
VBFBP004 – Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade Policy - Fatigue Management

1. Intention

The intention of this policy is to ensure a system is in place to manage fatigue in all bush fire brigade volunteers. The Shire of Waroona has a commitment to ensure that all bush fire brigade volunteers on the fire ground are kept safe and in good health. Fatigued fire fighters can pose a health and safety risk to themselves and to others. Unique considerations relating to fatigue in volunteer fire fighters include:

- The unexpected nature of bushfires;
- The need for fighting fires outside of normal working hours;
- Operating in an environment that presents high level health and safety risks; and
- Bush fire brigade volunteers turning out to fires from another workplace.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Shire of Waroona bush fire brigade volunteers in their line of duty when fighting a fire under the control of the Shire. The policy also applies to any bush fire brigade volunteers from other local government areas that are providing assistance in the Shire of Waroona.

When bushfire brigade volunteers are fighting a fire under the control of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Parks and Wildlife, the relevant policies and procedures of those agencies are to be followed.

3. Statement

Fatigue impacts alertness, which may lead to mistakes and an increase in incidents and injuries. Fatigue may result in an individual being less alert, having poor judgement, being slower to react and having decreased motor skills.

3.1 Shift Length

In order to reduce the risk of fatigue impacting bush fire brigade volunteers, the following applies on the fire ground:

- The maximum shift length is 12 hours. This includes the travel time from when the volunteer leaves to attend the fire ground and leaves to go home. For example, if the travel time to and from the fire ground is 30 minutes, the volunteer must only spend a maximum of 11 hours on the fire ground;
- The time a volunteer spends at their normal occupation prior to attending the fire ground also needs to be factored in. For example, if a volunteer has just worked a night shift at their primary occupation and turns out to the fire ground, this volunteer is likely to be fatigued already. In many circumstances, a volunteer is likely to have turned out to a fire directly from their primary occupation and varying levels of fatigue will be present. It is up to the individual to take a common sense approach to this and inform the Incident Controller or brigade FCO/Captain if they have been working prior to turning out, particularly if their line of work is labour intensive;

- The Incident Controller is to record start times and finish times in their diary as per the T-Cards; and
- Following the end of a shift, a volunteer must leave the fire ground and not linger around to ensure they have ample opportunity to wind down, eat and sleep away from the fire ground.

3.2 Arrangements for Rostering Shifts of Incidents that Require Shifts

The arrangements for rostering day and night shifts during a major incident may present challenges for the Incident Controller because of the difficulties in finding sufficient volunteer numbers to cover shifts and the need to potentially change sleeping patterns of volunteers. To ensure shift fatigue can be managed, the following applies on the fire ground:

- The recommended day shift pattern is 5 days on shift then 24 hours off the fire ground, followed by 5 days on shift then 48 hours off the fire ground [repeat cycle];
- The recommended night shift pattern is 3 nights on shift then 24 hours, followed by 3 nights on shift then 24 hours off the fire ground [repeat cycle];
- The Incident Controller must plan well in advance for shift changes so that volunteers are able to leave the fire ground when their 12 hour shift is over (i.e. ensure fresh volunteers are ready to swap on time). This includes planning in advance for shift changes for the Incident Controller him/herself;
- If in the unlikely event there are limited or no fresh volunteers available to attend the fire ground to take over a shift, those firefighters already on the fire ground are permitted to continue to fight the fire provided their mental and physical signs of fatigue are in a reasonable state to ensure sound judgement and concentration is maintained. The Incident Controller must weigh up the risk of having reduced numbers on the fire ground against the risk of the fire spreading or escalating.

3.3 Personal Responsibilities

Bush fire brigade volunteers have a responsibility to identify signs of fatigue in themselves and others and report signs of fatigue-related behaviour to their crew leader. The mental and emotions signs of fatigue include:

- confusion;
- poor concentration;
- general cognitive slowness/slow reaction times;
- forgetfulness;
- narrowed perception;
- carelessness;
- loss of situational awareness;
- poor decision making;
- decreased interaction with team members;
- lowered morale;
- loss of sense of humour; and
- moodiness, irritability, argumentativeness

The physical signs of fatigue include:

- tiredness and sleepiness;
- yawning;
- headache;

- dizziness;
- sore or aching muscles;
- muscle weakness;
- slurred speech;
- appetite loss;
- reduced immune system function;
- blurry vision; and
- vacant stare with sunken bloodshot eyes.

It is important to note that a decline in mental performance is usually not apparent to the individual who is fatigued. Crew leaders and fellow volunteers have an important role in identifying fatigue in each other.

4. Legislative and Strategic Context

The Shire of Waroona has a legal obligation under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2020* to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its volunteers who attend emergency incidents and training. This includes ensuring that brigade volunteers are part of a happy and inclusive volunteer bush fire brigade environment.

5. Review

This policy is to be reviewed triennially.

6. Associated Documents

Nil.

Division		Corporate & Governance			
Policy Number		VBFBP004			
Contact Officer		Coordinator Rangers & Community Safety			
Related Legislation		Work Health and Safety Act 2020			
Related Shire Documents					
Risk Rating	Moderate	Review Frequency	Triennially	Next Review	July 24
Date Adopted	25/06/2024			OCM24/06/092	

Amendments		
Date	Details of Amendment	Reference
Click or tap to enter a date.		
Previous Policies		
N/A		