the hazard area, to avoid underground voids and causing secondary collapse. Approach routes and cordons should be continuously monitored, and any updates communicated to all emergency responders. Vehicle movements should be isolated or controlled in areas where this could impact on structural stability.

Avoidance routes should be established that keep emergency responders and casualties away from high-risk areas.

#### Physical protection

If possible, personnel should try to use or create hard protection barriers. These may exist at the scene, with an example being the use of elements that are structurally sound to define an access route to an unstable area of the structure.

It may be possible to use equipment and shoring techniques to create hard protection, or to build temporary physical barriers that allow emergency responders and casualties to be isolated from the hazard of secondary collapse.

### Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Consider having access to materials that can be used to provide hard protection for emergency responders and casualties

## Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Establish and monitor safe approaches to and cordons for the hazard area, avoiding underground voids at unstable or collapsed structure incidents
- Establish and monitor avoidance routes that keep emergency responders and casualties away from high-risk areas
- Ensure emergency responders are aware of the safe approaches and the avoidance routes, including any changes to them, at unstable or collapsed structure incidents
- Consider isolating or controlling vehicle movements in areas where this could impact on structural stability
- Consider using or creating hard protection to isolate emergency responders and casualties from the hazard of structural collapse