



ACT FIRE & RESCUE

**STANDARDS AND PROTOCOLS FOR
COMMUNITY FIRE UNITS**

December 2017 (v1.2)

[http://esa.act.gov.au/actfr/community-fire-units/documents/CFU Standards and Protocols.pdf](http://esa.act.gov.au/actfr/community-fire-units/documents/CFU%20Standards%20and%20Protocols.pdf)

ACTF&R Intranet - ACTFR Policy/CFU Standards and Protocols.pdf

1. PURPOSE

To form a set of standards and protocols for ACT Fire & Rescue in relation to the operations of Community Fire Units (CFUs), so that CFU members may be guided in the exercise of their functions and responsibilities under the *Emergencies Act 2004*.

These Guidelines also represent a direction of the Chief Officer of ACT Fire & Rescue to CFU members.

2. REFERENCES

Emergencies Act 2004

Work Health and Safety ACT 2011

Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011

ESA Arrangements for Working with Vulnerable People ESA022

3. DEFINITIONS

ACTF&R – ACT Fire & Rescue

CFU – Community Fire Unit

CFU Training Activities – A list of defined CFU training activities

CFU Operational Area- The mapped area a CFU, when activated, can operate in

CFU Training and Recruitment Area- The mapped area a CFU can train in, carry out fire prevention and public engagement work. Members are recruited from within this area

CFU Training Activity and Reporting Period – An annual period starting from the (October 1) to start of the next fire season (October 1)

Chief Officer –The Chief Officer of ACTF&R, appointed under the *Emergencies Act 2004*

Commissioner – The ACT Emergency Services Agency Commissioner, appointed under the *Emergencies Act 2004*

ESA – ACT Emergency Services Agency

The Act – Emergencies Act 2004

WWVP – Working with Vulnerable People

Vulnerable Person – Section 7 of the WWVP Act 2011 defines a vulnerable person as:

(a) a child; or

(b) an adult who is—

(i) disadvantaged; and

(ii) accessing a regulated activity in relation to the disadvantage.

4. BACKGROUND

ACTF&R has the objective of protecting life, property and the environment in the Australian Capital Territory. ACTF&R achieves this in a number of ways including through the use of appropriately skilled and trained career and volunteer members.

Community Fire Units are established by the Chief Officer under s47 of the Act for the protection of property in urban/bushland interface areas within the ACT.

A CFU is comprised of a group of volunteers, appointed under s48 of the Act, who reside in the area for which the unit is established as designated by the Chief Officer. These volunteer members are trained and equipped by the ACTF&R to assist in the protection of property from bushfires and enabling them to exercise their functions.

5. FUNCTIONS

A CFU has three main functions under s49(2) of the Act:

- To undertake fire prevention work
- To assist with firefighting during a fire emergency
- Assist with recovery operations after a fire emergency.

Under s49(3) of the Act, a CFU must exercise these functions:

- Only in the area for which the unit is established
- In accordance with the standards and protocols for ACTF&R
- Under the directions of the Chief Officer of the ACTF&R.

The ‘area for which the unit is established’ is designated by a registered map certified by the Chief Officer. These maps will define an area designated for firefighting and recovery operations, and an area defined for approved fire prevention work which includes community education. PDF versions of these maps can be found at <http://esa.act.gov.au/actfr/community-fire-units/cfu-training-area-locations/>

Under s67(5) of the Act, CFU members may exercise certain powers of the Chief Officer as is necessary for the protection of life or property or to control or extinguish a fire in the built-up area. This exercise may only occur without the Chief Officer’s direction or authority where:

- The exercise is done in accordance with the Commissioner’s Guidelines for ACTF&R (including these Guidelines); or
- It is not practicable for a direction or authority to be obtained.

CFU members should give careful consideration to making a decision to act under s67(5) of the Act. The exercise of some of these powers has the potential to impact on individual human rights.

CFU members are only to undertake duties that they have been trained to perform.

For example a CFU member may:

- With any necessary assistance and force enter land
- Bring equipment onto land or into a structure or vehicle
- Use a supply of water without charge
- Give directions or regulate or prohibit the movement of people, animals or vehicles
- Advise persons on evacuation options

- Other duties by appropriate trained members as required by the Chief Officer.

But may not

- Open a container, or dismantle equipment, using any necessary or reasonable force
- Remove, dismantle, demolish or destroy a structure or vehicle, contain an animal or substance
- Close a street or road to traffic
- Control, shut off or disconnect a supply of fuel, gas, electricity, water or anything else
- Remove or destroy an animal, a substance or vegetation
- Turn off, disconnect or shut down a motor or equipment
- Require a person to give reasonable assistance to a member of an emergency service.

This is because CFU training has not prepared you to undertake these functions in a safe manner.

These Guidelines outline the powers that may be exercised and the circumstances in which a CFU may exercise them.

In addition, CFU members may not be protected from personal liability in relation to the exercise of a function under the Act in certain circumstances (see s198 of the Act).

Any actions taken by CFU members under s67(5) of the Act may also be subject to review by the Chief Officer.

6. CFU WORKING WITH VULNERABLE PEOPLE REQUIRMENTS

As a regulated activity, emergency services including CFUs, are required to comply with the *Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011*.

- It is highly recommended that all CFU members obtain a Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) card
- CFU members **without** a WWVP card are to comply with Section 5.3 Exemption from Registration and Table 2 (below) from the ESA Arrangements for Working with Vulnerable People policy. A day includes part of a day or an activity within that day.

5.3. Exemption from Registration

Some roles may be exempt because the frequency of regulated activities performed does not exceed the thresholds detailed in Table 2 below.

The relevant Chief Officer/Director must complete a risk assessment to authorise an exemption based on the operational activities of the individual. Procedures must be put in place to ensure any individual routinely engaged in non-exempt activities is registered.

Table 2:

Exemptions	Action Required
There is a range of exemptions described in the <i>WWVP Act</i> (Part 3, Section 12). For the purposes of ACT ESA, the following exemption may apply.	
<p>The person is engaged in the activity for not more than:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 days in any 4-week period; and - 7 days in any 12-month period. 	<p>It is possible for this exemption to apply to some staff and volunteers.</p> <p>If it is to apply, the service must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify the specific role/s in which individuals may be appointed under this exemption OR amend the terms of appointment for specified individual to clearly identify the activities they may and may not undertake <p>AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitor and record individuals activity to demonstrate the terms of the exemption are not exceeded

ESA022 ESA Arrangements for Working with Vulnerable People

- It will be the responsibility of all CFU members without a WWVP card to notify their Team Leader if they are at risk of exceeding the number of days set out in the policy.

- All members of a CFU with cadet members, except cadets aged 14 and 15 years, are required to hold a valid WWVP card.
- All CFU members in a unit with a vulnerable person are required to hold a WWVP card.

7. RECRUITMENT OF MEMBERS

New CFU members are required to reside within the following mapped areas;

- The unit's Operational Area or
- The unit's Training and Recruitment Area.

CFU maps can be found on ACTF&R CFU website.

Recruitment is usually achieved in two ways.

- General recruitment by ACTF&R via street meetings and letter box drops or
- By team leaders within CFU areas.

Potential new members are to be directed to the ACTF&R CFU website

Potential new CFU members are **not** permitted to undertake the functions of a CFU Operational Member until induction training is completed.

On successful completion of CFU Induction training, the Chief Officer will appoint new members under section 48 (1) of the Act.

Cadet membership

The requirements to become a CFU Cadet include:

- Parent or a guardian is to give written permission to join
- Cadets can be aged between 14 and 18 years of age. On their 18th birthday Cadets will automatically become Operational Members
- Cadets are required to comply with the same annual training requirements as Operational members
- Cadet induction training will consist of eLearning theory and a practical training day with ACTF&R staff.

8. TRAINING

The Chief Officer will provide each CFU with training and equipment to enable the unit to exercise its functions.

CFU Training Areas

CFU training can occur within the following mapped areas;

- The unit's Operational Area
- The unit's Training and Recruitment Area.

CFUs can attend ACTF&R endorsed training and public engagement activities outside these areas.

Induction Training

Induction training will be conducted by suitably trained and skilled members of ACTF&R.

Induction training will provide trainees with the skills, knowledge and competence to safely undertake the duties of a CFU member.

Skills Maintenance

Due to the duties that CFU Operational Members are required to perform, all Operational Members must participate in at least one CFU Training Activity each year under the guidance of ACTF&R staff or their CFU Team Leader.

CFU Training Activities

The following are defined CFU Training Activities:

- CFU Induction and Refresher Training at the ESA Training Centre, Hume
- CFU training with an ACTF&R operational pumper crew carrying out a drill
- Carrying out a drill as defined by the current CFU Training Activities Guide found on the ACTF&R CFU website.

9. RESPONSIBILITIES

The CFU Coordination Team, including the CFU Coordinator, are ACTF&R Officers with the responsibility of managing and coordinating the CFU program and its members.

Duties include:

- Develop and implement policy
- Establish and install units
- Manage CFU operations, including training
- Liaise with team members
- Administer the CFU program and
- Manage Work Health & Safety (WH&S).

Each CFU can made up of:

- Team Leader
- Equipment Custodian
- Operational members
- Cadet members
- Associate members
- Auxiliary members and
- Life members.

CFU Team Leader

Each CFU is represented by a Team Leader. The role of the Team Leader is to:

- Lead their CFU team members
- Act as liaison with the CFU Coordinator
- Take charge of CFU operations pending the arrival of ACTF&R
- Monitor availability of members during periods of bushfire alert
- Maintain an accurate register of members and inform the CFU Coordinator of any changes
- Ensure the CFU Activities are logged in the Occurrence Book and is accurately maintained
- Ensure all team members wear approved personal protective equipment and
- In September of each year (commencing 2018), Team Leaders are required to submit a report on the previous Training Activity Period
- At the end of each fire season, Team Leaders will be requested to submit a progress report on team training.

CFU Equipment Custodian

The members of each CFU appoint an Equipment Custodian.

Duties of the Equipment Custodian include:

- Ensure that the equipment is readily accessible by CFU members at all times
- Ensure that the equipment trailer is kept in good working order and is clean
- Ensure the regular checking and recording of the condition of CFU equipment and
- Notify the CFU Coordinator of any equipment loss or damage.

CFU Operational Members (including Cadets)

All members of a CFU share some common roles. Members should make a reasonable effort to be contactable during periods of high fire danger. It is not expected that members be available to activate at all times, however the Team Leader needs to have an awareness of available human resources during high fire danger periods.

Duties of operational members include:

- Attendance at least one CFU Training Activity each year
- The performance of CFU functions without recklessness, so as to not endanger themselves or others
- Taking directions from the Team Leader, who in turn will take directions from ACTF&R staff
- The wearing of supplied PPC when activated or in training.

CFU Associate Members

Associate Members must always work in the vicinity of the trailer to carry out operational duties.

CFU Associate Members are Operational Members that choose to become an associate or are Operational Members that have not participated in a CFU Training Activity in the past year.

If an Associate Member chooses to complete a CFU Training Activity they will be reinstated as an Operational Member.

CFU Auxiliary Member

A CFU Auxiliary Member is an interested person who does not want to become an operational member, but has skills to offer a CFU team.

Auxiliary Members can be involved in all aspects of CFU activities with the exception of;

- Activations
- May observe but not participate in a CFU Training activity.

Team Leaders are to notify the CFU Coordination Team when they have a suitable person interested in becoming an auxiliary member.

To become a CFU Auxiliary Member an interested person must complete the eLearning theory component of Induction Training. An identity card, hat and T-shirt will be issued on completion.

Auxiliary members can become an operational member by attending an induction practical day with ACTF&R staff at Hume.

CFU Life Member

The Chief Officer of the ACTF&R may, after receiving a nomination from the CFU Coordination Team and Consultative Committee, appoint a person as a life member of the CFU.

Life members may be called upon to assist with special projects or for guidance and advice in areas of expertise.

10. ACTIVATION

A CFU may be activated by any of the following means:

- The ESA Communications Centre (ComCen)
- Self-activation after contacting ComCen by call Triple Zero (000) or
- Under advice from an ACTF&R Officer on site.

Activation

In the event of an incident in their area a CFU will be activated by ComCen via SMS message. This message will be sent to the numbers provided to the CFU Coordinator by Team Leaders. Activation means the deployment of the CFU trailer to an incident.

The minimum activation requirements for a CFU is four Operational Members for a standard deployment of one line of hose. One of these Operational Members roles can be performed by a Cadet Member.

Additional Cadet Members can be utilised for other duties at the discretion of the Team Leader.

Notification

In the event of an incident in their vicinity a CFU will be notified by ComCen via SMS message. This message will be sent to the numbers provided to the CFU Coordinator by team leaders. Notification means there is a fire in the area but no action is required at this time.

Catastrophic Fire Danger

CFUs will not be activated by ComCen if the fire danger has been classified as Catastrophic. CFUs are not to self-activate if the fire danger has been declared as Catastrophic.

Team Leaders may consider moving the trailer to a predetermined safer location within the CFU's operational or training area during Catastrophic Fire Danger periods. Team Leaders/Equipment Custodian will endeavor to notify ComCen/CFU Coordination Team of the trailer movement. Members are trained to call ComCen in the event the trailer is required to be redeployed in an operational area after the fire danger subsides below catastrophic.

General Method of Operations in Response to a Fire

Proceed to the area threatened by fire with the CFU equipment. If ACTF&R or the ACT Rural Fire Service (RFS) is in attendance, consult the officer in charge as to whether the unit's pre-determined plan is consistent with the Station Officer's plan. If no ACTF&R staff or RFS volunteers are present, set up the unit in the manner approved in the CFU Team Leaders handout and communicate those actions to ComCen via radio. Always ensure that escape routes are available for members at the fence line.

Make sure members utilise the accountability system.

Designate CFU members to patrol their area to watch for ember attack, notify Team Leader of changes in conditions, and deploy CFU equipment in the approved manner as required. Team Leader to notify ACTF&R of changes in conditions and any actions they are taking using a CAN report.

At this point, the Team Leader will need to decide whether to run out hose and charge the branch, or just ship a standpipe and leave hose rolled. The Team Leader should keep in mind that it is a simple matter to roll out hose and charge the branch. It is a slower process to re-roll the hose and re-stow the trailer if the fire threatens an area that was not anticipated. Think carefully before committing resources. Alternatively, if there is time, the Team Leader may decide to commit some resources and damp down an area leaving the rest of the equipment ready to move at short notice. Team Leaders may also consider sending a member/s to alert neighbours of the bushfire threat, to advise on house preparations and appropriate times and places for evacuation.

A priority should be to wet grass and other combustible materials in the area where the fire is likely to approach. This will reduce the spread of the fire, reduce pre-heating of fuels and reduce spot fires caused by ember attack.

Mop up and maintain ember watch for several hours after the front has passed or longer as required.

Maintain the CFU Occurrence Book. Record any event/ occurrence that may be useful to the Coroner or the Chief Officer in the investigation of a fire. Record any injuries to CFU personnel or injuries witnessed by CFU personnel as per WH&S requirements.

CFU members may not take equipment outside their designated area unless directed by the Chief Officer. The purpose of the CFU program is to defend property in a predetermined area, not to respond to other fires.

The temptation to go to meet the fire, even by a few hundred metres, is understandable, however as you are doing this, embers could be landing between you and the property, trapping you, and leaving your own and your neighbour's properties exposed.

11. SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

All CFU members work under the *Work, Health and Safety (WH&S) Act 2011*, with responsibilities for their own safety and their fellow CFU team member's safety. Under the Act, CFU members are covered by workers compensation provided they work within their designated CFU operational and training areas and in any authorised ACTF&R activity ONLY.

Safety of personnel is paramount. Personnel should only be positioned in locations that will allow quick and easy escape from an approaching fire front. Life safety is always the highest priority before property and asset protection.

Always have a pre-determined escape route from the fire front.

Members should not take unreasonable risks to protect property. Crews should take any reasonable practicable steps to eliminate a risk, including withdrawing from the fire ground. It is important to monitor the surrounding conditions at all times to allow time to safely withdraw from the scene. Any instruction from a member of ACTF&R to withdraw or evacuate must be followed immediately. In the absence of an ACTF&R member, any advice from an officer of another ACT Emergency Service (RFS, State Emergency Service, ACT Ambulance Service) or ACT Policing to withdraw or evacuate should also be followed. In the interests of safety that advice should be followed without question.

ACTF&R members will generally have access to more information about the state of the fire and the prevailing conditions. Any delay in evacuating the scene could create unnecessary risk to both CFU members and other people tasked with firefighting at the scene.

No member of a CFU is to be deployed by a member of ACTF&R, the Team Leader or at his or her own initiative unless they are fully attired in correct Personnel Protective Clothing (PPC).

Members should work in a minimum group of two, based on the 'buddy system'. Watch your partner carefully for signs of fatigue.

Caution should be observed when working near power lines. Always assume power lines are live. Do not aim water at power lines. Fallen power lines should be reported immediately to ACTEW, or any onsite ACTF&R personnel. The immediate area should be cordoned off to all persons until the area is made safe.

12. USE AND MAINTENANCE OF EQUIPMENT

The equipment provided by ACTF&R is restricted to the identified area of operation for any particular CFU. Only equipment supplied by ACTF&R is to be used by a CFU.

Equipment is only to be used for the protection of life and property during times of fire threat and for recognised training sessions.

Any use of equipment for operations, training or testing should be recorded in the CFU occurrence book.

Any loss of damage to equipment should be logged in the CFU occurrence book and reported to the CFU Coordinator.

13. HOUSE FIRES

In the event of a structure fire, unconnected with a bushfire, occurring in a CFU area, members of CFUs can be of assistance so long as basic safety principles are applied and followed. It is not uncommon at house fires for neighbours to assist where possible prior to the arrival of ACTF&R.

In such a situation, it would be unrealistic to instruct CFU members not to use the CFU equipment for such a purpose. With this in mind the following instructions are to be followed:

- Always ensure that ACTF&R has been called by Triple Zero prior to any attempt to deploy CFU equipment. If the equipment is not close at hand, remember, the response time for ACTF&R will generally be less than the time it will take to procure the equipment.

CFU members may also:


- Alert the occupants of adjoining houses
- Ship a standpipe as near as possible to the house involved in fire as this will be useful for the first arriving ACTF&R appliance
- Keep bystanders well back
- Undertake traffic control
- Remain a safe distance from the house involved in fire
- A 'safe distance' for this purpose is twice the height of the roof away from the building and away from any smoke (the smoke from a house fire is toxic).

Note: If CFU equipment is to be used members should always wear their PPC. If you are offering assistance with no PPC you are considered to be acting as a civilian.

Under no circumstances should you enter the building involved in the fire.

Nothing in your personal experience will prepare you to attempt entry. Every year people die in structure fires after travelling just a few feet, even in their own home where they would normally be able to move around in darkness. The temperature inside a house fire will quickly rise to several hundred degrees Celsius. The CFU PPC is classified as Level E (Wildfire coat, over pants, helmet, gloves, goggles and boots). Level E PPC is designed to protect you from fires in the open and allow you to move around with a lesser chance of heat exhaustion. **CFU Level E PPC will not protect you in a structure fire.**

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