

## Command and Control of Incidents

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

### Purpose

This procedure describes how to establish and manage the staging area and forward command point for an incident.

### Scope

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is applicable to personnel from the ACT Rural Fire Service (ACT RFS) brigades, as defined in the *Emergencies Act 2004*, their subcontractors and crew deployed from other jurisdictions.

### Background

A **staging area** is established for any incident where there may be a significant number of units attending, access is difficult, safety considerations, complexity of incident or where there is to be a changeover of crews. It is a designated area for personnel, vehicles and equipment to prepare for their assignment at an incident. Off-going crews also muster at the staging area before leaving.

A **forward control point** (FCP) is generally a fixed location that is identifiable and accessible from which a Divisional Commander/Group Officer operates and provides operational resource command, incident information collection, situational awareness, incident SITREPS and updated weather.

A FCP may be established:

- if a fire is of a size or complexity that it requires a fixed location for command to be undertaken
- if a number of firefighting appliances or personnel attending an incident would be better managed by the establishment of an FCP
- at the request of the Incident Controller.

### Responsibilities

Members	
Incident Controllers/IMT	Establish and close Forward Command Point. Establish and close Forward Communications Unit.
Operations Officer/IMT	Conduct risk assessment before establishing staging area. Establish and close staging area.
Staging Area Manager	Manage staging area, keeping records

# Command and control operational procedures

## Establishing a staging area

The Operations Officer, in consultation with the Incident Management Team (IMT), will determine where and when a staging area is to be activated and when it is to be deactivated. The decision to activate the staging area must be made early so that there is time for it to be ready to support operations as units arrive at the incident. If no IMT is established the ACT RFS DO and on scene IC will activate and determine location of a staging area.

The staging area may also be used as a Forward Command Point or Forward Communications Unit (FCU) where it might be used as, for example, a communications relay, or a control point for the Incident Management Team. The FCU is to be located in an area from which it can be quickly deployed.

Staging areas should contain separate areas for the following if required:

- incoming crews
- departing crews
- a meeting point for the media and VIPs
- hygiene
- catering
- resources
- logistics
- aviation
- fuel.

## Functions of a staging area

The functions undertaken at a staging area include:

- logging the names and call signs of all attending crews using T-Cards and other forms of electronic recording if being used.
- logging the types and call signs of attending vehicles and the brigades that they belong to
- logging the names of crews and vehicles departing the incident
- maintaining information on:
  - access and road or track locations
  - location of sectors
  - general fire conditions
- briefing incoming crews
- maintaining communications contact with units en-route from the staging area to their assignment.

## Additional requirements

There are logistical and welfare issues that also need to be considered by both the Logistics Officer and the Staging Area Manager when setting up a staging area. These include:

- identifying an area that is separate but close to the staging area for catering, ablutions and other welfare facilities
- arranging for the servicing of these facilities outside peak activity times
- using the staging area as the bases for mid-shift change-overs of support functions such as ground support, catering, supplies
- identifying an area for equipment storage – a secure location protected from weather, to comfortably hold a range of stores, spare parts and other equipment as required.
- Identifying a separate area for fuel storage – this must be in a separate area where any risks and dangers associated with the storage of bulk fuels are minimised. All WHS requirements are to be adhered to.

## Staging area location

Because of terrain features, the choice of a reasonable staging area may be restricted. When selecting the location for a staging area, consider:

<b>Accessibility</b>	The staging area needs to be easily accessible for the responding units and for the IMT, if they choose to operate from this point.
<b>Safety</b>	Choose an area that is relatively close to and up wind of the incident; near to the heel of the fire is often a suitable site. The likelihood of it being at risk from the incident should be minimised. The area should be able to be easily relocated on short notice if it comes under threat from the fire.
<b>Size</b>	This will depend on the number of units expected to use it, including both incoming and departing crews. The staging area may need to expand to accommodate additional units if the fire escalates.
<b>Communications</b>	The location must be able to support the communications arrangements as specified in the Communications Plan for the incident.

## Managing a staging area

When a staging area is established, a Staging Area Manager will be designated. The Staging Area Manager is responsible to the Operations Officer assigned to the incident and has the authority and responsibility for the proper functioning of the staging area functions.

The Staging Area Manager will usually be an officer from either the ACT Rural Fire Service or the ACT State Emergency Service, though an experienced member from any Service can be appointed to this role.

The Staging Area Manager must wear a blue tabard marked “Staging Area Manager” at all times. For large incidents the Staging Area Manager will require supporting staff such as T-Card Officer, Records Officer, marshallers, and gatekeepers.

## Communications

Units despatched to a staging area from their brigade must report to the Staging Area Manager for tasking. The Staging Area Manager, on advice from the IMT (Operations Officer) will assign the unit and advise:

- what channel the unit will be operating on
- who to report to
- where they will operate.

All units departing the staging area for the incident must be on their assigned incident channel.

For other communications requirements, see SOP 2.2.12 Communications.

## Catering

If possible, catering should be a separate area in the staging area and not in a location where deploying and returning crews can be delayed or cause confusion with crew movements.

## Keeping records

The Staging Area Manager must ensure that a log is maintained that records:

- the time of arrival and departure of all units
- the instructions given (communications channel, who they are to report to)
- their intended destination on departure
- any other information required by the IMT.

A copy of the log must be forwarded to the Director, Operations within 24 hours of the staging area being closed down.

## Establishment of a forward command point

The Incident Controller or Operations Officer, will organise the establishment of an FCP. They will advise the IMT or ACT RFS DO, if no established IMT, of any specific resources required to establish the FCP and will obtain these resources and arrange for their delivery to the designated area.

## Staffing an FCP

Staffing levels and requirements are at the discretion of the Incident Controller or Operations Officer. Normally this comprises a Divisional Commander/Group Officer, Radio Operator and scribe.

## Location of FCP

The Incident Controller or Operations Officer determines the most appropriate location for the FCP.

The FCP location requires:

- access to radio and telephone communications with the fireground and IMT
- proximity to the incident to allow the Divisional Commander/Group Officer to carry out the role without undue travelling
- easily locatable by incoming crews
- ability to be upgraded and downscaled along with the incident.

## FCP call signs

Each FCP will be given a unique call sign which must be used for all communications between the FCP, the IMT and units at the incident scene. For example, an FCP established at Mulligan's Flat for a Divisional Commander to work from would be "FireCom this is Mulligan's DivCom" or "Mulligan's DivCom this is Sector Golf".

## Additional agency involvement


Operations outside the ACT will follow the interstate organisation's existing operating procedures

## Document information

### Version history

Author	Version	Version Approval Date	Summary of Changes
Andrew Stark	1.0	15/12/2012	SOP 2.3 and SOP 2.6
Rohan Scott	2.0 Draft	05/03/2020	Reviewed and updated
Rod Anderson	3.0	10/06/2021	Administrative Review

### Approved by

Name	Title/Role	Signature	Date
Rohan Scott	CO ACT RFS		23-07-21

### Document Owner

Position	Section
Director	Operations

Next review due: 05/03/2022

### Related documents

Document name
2.2.12 Communications Standard Operating Procedure
<a href="#">Work Health and Safety Act 2011</a>
<a href="#">Riskman Incident Reporting form</a>

Signed documents will be scanned and filed in TRIM.

