

Keep bushfire volunteers safe and well

A local government's safety obligations

Local government organisations must, as far as 'reasonably practicable' ensure volunteers, are not harmed as a result of work carried on their behalf. Most would agree that the role bushfire volunteers carry out on behalf of local government, is valuable and high risk.

Whilst legislation does not specify the steps local government must take to prevent harm to volunteers - it's important to consider the severity of any potential injury and harm to health, the likelihood of this harm occurring, and the availability of both financial and physical control measures. The legislation is broad and states that hazards and risks must be identified, assessed, and controlled in a 'reasonably practical' manner.

The level of risk associated with the volunteer activity will influence the actions required by a local government. For those local governments that have a team of bushfire volunteers there will need to be extensive action to ensure bushfire volunteers are not harmed, and return home safe and well to their families.

Doing what is 'reasonable and practical' will depend on the circumstances of each case. It is expected that local governments undertake the following activities, to demonstrate their commitment to ensuring the safety of bushfire volunteers.

Local government responsibility	Practical steps to achieve
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure all potential hazards have been identified and controls in place. Communicate this to volunteers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify hazards associated with the environment, work tasks, and activities. Assess the risk and controls in accordance with hazard management processes and procedures. Actively communicate to all volunteers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dual control of a workplace. e.g.: Bushfire event, work in collaboration with other parties (BFB, DFES) to ensure the safety of volunteers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain regular consultation, agreed handover procedures, and clear roles and responsibilities, between all parties.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take action to ensure that volunteers understand their duties and responsibilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide volunteers with training on their roles and responsibilities, as well task specific training.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure policies and procedures are in place for the clear governance of recruitment, screening and supervision of volunteers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage your volunteer recruitment process, with clear framework, including supervision of volunteers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocate sufficient resources (physical and financial) to effectively manage and develop the volunteer program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure responsibilities form part of individuals roles and financial resources are in place (sufficient budget for adequate training, supply of PPE etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide volunteers with personal protective clothing and equipment (PPC & PPE) and safety equipment, where required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure PPC & PPE is budgeted for and available to volunteers. Make sure volunteers know when and how to use PPE and equipment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate and consult with volunteers on occupational safety and health issues. Induct, train, and instruct volunteers in their tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide volunteers with an induction, safety information, safety manuals, and appropriate training.

For more information or assistance

Contact Emma Horsefield, LGIS Safety Program Manager at emma.horsefield@lgiswa.com.au or contact your Regional Risk Coordinator