

Safety Feedback

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This feedback was compiled during the during the 2019 fire season on an ongoing basis whilst I was undertaking the role of State Safety Advisor. It has been developed while dealing with a combination of issues that were raised with me and I had to address and also from suggestions that that were made by people, mainly IMT Safety Advisors, about how we could do things better. I have endeavoured to try and be constructive so where possible I have offered solutions to identified problems. I also suggest that others, such as IMT Safety Advisors and especially those from interstate, should be contacted for feedback that they may be able to provide on issues that they had to address at their level.

The issues below are ordered as they arose and not in order of importance.

Fatigue Management

This is quite difficult to manage due to the lack of an electronic management system. Most timesheets are entered into IRMS, but members of permanent brigades are logging their overtime through their brigades. When I had an Admin staff member do an IRMS extraction so that I could prepare a report on how many members had worked x number of days, x number of hours, etc it came up on individual incidents; eg, Fenton, Geeveston, Great Pine Tier, etc. This meant that without manually cross referencing it didn't capture personnel who were working across incidents.

Additionally, IRMS reports only show days on current deployment, not normal work before or after. So this doesn't present an accurate picture of fatigue management.

Ideally one database for time management. This should incorporate a traffic light system. Staff who are available to work are in green, as they are coming up towards the maximum time allowed to work their name changes to orange and then goes red when they are at or have exceeded the recommended rostered on time.

Whilst T Cards are efficient at doing what they are supposed to do, ie, record those on and off the fireground, they are not efficient as a time management system. Some go missing, some turn up weeks later to be entered into IRMS. Therefore they don't capture real time fatigue management issues.

Need to also get better in this area with volunteers. If they are full time workers, then working weekends with us, then back to work, etc many may not be getting a break at all. Besides the heightened risk of accidents occurring it is not good for their personal life.

Similarly with contractors management. Contractors will work as many hours / days as we give them. We have the same duty of care to contractors as we do to our own people so fatigue management policies and procedures must be applied equally to them.

With regard to the actual procedure:

Need a clear, simple, flexible and transparent guideline. Most people find the current guideline written in terms of hours confusing.

For example:

Day workers (any award, fatigue is independent of award)

Five days on, One day off.

Five days on, two days off.

After four rotations, four days off.

Max 12 hour per day scheduled, min 8 hour break

If, due to operational circumstances longer hours are worked then:

12 – 15 hours, min 10 hour break.

15+ hours, min 12 hour break

3 x consecutive 15 hour days, enforced 24 hour break, irrespective of the rostered deployment.

These breaks need to be enforced. If hours in excess of this are required then needs to be justified on timesheet.

Before any of the above is signed off it needs stakeholder engagement at all levels to ensure workability. Discuss with workers and managers/supervisors as they are the ones who will have to work with the procedure.

Contractor Management

EOI's for all contractors intending to work for TFS during the fire season to go out early. They attend contractor induction workshop, present insurances, competency certificates etc. Entered on to a register and only contractors from this register are used.

If, during the fire season, further contractors are required, then human resources required to induct them must be found, before they are engaged.

Need to also ensure that contractors have the right skills and equipment for the job. Just because they have a dozer doesn't mean they know how to cut a fire trail to suit us, understand the risks of trees or have the suitable equipment. If they normally work in a quarry or road construction they may have little idea of what we require or how to do it.

Trees

Clarify to all staff that the MAC – SWP is the current document for managing hazardous trees, irrespective of the size of the incident.

Reinforce to all staff that manual felling is not the first option. And, just because it's going to take a couple of hours to get a machine there, or cost money, doesn't mean that mechanical felling is ruled

out. Tape the area off. Too often it seems that because the machine is not there on the spot that is the reason mechanical felling is ruled out.

Remove the discrepancy between the MAC–SWP and COOI T.6.3 on number of fellers required. Better still, review both, decide which is the better document and remove the other.

An essential component of the pre-season briefings should be a session on recognition and management of hazardous trees.

E-Doctrine (and all other procedures on the intranet)

Review all these and update. Ensure they are current and signed off by current managers. Implement system of version control so that if new procedures, or revisions, are promulgated, then old versions and systems are removed.

The current “system” of putting new procedures up without removing the ones they supersede creates confusion, arguments and is a potential safety issue when old ones that have old standards of safety are still available electronically.

MAC Documents to be widely promulgated

Following on from the above, all documentation to be widely promulgated and readily available. For example it was raised with me what is a “9 Lines Medical Assessment” that was referred to in the IAP Medical Plan. No TFS or AT person could tell me. Eventually it turned out it was developed by the MAC Group and was covered in the inter-agency pre-season briefing. However it didn’t find its way any further down then that.

Pre-season briefings

These need to contain information that is relevant and pertinent. Need to be more of a workshop type format rather than just a chat. Rather than just be delivered by one person, arrange into topics and have subject matter experts deliver each topic. That adds variety to presenters and keeps it interesting. One person can’t be expected to know everything about each role.

Training and Development

Provide needs based and relevant PD for the roles that people are expected to undertake during major operations. This should be done prior to the pre-season briefing so that people can then pass on relevant information as per above.

Hazard / Accident Reporting

In short, this isn't working. Issues include:

Difficult to report. Paper based system means that if a person doesn't have a hazard form to hand, by the time they have the means they'll have forgotten about it.

Significant delays in notification due to time taken to hand into supervisor, supervisor to process, go through the system, etc. This is slow enough amongst our career staff but the problems are exacerbated with volunteers. For example during current operations it took us eight days to receive notification that a volunteer had broken his ribs during a fall. The delay was caused by him going to the hospital after duty, then next time he was at station he filled in the accident report, then handed to his Brigade Chief, who then handed to next in line and so on. Other issues include reports being handed in at staging areas but they don't make their way to the IMT. Or reports going in to regions and not going in to IMT.

Mixed messages being sent by some middle managers. Some managers/supervisors take hazard reports raised on their watch personally, sending the message that the person raising it is just causing trouble and/or creating problems/work.

Lack of education/training about what is a hazard, what is a near miss, etc. For example, I told a firefighter who had a helicopter drop water on him that he needs to fill in an accident report and tick "accident without injury". His supervisor told him it was a hazard because he didn't get hurt. So not only the system is the problem, there is a lack of understanding amongst our people.

Solution is to create a simple, electronic notification system that is coordinated centrally. Benefits of this is that we have real time reporting, can act on hazards where necessary before an incident occurs and can follow up with the person sending the report for further information if they forget to. Also means that reports won't languish in the "system" for weeks or months. Suggest that as a starting point review the system that STT use and see if it would work for TFS.

IAP Safety Plans

Issues include:

Need a standard template that is issued at the start of the fire season and is version controlled. All previous versions to be removed. Current ones seem to start with very basic dot points and then increase on a reactive basis. Proactively the core issues need to be addressed consistently statewide and grouped under subject headings to make it easier to cover in briefings. Each grouping to contain room to add local issues and also in a separate "other" group for local issues, stressing that as a minimum core issues must be addressed.

Reinforce to IMT staff that they do not keep their own hard copies. For example, information would be disseminated on safety matters, then there would be a change of planning staff in IMT and someone would include the safety plan from the previous week which didn't include issues since identified.

Many people don't have access to the IAP's so the only safety information they have is what's conveyed to them at briefings. A pocket book should be developed that contains all the key safety

information, including room for notes. The current personal logbook just assumes that people will write this information down.

This safety book should be distributed to all personnel before they enter the fireground. Ideally each person would sign and acknowledge the receipt of these and that they will abide by the safety instructions contained therein.

Safety Alerts

Review the Safety Alerts, and where practicable, attempt to resolve the issues so that they don't recur. Many of them, such as hazardous trees, will be continuing issues.

Where the issues are likely to be ongoing they should be reissued early in the fire season, or each major fire operation, in an attempt to be proactive rather than reactive.

Airbase & Staging Area Emergency Procedures

At one stage there was an urgent need to request an ambulance. The person making the call soon realised that as they were not local they could not provide location information, or directions, other than xxxx Staging Area. It was then realised that none of the staging areas had emergency procedures.

As an organisation we expect everyone else to have emergency procedures in place, even temporary workplaces such as festivals, construction sites, etc. Staging Areas and Airbases, however temporary, are workplaces, and as such should comply with Regulation 43 of the Workplace Health & Safety Regulations.

This should not be overly difficult. A generic plan could be developed that could have the local information completed when a Staging Area or Airbase is established.

Air Operations

Unlike other operations, and unlike other contractors, air operations did not appear to have any external governance or requirement to implement. When an aircraft incident occurred we relied on the operator to conduct an investigation and submit a report. We would not allow this with other contractors,; eg, earthmoving, so I'm not sure why we would do this with aircraft operators. I believe that this is an area of significant risk to Tasmania Fire Service.

