Section 2 – Guidelines

2.1 Principles

The guidelines are founded on the following principles.

- Everyone at the fire has responsibility for safety.
- Accept responsibility for your decisions and actions.
- Ensure someone from CFA at the fire is aware of your presence and what tasks you are undertaking.
- Work cooperatively with the emergency services and others.
- Do not work alone – team up with others.
- Be aware of the situation around you and any hazards likely to cause you harm.
- Wear appropriate personal protective clothing.
- Know and work within your personal limits and ability.
- Ensure your equipment is well maintained and you know and operate it within its limits and capability.
- Ensure the tasks you undertake match your capability and that of your equipment.
- Maintain communications.

It is essential for all private equipment operators to fully understand these principles and diligently apply them at the fire.

They are based not only on sound common sense, but also the vast experience of private equipment involvement at fires across the state over many years.

The rest of this section discusses these principles in more detail.

2.2 Safety at Fires

Safety at fires is the number one priority of CFA, and must also be yours. Take responsibility for your own safety at fires.

The decision to engage in firefighting should be well considered, and at a time well before the actual outbreak. It is common practice for private equipment operators to be at a fire prior to the local brigade. CFA values this early intervention, fires may even have been brought under control before the arrival of the fire brigade.

Nevertheless, it is essential that prior to deployment, private equipment operators be adequately prepared in terms of themselves and their equipment.

CFA volunteers are trained and qualified in the roles they undertake for CFA. Private equipment operators who have undertaken formal training in wildfire firefighting will already have a good understanding of fire awareness. This publication will assist you in developing your awareness. However, the best way you can become proficient in fighting fires is to be a CFA trained firefighter.

Personal preparation includes:

- having the appropriate skills and knowledge;
- being mentally and physically prepared;
- understanding the risks involved;
- being prepared to accept responsibility for your decisions and actions; and
- having suitable personal protective clothing.

Equipment preparation includes:

- ensuring the vehicle is not overloaded;
- ensuring the load and fittings are properly secured;
- ensuring the vehicle and equipment is mechanically sound and reliable; and
- ensuring the vehicle is equipped with recommended safety equipment and communications.

Private equipment operators are encouraged to discuss these matters with their local fire brigade and to share information and views as part of their preparation.

Use of the checklists in Section 4 will assist in being adequately prepared.

2.3 Accept Responsibility

When you elect to engage in firefighting as a private individual, you accept responsibility for your actions. CFA has similar responsibilities to its members. Also, everyone at the fire has a shared responsibility for the safety of others.

The underpinning theme of the guidelines is one of mutual cooperation between the emergency services and private equipment operators.

As you perform your tasks at fires, you will be continually faced with circumstances requiring decisions and actions. In some cases, it may be best

to refer a situation to someone from CFA at the fire, but in others, you will choose to make the decision and take action.

Such decisions should be well considered and not taken lightly, but above all you are expected to take responsibility for that decision. Remember, you are not exempt or above the law when firefighting. Comply with all legal obligations and **make safety your priority.**

2.4 Making Your Presence Known

If you arrive on scene before the fire brigade, team up with others and work within your capabilities. It may be your good work that saves the day.

When CFA is present it has an obligation to CFA members and other people who are at the fire. It is essential that you make yourself known to CFA so that you can operate in a coordinated and safe manner. As more resources arrive, the fire brigade may assume your tasks allowing you to drop back to a less intense activity.

Understand that uncoordinated and/or incompatible actions by individuals can be dangerous and are discouraged.

2.5 Working Cooperatively

Successful firefighting depends heavily on all personnel working cooperatively. As the fire grows in size and complexity, so too does the number of personnel and equipment. While formal organisational structures are put in place to manage the incident and emergency services' resources, a strong commitment to, and spirit of cooperation between agencies and individuals alike, must prevail.

The emergency services operate under pre-determined procedures and protocols and will establish Incident Action Plans to define the tasks to be performed by their available resources. Therefore, it is essential for private equipment operators to apply their efforts towards compatible objectives.

CFA will, where possible, keep you informed on operational and safety issues so that you can make decisions about your actions at the fire. If CFA asks you to conduct particular tasks, someone from CFA will give you a briefing about the incident situation and the tasks involved. This will ensure you are working safely, effectively and efficiently.

If you are unsure on any point, seek clarification by asking questions.

2.6 Team Up With Others

The old saying "there's strength in numbers" is true. By working cooperatively and jointly with others, the operation will be safer and more effective. Members of the team can watchout for one another, increasing safety. Communications will also be more effective.

2.7 Look for Hazards and Assess the Risk

Section 3 contains detailed information on the hazards related to wildfires. Not only are these hazards associated with wildfire, but many are also present at other incidents such as structural fires, hazardous materials incidents, motor vehicle accidents and other industrial accidents.

Hazards you may encounter include:

- smoke;
- high levels of radiant heat and heat related issues;
- heat related illness (e.g. dehydration, heat stress and heat stroke);
- danger from falling objects (especially trees and tree limbs), sharp objects, hot surfaces and flames;
- high noise levels for prolonged periods of time;
- mines and mine shafts;
- poor visibility due to smoke and dust;
- live power lines being down;
- operating equipment in rough terrain or dense vegetation; and
- close proximity to firefighting vehicles, heavy machinery and emergency vehicle traffic.

Identifying and being aware of the hazards is the first step. Next, it is important to assess the risk that hazard presents to you. Exercise your knowledge, life experience and your common sense to decide, "What is the likelihood of this hazard causing me or others harm?" If the answer is extreme, high or medium, you should seriously consider withdrawing to a safer location and/or circumstance.

2.8 Wear Appropriate Clothing

Radiant heat can kill. You need to cover up to protect yourself from radiant heat.

The correct level of protective clothing enables the release of increased metabolic heat generated through increased activity.

At the same time, it provides the protection required from radiant heat and from working in hostile and hazardous environments.

The design and fabric of the clothing worn is particularly important because unsuitable or ill fitting clothing can create heat stress, which can range from discomfort to impaired performance, illness, collapse or even death. It can also restrict performance by adding weight and limiting movement.

It is imperative that all personnel, including private equipment operators, be suitably equipped and dressed for fires.

As a minimum, private equipment operators should wear the following at a fire:

- cotton or natural fibre overalls with long sleeves (bib and brace type overalls are not acceptable) **or** cotton or natural fibre work shirt with long sleeves and trouser ensemble (non fire resistant synthetic materials are not acceptable);
- sturdy leather boots, preferably lace up type;
- leather work gloves;
- industrial type helmet with chin strap;
- industrial type goggles;
- dust masks and hearing protection (ear muffs or ear plugs) may be required for some tasks; and
- a high visibility industrial type vest is also desirable, particularly for heavy machinery operators.

Protective clothing should cover the main part of the body whilst allowing a reasonably good airflow to aid cooling. It should have closures at the wrists and ankles to prevent entry of heat and embers.

To minimize the build up of body heat it should be loose fitting, sleeves should be rolled down and trouser legs should not be tucked into boots.

If other clothing is worn under the protective apparel, it should also be loose fitting and be of natural fibre. This includes underwear and socks.

Only when in a safe area should you unbutton your clothing or drop your overall tops to provide maximum cooling benefits.

2.9 Know Your Limits and Capabilities

Firefighting can be arduous, both physically and mentally. It requires a good level of fitness to cope with physical exertion in a hostile and ever changing environment. It can exert enormous mental pressures requiring decisions to be made for constantly varying circumstances.

Therefore, you should work well within your limits. Much of this will be dependent on your levels of experience and knowledge. Those who have previously been involved in firefighting will have a better understanding of fire behaviour as well as a greater appreciation of how well they personally can cope with the situation.

To assist in developing your fire awareness, some basic information is included in Section 3 of this publication. Before participating in firefighting you should ensure that you are familiar with this material.

2.10 Your Equipment

If you are planning to use your equipment to fight fires you should ensure that the:

- operators safety and that of others is not compromised;
- equipment is suitable and capable of performing the task;
- equipment is reliable; and
- equipment has the capability and robustness to operate in a hostile environment.

Private equipment operators are not exempt nor above the law when engaged in firefighting operations. Compliance with all legal obligations, including traffic regulations is imperative for safe operations.

Private equipment should meet the following requirements to ensure its suitability for firefighting.

2.10.1 Vehicles equipped for wet firefighting

- Vehicles must not be overloaded i.e. the vehicle's Gross Vehicle Mass must not be exceeded. **This is a critical safety issue.** An overloaded vehicle will be less stable, harder to steer and has reduced braking capacity.
- The load including tank, pump and fittings are to be properly secured. Unsecured loads are illegal and may cause instability. Objects falling from the vehicle can be lethal.

- The vehicle should be roadworthy and registered if operating on public roads. Participation in firefighting does not exempt private equipment operators from the law.
- The vehicle and pump should be in sound mechanical condition, be regularly serviced and easily started. Equipment maintenance is essential, and should be undertaken pre fire season to ensure reliable service at a fire.
- Consult your local fire brigade about what form of communication you should use. It may be that your vehicle should be equipped with a good quality UHF Citizens Band radio, or that you have access to a mobile phone. These can be an important tool to aid good communications at the fire.
- The vehicle should have a first aid kit and a woollen blanket to use for personal protection at fires.
- The vehicle should be equipped with an amber rotating beacon. At fires you have a responsibility to **"see and be seen"**. Amber rotating beacons as well as the vehicle's illuminated headlights will assist in making your vehicle more visible particularly in smoky environments.
- The vehicle should have hand railings and heat shields, if personnel are to operate from the tray while the vehicle is moving. These features are absolutely essential to minimise the risk of being thrown from the vehicle and from being effected by the radiant heat from the fire. It is also imperative that the layout of the tray enables the operator to communicate with the driver.

2.10.2 Tractor and utility drawn trailer units

The same criteria as detailed in 2.10.1 above applies to this category. The safety of the tractor driver also needs consideration. Direct attack on a running fire with the unit moving is generally discouraged and should only be undertaken with the tractor driver in a fully enclosed cabin. Tasks performed by trailer units should be well considered due to their reduced maneuverability, mobility and stability. People should not ride on trailer units.

2.10.3 Farm machinery and implements

By and large, this category of equipment will be engaged in dry firefighting tactics e.g. slashing, ploughing, ripping, harrowing, grading etc. with an implement being drawn by a tractor.

All criteria in 2.10.1 and 2.10.2 will be applicable to varying degrees. It is essential that the task performed by this equipment is acknowledged by someone from CFA at the fire and that the machine is supported by a unit with wet firefighting capability and communications. All terrain vehicles (ATV's, Quad Bikes) fitted with spray units should only be used on very small spot fires or for blacking out due to their limited capacity. They should not be operated in close proximity to other larger firefighting vehicles on running fire edges.

2.10.4 Heavy plant and equipment

This category includes self-propelled machinery such as bulldozers, graders and scrapers. All criteria in 2.10.1, 2.10.2 and 2.10.3 will apply to varying degrees. In circumstances where they are contracted directly at fires, they are subject to rigorous conditions for both the equipment and operator. Where the heavy plant or equipment is being operated independently by a private individual, it is essential that the task performed by the equipment is acknowledged by someone from CFA at the fire and that the machine is supported by a unit with wet firefighting capability and communications.

Note: If CFA observes equipment, which it considers as inappropriate for the task or unsafe, CFA may require that it be withdrawn from that area of the fire or deployed to another task.

2.11 Your Tasks

The tasks performed by private equipment operators may vary and may include:

- initial attack;
- tactical support – direct attack and parallel attack;
- blacking out operations; and
- patroling.

The tasks will vary in terms of hazards and risks involved, the degree of physical effort, the reliance on the equipment used, and the mental exertion required. So the actual tasks you perform will very much depend on your capabilities and experience, and the type, condition and capability of your equipment.

For example, it is not appropriate for someone dressed in shorts and tee-shirt, to undertake a direct attack with a hose line at the head of an intense running grass fire.

Nor is it appropriate for a person on a quad bike fitted with a spray unit to be fighting the flank of an intense fire amongst heavy tankers. But the quad bike sprayer may be an excellent tool for blacking out fence posts or tussocks in the burnt area.

2.12 Communications

Communications systems are crucial in ensuring that information about new strategies and the associated instructions is rapidly disseminated.

A communications plan will be in place for every incident. Check with your local fire brigade to determine the communication arrangements and protocols applying in your area. A combination of UHF radio, Citizens Band radio and mobile phones may be used.

Remember, communication at fires is not only confined to radio and mobile phone traffic. Direct contact and interaction between individuals and crews is essential.