



National
Operational
Guidance

Control measure

Cordon controls



NFCC
National Fire
Chiefs Council

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Control measure knowledge

Fire and rescue services have the power to restrict the access of people to premises or a place in an emergency. Commanders must consider the safety of personnel, members of other agencies and the public. Cordons are an effective way of controlling resources and maintaining safety.

Where practical, the police will establish and maintain cordons at appropriate distances to allow the emergency services and other responding agencies to save life, protect the public and property, and care for casualties.

In some areas the police will have agreements enabling the fire and rescue services to manage gateways into the inner cordon, establish who should be granted access and keep a record of people entering and exiting.

Personnel from other agencies may need to work within cordons that are under the safety management of the fire and rescue service. Briefing arrangements for responders from other agencies should be jointly established, preferably in advance of an incident.

Pre-planning and exercising with partner agencies should aim to establish the roles and responsibilities for implementing and maintaining cordon control for multi-agency incidents.

Further information on cordons can be found in the Cabinet Office publication, [Emergency Response and Recovery](#).

After the initial cordon has been established to secure the scene the incident is usually divided into two distinct areas:

- Inner cordon
- Outer cordon

Inner cordon

The inner cordon denotes the hazard area and controls access to the immediate scene of operations. This provides an increased measure of protection for personnel working in that area. Incident commanders should restrict access to the lowest numbers needed for safe and effective operational activity. At small incidents this could be an existing physical barrier or a safety officer briefed to restrict access.

At incidents where a higher degree of control is required, those entering the inner cordon should report to a designated scene access control point and register their arrival. This ensures that they can be safely accounted for should there be any escalation of the incident, and affords an opportunity for briefing about the hazards, control measures, emergency arrangements and other issues. Nobody should be permitted to enter the inner cordon without an appropriate level of personal protective equipment (PPE). It is necessary to ensure that those leaving the inner cordon register their departure.

Incident commanders must account for people's safety and location. If an incident is using sectors they can delegate this responsibility to the sector commander, who should be aware of the people and personnel who are active in their sector. An inner cordon gateway control system should be established and may include:

- Means of recording all people entering and exiting the inner cordon area
- Provision of safety briefing and agreed evacuation signals
- Checklists for personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Personnel to escort non-fire and rescue responders
- Details of working locations
- Tasks of other agencies

The fire and rescue service will be responsible for safety management within the inner cordon until responsibility for the scene is transferred to another body. Overall responsibility for the health and safety of personnel working within the inner cordon remains with individual agencies. Such agencies should ensure that personnel arrive at the scene with appropriate PPE and are adequately trained and briefed for the work they are to undertake within the cordon.

Information about the control of the inner cordon is detailed in the Cabinet Office publication, [Emergency Response and Recovery](#).



Figure: Where practical the inner cordon should be identified with the use of red and white barrier tape

Outer cordon

An outer cordon may be established around the vicinity of the incident to control access to a wide area. This will allow the emergency services and other agencies to work unhindered and in privacy. Access through the outer cordon for essential non-emergency service personnel should be by way of an access control point.

This cordon limits access to an area being used by the emergency services and other relevant agencies. The police will usually control outer cordons, and may also establish traffic cordons to prevent unauthorised vehicular access. The police will identify safe routes in and out of the cordon for emergency vehicles and other agencies. Rendezvous points and marshalling areas will usually be located within the outer cordon



Hot, warm and cold zones

At certain incident types, there may be a need to divide cordons into hot, warm and cold zones. This will depend on the level of risk faced by emergency responders and the range of corresponding control measures identified and implemented. The use of these zones should be agreed by all emergency responders. As example, for a CBRN(e) incident, JESIP provides the following definitions:

- Hot zone – The area where the initial release occurs or disperses to. It will be the area which may pose an immediate threat to the health and safety of all those located within it and is the area of greatest risk.
- Warm zone – An area uncontaminated by the initial release of a substance, which becomes contaminated by the movement of people or vehicles. The warm zone will be extended to include the area of decontamination activity. These areas cannot be guaranteed as free from contamination.
- Cold zone – The uncontaminated area between the inner cordon and the outer cordon where it has been assessed that there is no immediate threat to life.

Exclusion zone

Some hazards may present such a significant danger to the safety of personnel, other agencies and the public that no control measures will adequately reduce the risk. Incident commanders should consider establishing an exclusion zone within the inner cordon to which precludes access for all personnel and responders from other agencies.



Figure: Where practical exclusion zones should be identified with the use of black and yellow

barrier tape

Air exclusion zones

It is important that fire and rescue services notify air traffic control as soon as possible if there is a possibility that an incident may represent a hazard to aircraft in the area. Air traffic control can then issue warnings and instructions to aircraft in the vicinity of the fire. If required, the police can request that air traffic control create an air exclusion zone around a fire, to prevent unauthorised aircraft or drones (classified as a type of unmanned aircraft system by the Civil Aviation Authority) from flying over, or near, the incident.

Strategic actions

Fire and rescue services should:

- Provide appropriate equipment and other resources to safely implement cordon control
- Establish the roles and responsibilities for implementing and maintaining cordon control with partner agencies for multi-agency incidents
- Jointly establish the briefing arrangements for when other agencies are working within inner cordons under the safety management of the fire and rescue service
- Consider pre-planning and exercising with partner agencies for cordon control arrangements

Tactical actions

Incident commanders should:

- Ensure that appropriate inner and outer cordons are established and communicated following an assessment of risk to all people present
- Control access to the inner cordon using methods proportionate to the type, size and complexity of the incident
- Establish a scene access control point to log all people operating within the inner cordon when appropriate



- Implement exclusion zones if intolerable risks to safety are identified
- Request police assistance to establish a traffic cordon or air exclusion zone if necessary