

Managing Fatigue

The ACT Rural Fire Service Chief Officer has issued this standard operating procedure (SOP) under Section 38(1) of the *Emergencies Act 2004* – A Chief Officer may determine standards and protocols.

Purpose

This SOP is a risk control for effective fatigue management practices during firefighting operations.

It provides rules for Incident Controllers (IC) and Officers in Charge (OIC) to manage their own fatigue as well as the fatigue of the personnel they are leading. It provides guidance for rostering, personnel logistics and work activity decisions that relate to fatigue management.

Scope

Under the *WHS Act 2011*, all persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) are responsible for the safety of their workers, including volunteers.

This SOP is applicable to all personnel from the ACT Rural Fire Service brigades, as defined in the *Emergencies Act 2004*, contractors, and interstate personnel engaging in firefighting operations within the ACT.

Background

Fatigue, especially cumulative fatigue can compromise the individual and brigade's ability to safely and effectively respond to an emergency incident. It is important to have control measure in place to prevent or minimise fatigue for bushfire fighters and support personnel.

Fatigue management can be a major issue to overcome when rostering or allocating resources to work on a fire. It is imperative that Incident Controllers ensure that shift lengths do not cause unacceptable fatigue of personnel. Fatigue management is also a personal responsibility under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and can be impacted by personal behaviours.

Responsibilities

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| All personnel | Take personal responsibility to maintain adequate hydration and nutrition during shifts. Maximise rest opportunities and required breaks between shifts. Report any fatigue concerns – for themselves or for colleagues – to their supervisor. Drivers must meet the requirements of the HVNL. |
| Supervisors | Manage any reported fatigue issues with personnel. |

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| | Ensure that all personnel in their command have opportunities for breaks to enable adequate rest, hydration and nutrition during their shift. |
| Incident Controllers/Officers in Charge (IC/OIC) | <p>Plan rosters to ensure all personnel have reasonable opportunities for rest between shifts.</p> <p>Ensure drivers do not exceed limits set by the Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL).</p> <p>Discuss any exceptions to agreed shift patterns with the personnel affected and their direct supervisor.</p> <p>Report all shifts worked, including exceptions, to the RFS Duty Officer (DO).</p> <p>Plan logistics, including transport and driving to avoid use of fatigued drivers.</p> |

Applicability of this SOP

Personnel will comply with this SOP when deployed at any incident or community engagement activity in the ACT or interstate.

Operational procedure

Work activity and breaks

Work should be rostered to meet these schedules unless exceptional circumstances prevent this.

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| Maximum time on duty (including travel time and briefings) * | 14 hours * |
| Break between shifts | 10 hours |
| Maximum number of consecutive day shifts | 5 |
| Maximum number of consecutive night shifts | 3 |
| Minimum rest break between shift rotations | 24 hours |

* During the initial hours of an incident, this time may be extended to 24 hours, depending on the availability of relief crews.

Rest, recovery and sleep

Personnel will have a minimum of 10 hours free from duty within every 24 consecutive hour period, This allows for the opportunity for 8 hours of prone rest as well as time for general recovery, nutrition and personal hygiene.

Personnel are encouraged to prioritise the quantity and quality of their sleep throughout an extended operation. On deployment, personnel are encouraged to take ear plugs and eye masks to maximise their sleep quality when in shared or noisy environments.

If called to a fireground after completing a full or partial day's work in a non-fire fighting occupation, personnel should monitor fatigue and review this when flagging their availability.

Driving

Where possible driving should be managed following extended shifts as follows:

- No driving should be undertaken after 16 hours continuous awake time.
- Driving **must not** be undertaken after 24 hours continuous duty.

Under the law, heavy vehicle drivers are required to fill in a diary when working 100km away from home station. Heavy vehicle drivers are exempt from this requirement under the *National Heavy Vehicle Volunteer Emergency Services Work Diary and Record Keeping Exemption Notice 2023 (No.1)* while performing an emergency management activity (an activity performed in preparation for, in response to, or in recovery from, an emergency). However, fatigue related provisions under the HVNL must still be complied with.

Irrespective of the exemption, drivers of RFS heavy vehicles (GVM 4.5T or above) must complete a work diary/log book, and must comply with the fatigue management standards specified in the HVNL.

Where driver awake time will exceed 16 hours, RFS or the IC must organise a relief driver or separate transport for the crew from the fire ground to their accommodation.

Hydration and nutrition

Hydration is a common source of fatigue for emergency workers and is best managed by prevention. Personnel should attend shifts fully hydrated and replenish any fluids lost through sweating.

To avoid fatigue, personnel should eat a healthy well-balanced diet throughout the day, including:

- plenty of vegetables, legumes and fruit
- cereals (bread, rice, pasta and noodles) preferably wholegrain
- lean meat, fish, poultry or alternatives.

Take care to moderate total intake of fat, sugar and salt.

Drugs, alcohol and caffeine

Alcohol and drug use (including illicit drugs, prescription and over-the-counter medicines) have the potential to adversely affect sleep patterns or cause fatigue at times that are not desirable or safe. Refer to the Service Standard 1.1.4 Alcohol and Drug Consumption and RFS Activities.


Caffeine can also cause irritability, headaches, poor concentration, tremors and adverse gastrointestinal side-effect. Caffeine should be consumed in moderation and avoided at least four hours before sleep is intended.

Document information

Version history

| Author | Version | Version Approval Date | Summary of Changes |
|-----------------|---------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Andrew Stark | 1.0 | 15/02/2011 | Version 1.0 |
| Rohan Scott | 2.0 | 12/03/2020 | Reviewed and updated |
| Stephen Huntley | 3.0 | 01/03/2023 | Reviewed and updated |

Approved by

| Name | Title/Role | Signature | Date |
|-------------|------------|--|------------|
| Rohan Scott | CO ACT RFS |  | 08/02/2024 |

Document Owner

| Position | Section |
|--------------|------------|
| RFS Director | Operations |

Next review due: 01/02/2027

Related documents

| Document name |
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| AFAC Guideline: Managing Fatigue in Emergency Response |
| 1.1.4 Alcohol and Drug Consumption and RFS Activities Service Standard |
| National Resource Sharing Centre (NRSC) Fatigue Management Plan |
| Work Health and Safety Act 2011 |
| Heavy Vehicle National Law Act 2012 |
| Heavy Vehicle (Fatigue Management) National Regulation |
| Effective Fatigue Management, National Transport Commission May 2019 |
| National Heavy Vehicle Volunteer Emergency Services Work Diary and Record Keeping Exemption Notice 2023 (No.1) |

Signed documents will be scanned and filed in TRIM.