



COVID-19: Recovery principles

March 2021

Recovery Principles, Covid-19: Non-Emergency Response

Introduction

In adopting the recovery principles and any associated guidance, Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) should be aware of the current COVID-19 management measures in place relevant to their respective national and local government areas.

The recovery principles set out in this document should be read in conjunction with the NFCC Strategic Intentions for non-emergency response which set out the necessity for FRSs to continue to deliver against the statutory functions and duties set out in law and in support of public and firefighter safety.

As the country moves towards continued recovery from coronavirus, FRS's will seek to increase the activities around non-emergency operational response in terms of operational preparedness which is an essential aspect supporting Firefighter safety and competence.

These principles are not prescriptive and each FRS will determine the actions they need to take to continue towards a full recovery. The principles do offer FRS a common framework from which they can consider their operational preparedness activities.

The principles set out considerations for FRS to safely carry out operational, non-emergency response activities which may have been temporarily disrupted due to COVID-19. Its purpose is to ensure that the management of activities protects the safety of both staff and the public and does so in accordance with current government and local guidance and by way of common sector specific risk assessment. It compliments existing FRS activities and their associated risk assessments; it does not supersede them.

Fire Standards

The Fire Standards Board recently published Fire Standards for Operational Preparedness¹ and Operational competence² which provide FRS with an outline of the types of activities they may seek to consider and support the principles set out in this document.

Non-Emergency Response Principles: What's included

It is for each FRS to consider a risk-based approach to undertaking non-emergency response activities, balancing the need to carry out our statutory duties and other work in support of Firefighter and community safety and to protect staff and the public from exposure to COVID-19. A robust risk assessment process will continue to be a fundamental aspect of all activities and any move towards recommencing any activities.

¹ [Operational Preparedness – Fire Standards Board](#)

² [Operational Competence | Fire Standards Board](#)

The range of activities that these principles cover include the following but should not be considered as a definitive or comprehensive list as there may be other activities that these principles would apply to.

- Conducting Part 2, s.7 (2)d visits under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004; or equivalent in devolved administrations;
- Carrying out / refreshing Site Specific Risk Assessments (SSRI);
- Reviewing or visits in support of emergency response plans;
- Safety Critical, core and specialist training activities and revalidations of skills;
- Undertaking operational assurance activities;
- Live play operational exercises included 'off site'/station locations;
- Face to face training, learning and development activities;
- Other duties of a non-emergency nature required in support of firefighter or public safety.

Working Principles - risk based approach to non-emergency response

In relation to operational preparedness and competence, FRS may wish to consider the following principles as they continue to move through the recovery stage of the coronavirus pandemic.

Within the recovery principles is an assumed default position of '*activities will be carried out*' as opposed to an automatic default of not undertaking activity. The risk assessment process will help identify what can be achieved safely however, the assumed posture of expectation that activities will be undertaken provides a consistent and positive start position.

- a) FRS should endeavour to undertake their full range of activities but continue to adopt a risk based approach to ensure the benefits of such activities will be balanced against the risk to staff and the public in terms of the transmission of the COVID-19 virus.
- b) FRS may wish to consider any of their workforce whom may be considered as more vulnerable to the coronavirus and therefore may be at additional risk and require additional protection measures when moving to full resumption of operational preparedness activities.
- c) Risk assessments for all activities may require to be reviewed to ensure that they include any additional control measures that may be required to safety restart or increase non-emergency operational preparedness activities.
- d) In circumstances where FRS crews need to attend other workplaces for the purposes of carrying out operational visits or information gathering, they should consider calling ahead on the day and checking that there are no staff with COVID symptoms and that the premises are COVID secure.
In reducing contact either between members of the FRS, or between the FRS and the public, has the effect of reducing the opportunity for COVID-19 to spread. This is especially important where new variants of COVID-19 have been identified to be more transmissible between people. At this current time the information and guidance is that current procedures, Infection Prevention Controls (IPC) and levels of PPE are a suitable defence.
- e) FRS may wish to consider prioritising operational preparedness activities related to compliance with maintenance of competence for specific skills and knowledge.
- f) FRS may wish to provide additional supervisory support and assurance to staff and teams who are reengaging in activities that they may not have not been engaged in as often as normal.
- g) Operational training, exercising, visits and familiarisation activities are essential elements supporting operational competence and safety and should be considered in this context when weighing up the benefits / risks of each activity.
- h) FRS may wish to consider how technology and digital tools and systems could be utilised to support the work to be done or reduce contact time where appropriate.

- i) Risk assessments will need to be regularly reviewed as society continues to recover from coronavirus and the threat and risks change.
- j) Where available, FRS may wish to make use of lateral flow testing as an additional health surveillance measure to support some activities.
- k) The continued awareness and adherence to good hand hygiene as well as face covering and where possible social distancing should be utilised as far as possible.

Summary

Non-emergency operational preparedness and response activities will continue to increase as the country continues to recover from coronavirus. With falling infection levels and opening up of communities and society FRS will seek to increase the activities in support of operational preparedness and competence. Risk assessment and learning and applying lessons from the previous year's experiences provides an opportunity to reshape and rethink how activity is undertaken.

Firefighter and community safety remains the key priorities for FRS and the need to engage in non-emergency operational preparedness and response requires adequate and continuous preparations and application.

Supporting information

The existing guidance for [Covid-19: guidance for first responders](#)³, [Working safely during coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#)⁴ as well as the range of [NFCC guidance documents](#) and risk assessment provide a good baseline of information to support local decision making and safe actions for FRS as they continue their progress.

Where any member of staff has any of the following symptoms they should not attend the workplace and follow the official guidance for booking a coronavirus test.

- If anyone at the premises is showing symptoms of COVID-19 such as a high temperature (greater than 37.8°C) or a new, persistent dry cough;
- If anyone at the premises has been tested and is confirmed as COVID-19 within the previous 14 days;
- If anyone at the premises is known to have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 in the last 14 days;

The benefits of minimising and where possible avoiding close contact with others remains a component of preventing transmission of the virus. The continued use of appropriate PPE for staff is a key factor in supporting continuing activity where safe or necessary to do so.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-interim-guidance-for-first-responders/interim-guidance-for-first-responders-and-others-in-close-contact-with-symptomatic-people-with-potential-2019-ncov>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>