



National
Operational
Guidance

Control measure

**Safety officers: Water rescue and
flooding**



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

Developed and maintained by the NFCC



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Control measure knowledge

Safety officers should be appointed and positioned as soon as practicable. The nature of the incident and the environment will dictate the required safety officers at water incidents. The following safety officers are suitable for most water incidents.

Upstream spotters

Upstream spotters should be appointed to identify hazardous debris and communicate it to rescuers at the earliest opportunity. Upstream spotters should also communicate any changes in conditions or sudden releases of water.

Swimmers, divers and watercourse users in boats and other watercraft may be unaware of operational activity. They may affect rescue activities or endanger rescuers, casualties and themselves. Moving craft can also cause water movement, making rescue more difficult.

Spotters should be positioned a suitable distance upstream to inform responders of hazards and to stop oncoming watercourse users. When positioning spotters, consider the speed of flow and physical restrictions of the site to allow the best opportunity for early identification and communication of hazards.

Downstream safety

Downstream safety officers are positioned to retrieve rescuers and provide assistance to casualties.

Incident commanders will need to quickly assess the scene to decide if downstream safety teams will be required depending on the urgency of the rescue and the available resources.

Personnel should be positioned at a suitable point downstream to perform rescues. When using safety systems such as downstream safety lines, consider the time required to establish systems. It may be necessary to adopt alternative downstream safety until systems have been established.

The environment will dictate what form of downstream safety is appropriate. It may require the deployment of watercraft, a fixed downstream safety line or teams positioned on the bank side to perform in water or bank-based rescues.

Downstream safety officers should be positioned with safe entry and egress points in mind. Entry

and egress may not necessarily be the same point; water and bank conditions may make a point further downstream more suitable for egress.

Downstream safety teams should be comprised of a suitable number of personnel and equipment to rescue all people committed to the water, including personnel in watercraft and casualties.

Where downstream safety officers are not appropriate, another means of recovering casualties or responders should be considered. Safety systems should be appropriate for the environment; for example, when working near large static bodies of water, watercraft may be used to recover responders who accidentally enter the water.

Incident commanders will need to prioritise the effective use of personnel and equipment, particularly when waiting for additional resources to arrive. It may be necessary to implement either downstream safety teams or upstream spotters according to the outcomes of their dynamic risk assessment.

Safety officers for management of tethers or lines

When watercraft or rescuers are tethered, trained personnel should manage any lines or tethers in use. They should be positioned at a point of relative safety considering the requirements of the rescue.

Appointed safety officers should perform checks of equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE), confirm communication signals, hazards, control measures and any expected tasks. Safety officers should ensure that the clean line principle is maintained throughout the rescue.

Any member of personnel managing a line should have a clear line of sight to the rescuer or watercraft at all times and maintain verbal or visual communication with responders.

Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Provide equipment suitable for establishing safety systems at water incidents

Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Consider deploying appropriate safety officers at incidents involving water and unstable surfaces



- Consider using safety systems such as downstream safety lines
- Consider implementing appropriate method of controlling boat traffic and water users