

Peer Support Team Activation & Reactive Response

The ACT Rural Fire Service Chief Officer has issued this standard operating procedure (SOP) under Section 38(1) of the *Emergencies Act 2004* – A Chief Officer may determine standards and protocols.

Purpose

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure is to establish and provide the ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) and ACT Rural Fire Service Emergency Service (ACTRFS) staff and volunteers with a clear and consistent understanding of the utilisation of ACTRFS Peer Support Officers in providing reactive responses to an individual, operation or incident.

Scope

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is applicable to personnel engaging in supporting firefighting operations within the ACT or cross border, which includes personnel from ACTRFS and ACT Parks and Conservation Service.

This Standard Operating Procedure should be read in conjunction with the ACTRFS Operational Manual and the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and policies of the ACTRFS and ESA.

Background

Within ESA, the ACT State Emergency Service and ACT Fire & Rescue have been providing Peer Support Programs for their members for a considerable time. In 2015, ACT Ambulance Service identified through the "Enhancing Professionalism: A Blueprint for Change" (2015) that a Peer Support Program should be established as a commitment to the health and wellbeing of ACTAS staff and their families. ESA endorsed this approach and broadened this commitment to begin planning for all Services in ESA to have access to Peer Support Officers.

Peer Support Officers in ACTRFS, in addition to their firefighting volunteering, volunteer to be of assistance to their colleagues in helping come to terms with some of the most stressful effects of their volunteer firefighting role, as well as other work stressors and life events. The ACTRFS Peer Support Team shall be available to provide non-judgemental support to volunteers in need during times of potentially high emotional impact. Peer Support Officers (PSOs) are not professional counsellors. They are volunteers and colleagues who have come forward to undertake special training to assist others in coping with personal or volunteer related difficulties and operate within the Peer Support Officer Code of Conduct. PSOs can also put volunteers and colleagues in touch with professional counsellors or community organisations when needed.

Participation in the ACTRFS Peer Support Officer program is voluntary, both for the PSO and for the ACTRFS member who activates Peer Support. Peer Support Officers are generally available as required and undertake to make a commitment to be available after or outside working hours when necessary.

Applicability of this SOP

Personnel will comply with this SOP when deployed at any incident or community engagement activity in the ACT. The IMTs, agency representatives and agency personnel are responsible for compliance with this SOP.

Operational procedure

1. Activation of Peer Support Team

Activation of the Peer Support Team (PST) can occur through:

- 1.1. A text message from the ACTRFS SMSER requesting assistance
- 1.2. Contact being made by the ACTRFS Duty Officer to the PST Team Leader or Officer
- 1.3. An individual contacting a Peer Support Officer (PSO) or the Peer Support Duty Phone
- 1.4. An individual being referred to the team by a third party (with the individual's consent).

2. Activation by SMSer or ACTRFS Duty Officer to operations or incident

- 2.1 All PSOs will receive SMS updates regarding operations and incidents (such as requests to assist) for the following operational responses:
 - a. Assist the ACT State Emergency Service
 - b. Staging Area has been set up
 - c. If there is known property and loss of livestock
 - d. Any ACTRFS personnel have had injuries or near misses
 - e. Any circumstances as identified by the ACTRFS Duty Officer that would benefit from PSO assistance.
- 2.2 The PST Leader(s) is notified of operation or incident from either SMSER or from RFSDO for PSO activation at an incident.
- 2.3 The PST Leader contacts PSOs directly to determine availability.
- 2.4 The PST Leader will determine the response team based on availability and experience and advises team members of operation or incident details and transport options (where possible service vehicles are to be used).
- 2.5 The PST Leader then advises the RFSDO and/or RFS Incident Controller of PSO team member availability, operations/incident rostering and contact details.
- 2.6 The assigned PSOs attend to the location of the operation or incident in a timely manner, ensuring they have the following:
 - a. Wearing the appropriate PPE for operation or incident
 - b. PSO Grab bag - include pamphlets, contact cards, resources
 - c. RFS identification badge, WWVP Card

- d. Peer Support t-shirt, hat and brassard
- e. Any other resources or refreshments as required.

3. PSO arrival on scene at operation or incident

- 3.1 Upon arriving on scene, the PSO is to liaise with RFS Incident Controller.
- 3.2 The PSO is to participate in the operation or incident briefing or request a SITREP. It is important that the PSO receives:
 - a. a summary of the incident and operational plan
 - b. information about who is present at the incident
 - c. any site/scene risks and mitigation factors.
- 3.3 The PSO should record the relevant information and ensure they have conducted their own risk assessment upon attendance at the incident or operation.
- 3.4 At an operation or incident, the primary role of the PSO is to provide support to staff and volunteers. Where able, a PSO is to engage with operational or incident staff. Applying their PSO training and skills, PSOs should:
 - a. Be present and visible with operational volunteers and staff at incident.
 - b. Observe the incident and the operational volunteers and staff, looking for signs of fatigue, emotional upset or illness, for example.
 - c. Be mindful of the personal and working space of operational volunteers and staff and respect their privacy.
 - d. Maintain scene and situational awareness including proposed timing meal breaks, briefing schedules and changes in key contacts.
 - e. Assist all volunteers and staff on incident if requested.
 - f. Assist with the distribution of refreshments.
 - g. Ensure that self-care and mental health resources are available.
 - h. Liaise with RFS Incident Controller or operational leaders on team welfare or support needed.
 - i. Encourage volunteers and leaders to have welfare checks.
 - j. Be aware of team composition and which teams may have been involved in significant activities at incidents (such as traumatic exposures) as they may require follow-up at and post incident.
 - k. Participate in the final briefing/debrief.
- 3.5 After an operation or incident, where applicable, the PST Leader will formally communicate and follow up with Captains and Presidents of the Brigades involved in the operation or incident. The PST Leader will advise of post incident welfare and enquire if further PSO Team support is required, maintaining confidentiality at all times.
- 3.6 The PST Leader and members to determine if a PSO team debrief should occur and any other follow-up requirements.
- 3.7 The PST Leader and activated members to record their involvement in the operation or incident as per the PS policy.

4. Activation by individual member to PSO directly

- 4.1 All ACTRFS members across the Service can contact an ACTRFS PSO directly through the contact numbers provided to them from a PSO or via the ACTRFS PSO Duty Phone.
- 4.2 The relevant PSO is to acknowledge individual requesting assistance and advise them of confidentiality obligations and boundaries (as appropriate). PSOs must ensure that the privacy of the communication is maintained (consider venue and situation of contact being made, action as appropriate to maintain privacy).
- 4.3 Using PSO skills, the PSO is to manage the conversation to support individual. The PSO should consider rapport and listening skills (such as active listening and paraphrasing).
- 4.4 It is the PSO's responsibility to monitor the boundaries and the limits of the PSO role. The PSO to consider what other supports may be required (EAP, other support networks, other mental health support services) to assist the person if they require further interventions or supports.
- 4.5 If appropriate, and with consent, the PSO may consider options for next steps, including but not limited to:
 - a. If needed, offer to meet in person for further discussion (consider safety).
 - b. Ask who else can help.
 - c. Ask who can assist in the Brigade/Service.
 - d. Referrals to EAP or to the JACS People Workforce Strategy team.
- 4.6 The PSO will make a private record in their individual PSO notes - details of any relevant conversation and strategies provided.

Definition of terms


Term	Definition
ACTESA	Australian Capital Territory Emergency Services Agency
ACTRFS	Australian Capital Territory Rural Fire Service
ACTSES	Australian Capital Territory State Emergency Services
IMT	Incident Management Team
PSO	Peer Support Officer
PST	Peer Support Team
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SMSER	Short Messaging Service
SITREP	Situation Report
WWVP	Working With Vulnerable People

Document information

Version history

Author	Version	Version Approval Date	Summary of Changes
Ann-Marie Burgoyne ACTRFS PSO Team ACTRFS Operational team	1.0	23 October 2019	SOP authorised
Rohan Scott	2.0	12/12/2019	Renumbered only & reissued
Katherine Jenkins	3.0	23/06/2021	Administrative Review
Andrew Gradie	4.0	1/03/2023	Administrative Review

Approved by

Name	Title/Role	Signature	Date
Rohan Scott	CO ACTRFS		08/02/2024

Document Owner

Position	Section
Director	Volunteer Management

Next review due: 01/02/2027

Related documents

Document name
3.2.2 Peer Support Team On Scene Response SOP

Signed documents will be scanned and filed in TRIM.