Recording decisions at incidents

New policy number:	**828**
Old instruction number:	
Issue date:	**30 October 2013**
Reviewed as current:	**17 January 2017**
Owner:	**Head of Incident Command Policy & Operations Review Team**
Responsible work team:	**Incident command policy**

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 Operational personnel will be familiar with the fact that notes and records are often needed following attendance at an operational incident. There are various types of records which can provide a clear account of what occurred from the time the call was taken by Brigade Control, to the time the last appliance left the incident ground.

1.2 At some incidents it is necessary for the incident commander (IC) or other operational officers to record the decisions made and to provide their rationale for why certain actions were either taken or not taken. This may be of particular importance if the actions carried out deviated from the Brigade's standard operational procedures (SOPs) or at incidents where a public inquiry or inquest is anticipated.

1.3 This policy provides guidance for operational personnel on the type of records that can be created at incidents and the way in which certain decisions should be recorded. It also sets out the circumstances when recording the decision making process is necessary or advisable.

1.4 All references in this document to 'incident' also apply to those training and exercise events where record keeping is being practised or is otherwise appropriate.

2 Clarification of terms

2.1 For the purposes of this policy, the terms below have the following meaning:

- Decision logging – A means of documenting decisions made at an incident, with reference to the rationale behind why the decisions were made.
- Key decision – A decision or course of actions which either amends or changes current operational procedure, or which has an actual or potential significant impact on another organisation, person or location.
- Hazard – Something with the potential to cause harm. This could be anything from a trip hazard to an acetylene cylinder involved in fire.
- Risk – A measure of the likelihood that the harm from a particular hazard will occur, and the possible severity of the harm.
- Risk assessment – The process of identifying hazards, who or what is at risk from those hazards, the likely severity of that risk, and the control measures required to either remove or minimise the risk.
- Risk/benefit analysis – A comparison between who and/or what the decision or hazard is likely to present a risk to, and the potential benefits from a particular course of action.

3 Types of records

3.1 **Automated/system based records** – All incidents attended generate a report within the incident management system (IMS), as well as that generated on the BOSS (Browser of System Status). While much information is automatically generated, it is supplemented by detail provided by the initial and subsequent IC. These electronic incident records account for most of the information stored about incidents attended.

3.2 **Statements** – Some incidents, such as those leading to investigation into the cause of a fatal fire, require more information than is recorded within any automated system. It is usual for a signed and witnessed written statement to be required under these circumstances, and this is normally taken at the incident or shortly after it occurs. The creation of statements may be supported by members of the FIT, or by the police.

3.3 **Contemporaneous notes** – To support writing of a statement, especially if the statement is not made immediately at the incident, it is important that a contemporaneous note is made to record the sequence of events and other detail that is likely to be relevant but which might otherwise be forgotten over time. These notes are made at the time of the incident, or as soon as practicable (within 24 hours) afterwards. They may be hand-written or created on a personal computer (PC) or other information technology (IT) based system, and should contain a factual account of actions taken and a record of what has been observed and heard.

3.4 **Decision logs** – There are situations where the IC or another officer makes decisions regarding actions that may have a major impact on members of the public, or other services not directly involved in the incident. There are also occasions when full adherence to the brigade's current operational procedure would either risk the loss of a saveable life or create a delay that would increase risk to firefighters. In both cases, it is important that the circumstances and rationale for such decisions are recorded at the time they are made.

3.5 Information relating to the decision made, which will include the reasons why certain actions were considered necessary, and the safety measures implemented to remove or reduce any identified risk, should be recorded in a decision log. The decision log may be a hand-written document, or entered via one of the tools available in the command support system (CSS), which can be accessed on a command unit (CU) if one is in attendance at the incident.

4 Recording decisions

4.1 Decision logging at incidents will provide the IC and other operational personnel with a record that will support their ability to recollect the incident after the event accurately. In addition, such records may also assist any subsequent investigation, as they will show what actions were taken and when, that they were made rationally, safely, and based on the information that was available at the time the decision was made.

4.2 If an incident is subject to either public inquiry or inquest, the decision log and other associated records, will benefit any personnel required to provide either written statements or evidence in person.

4.3 When considering decision logging, a clear distinction should be made between:

(a) decisions to carry out an action that does not create any additional risk to operational personnel and which does not amend or change any current operational procedures, but which has a significant impact on members of the public or other services (e.g., the long-term closure of a road or railway, or the evacuation of nearby properties); and,

(b) decisions that lead to actions not covered by operational procedure in circumstances where compliance with all aspects of the policy are not appropriate due to the prevailing circumstances at an incident. These decisions may require additional safety measures to be put in place in order to reduce the risk to operational personnel to an acceptable level (e.g., establishing a bridgehead one floor below the fire because the building layout and design, and prevailing conditions make this a safe option, and where the location of dry rising main outlets, and/or the long travel distance to the fire would cause delay, if the bridgehead were located two floors below the fire).

4.4   While both types of decision will require a decision log to be completed, the type of information that is recorded will be slightly different.

4.5   If a decision relates to an action that does not add any additional risk to personnel, and it meets the requirements within the relevant operational procedure (as per 4.3(a) above), then a simple written log can be created. This log should include:

- The name of the person who is making the decision. (Note - this will not necessarily be the same as the loggist.)
- A decision number (in case there is more than one decision that requires logging at the incident).
- The time that the log entry is made.
- The time that the action was, or is intended to be, carried out.
- The location on the incident ground to which the decision refers (e.g., sector 1; A40 west-bound).
- A description of the action required (what is it that must be done).
- The rationale underpinning the decision (why must this action be taken or, if the decision is not to act, why action is not being taken).
- What is the anticipated impact of carrying out the action (who will be affected and for how long).

4.6   Where a decision is made to carry out actions that amend or change a current operational procedure (as described in 4.3(b) above), this will need to be recorded in a key decision log (KDL) and a risk assessment of the proposed activity will need to be undertaken. The risk assessment must show that additional hazards and the associated risks have been identified and that appropriate control measures implemented before any action is taken.

4.7   The information that must be recorded is:

- Decision number.
- Time entered.
- Name of the person making the decision and their role at the incident.
- The location to which the decision/intended action refers.
- The proposed action.
- The rationale behind why the action needs to be taken (i.e., and explanation of why the operational procedure is not suitable in this circumstance).
- What are the benefits of carrying out this action.
- What are the associated hazards and risks when carrying out the proposed action.
- What additional control measures will be implemented to minimise the risk to people.
- An overall risk ranking of the planned activity (this will be achieved through completion of a risk ranking matrix).
- Confirmation that the IC has been informed (if they did not make the decision) and that the actions are agreed.

4.8   If a CU is in attendance at the incident when a decision needs to be logged, then the facilities available via CSS should be used. Two types of logging exists within CSS; the simple "decision log" for instances where policy is not amended or additional safety measures are not needed, and the KDL (see appendix 1 - Key decision log), which will require a risk assessment to be carried out.

4.9   When a CU is not in attendance then all decisions that need to be logged should be recorded on the KDL form (F6182). A pad of these forms should be kept on all pumping appliances.

4.10   If a CU attends an incident after a decision has been logged using the KDL form, the IC must ensure that the record is copied on to CSS. A copy of the original log should be retained.

4.11   The decision logging tools within CSS are incident specific, and so are able to provide a direct link between the decision made and the incident attended.

4.12   If there is any doubt regarding the type of record that is required for a particular decision, then the default position should always be to use the KDL.

5   The decision logging process

5.1   At all incidents the IC will make decisions about the course of actions to take based on the available information, the incident objectives, and what is necessary to achieve their plan. This will always include carrying out an initial risk assessment, assessing current hazards and implementing suitable control measures, following the process described within Policy number 341 – Decision making model and Policy number 342 - Dynamic risk assessment.

5.2   The initial actions of the IC should ensure that the appropriate operational procedures are put into effect wherever possible.

5.3   Where there is clear information at the incident which suggests that an adjustment to the operational procedure is required, or where a course of action based on the operational procedures will have a significant impact on members of the public or other services, then the planned action must be recorded along with the reason and expected outcome.

5.4   The dynamic nature of some incidents may mean that it is not possible for a decision log to be started immediately. However, key decisions are to be recorded as soon as reasonably practicable using the KDL form, or within the appropriate logging tool within CSS. Use of CSS will only be possible when a CU is in attendance at an incident and they have completed their initial supporting actions for the IC.

5.5   To assist with the recording process at incidents, the IC should consider nominating someone to act as a loggist. At smaller incidents this would typically be the same person that the IC has nominated to send and receive messages to and from Brigade Control.

5.6   Where a CU is in attendance, the role of loggist may be given to one of the CU crew. At larger incidents, or where one of the CU crew are not available to act as loggist, the IC should consider nominating a senior manager for this role.

5.7   When deciding who to nominate for this role, the IC should consider the nature and scale of the incident and the likely complexity of the log that will be produced.

5.8   The loggist will be required to make a record of decisions made, which may include the outcome of any risk assessments carried out, and the rationale behind the decision.

5.9   Decisions should be recorded on:
- The key decision log pad.
- The CU decision log – found within the "gathering and thinking" tools on CSS.
- The Key decision log – found within the "strategic development" tools on CSS.
  (Further information about use of CSS can be found in Policy number 722 – Command support system).

5.10   **Whenever a KDL is completed, a risk assessment of the activity must be made and the risk ranking matrix completed** (see appendix 2). The KDL form within CSS prompts the user to complete the associated risk ranking matrix and will not allow the document to be saved without a score being recorded.

5.11 Completion of a KDL does not preclude additional information from being recorded in another incident related log if this will provide a more in-depth rationale for why the decision is being made. For example, this may include information about: fire-spread and building construction; business or community impacts arising from the decisions being made; other agency's requests and priorities; or information about the type and location of people involved.

5.12 A flow chart outlining the decision making and recording process can be found in appendix 3 – Process flow chart.

6 Managing risk at incidents

6.1 The fire service has a clear and defined methodology for managing risks encountered at operational incidents, which is supported by:

- Generic risk assessments – these are nationally produced, and provide statements of risk and possible control measures relevant to the fire service as a whole. They are based on information gained from operational experience across the UK and are intended to support the creation of locally based risk assessments and operational procedures.
- Strategic risk assessments – created locally by each Fire Rescue Service (FRS) and based on the national generic risk assessments. These result in the creation of detailed operational procedures and the determination of a pre-determined attendance (PDA) for specific incident types, as well as informing decisions regarding appropriate training, operational appliances and equipment, and PPE for operational personnel.
- Incident risk assessments – this is where the IC initially gathers information about the incident they are attending, and determines the operational plan to deal with the incident based on identified hazards and objectives. This will result in the appropriate control measures being applied to ensure safe systems of work are implemented. Incident risk assessments continue with all operational personnel carrying out actions in the operational environment. This process is outlined with Policy number 342 - Dynamic risk assessment.

6.2 As stated in 5.10 above, decisions recorded in the KDL will require the "decision maker" (normally the IC) to complete a risk assessment of the intended actions; this will also include completion of the risk assessment matrix.

6.3 Consideration of the hazards, the harm that may be caused by the hazard, and the likelihood that harm will occur will result in the activity being rated as either a low, medium, or high risk which will be represented by the overall score.

6.4 There is a balance between ensuring firefighter safety and carrying out the role of the fire and rescue service. This is known as the Firefighter Safety Maxim, and is as follows:

"At every incident the greater the potential benefit of fire and rescue actions, the greater the risk that is accepted by commanders and firefighters. Activities that present a high risk to safety are limited to those that have the potential to save life or to prevent rapid and significant escalation of the incident."

6.5 If the IC considers that a course of action is required that amends or changes a current operational procedure they must ensure that sufficient control measures are implemented to reduce the risk of injury to operational personnel to as low as reasonably practicable.

6.6 If, despite the implementation of additional control measures, the risk assessment ranking is still considered "high" then it is likely that the proposed activity carries an unacceptable level of risk. Under these circumstances, the KDL acts to support the decision maker to show why a particular course of action was not taken.

6.7   Any deviation from the relevant operational procedure should be the **minimum** required to achieve an objective. As soon as possible after an activity has been carried out that has amended or changed, the IC should resume implementation of the relevant operational procedure(s).

7   The role of the decision maker

7.1   At smaller incidents, the IC will always be the person who makes operational decisions, determines the overall objectives, and establishes the operational plan and the resources required to meet it. Therefore, the IC is the most likely person to make key decisions at the incident.

7.2   At larger incidents, where sector commander or operations commander roles have been allocated, they may be given authority to manage, determine or amend aspects of the overall operational plan. As a consequence, a sector commander or operations commander may be in a position to make a key decision.

7.3   Irrespective of the role of the decision maker, whenever a key decision is made at an incident which amends or changes current operational procedure, or which has a significant impact on another organisation, person or location, it will require recording in either the decision log or the KDL as described in section 5, above.

7.4   If a sector commander or operations commander make a key decision, they must ensure that the relevant information is recorded. Unless the allocated role permits them to leave the area in which they are working, it may be necessary to request that a loggist attend their current location or that another loggist is appointed.

7.5   As the officer with overall responsibility for actions taken on the incident ground, the IC must be informed of any key decisions that are being made. This is especially true where the intended actions will amend or change current operational procedures. The IC should be given a brief account of the reason why the decision to amend or change an operational procedure is being considered, and must be informed of the risk, benefits, and additional control measures that will be implemented.

7.6   If the IC considers that the stated benefit is out-weighed by the risk to crews, then they should not allow the proposed activity to take place. The decision **not** to proceed with an activity should be captured within the KDL form.

7.7   At all times, the safety of crews must be a paramount consideration and any decision that leads to additional risk must be justifiable in terms of the benefit(s) it will lead to.

8   Storage of paper/IT based records

8.1   All records relating to incidents attended are covered by the guidance outlined within Policy number 605 – Records management strategy. This includes individual contemporaneous notes, which are kept by the individual, as well as hand written KDLs which are retained at station, with a copy sent to the Brigade's Operations, Prevention and Response Department Admin, at Brigade HQ, for archiving.

8.2   Any records created within CSS will be stored with the incident record on CSS and will need no further action to be taken.

8.3   Incident related records are kept at stations for a period of 3 years, after which time they should be sent to the brigade's record centre at HQ for storage.

8.4   A record of the 'key' decisions, which may dictate future policy or a initiate a change of current policy, should be recorded on the IMS database.

9　Further reading

9.1　The associated policy documents and reference material that should be read along with this policy include:

- Policy number 238 – Incident command procedures,
- Policy number 341 – Decision making model,
- Policy number 342 – Dynamic risk assessment
- Policy number 408 – Incident command
- Policy number 605 - Records management strategy
- Policy number 673 - Risk assessment procedure
- Policy number 722 – Command support system
- Fire Service Manual, vol.2 – Fire Service Operations; Incident Command – HM Fire Service Inspectorate publication.
  http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/incidentcommand.pdf

Appendix 1 - Key decision log

L F B
LONDON FIRE BRIGADE

White – Send to Operations, Prevention and Response Department administration making decision   Green – Retained by officer

Incident number	Date	Name
Decision number	**Time**	**Role at incident**

Location at incident (Specify the location this decision refers to.)

Proposed action (What is the activity that you want to take place?)

Reason/rationale (What are the benefits of carrying out the proposed action, what will it achieve?)

Hazards/risks identified (What hazards have you identified and what risks are associated with the proposed activity?)

Control measures to minimise risk (What specific control measures will be in place to keep people safe while carrying out the proposed activity and what is the risk ranking with the control measures?)

	Risk ranking

Form 6182

Appendix 2 – Risk assessment matrix

RISK RANKING

Ranking risks is necessary in order to identify their relative importance. The degree of risk associated with a particular hazard depends on the likelihood of it causing an accident and the probable severity of the consequence of such an accident. The focus in applying this methodology is the risk faced by a single typical member of the Occupation responsible for carrying out the task giving rise to the hazard.

This ranking system involves classifying likelihood (in terms of frequency) and severity each on a five point scale and then multiplying them both together to give the risk ranking as follows:

This matrix gives possible ranking values as follows:

RISK = SEVERITY x LIKELIHOOD

The ranking values can then be grouped into three broad classes of risk:

Critical Risks	16 – 25	HIGH
Significant Risks	8 – 15	MEDIUM
Minor Risks	1 – 7	LOW

		SEVERITY				
		5 Single or multiple fatalities	**4** Major disabling injury	**3** Injury resulting in 3 or more days off	**2** Minor Injury	**1** Accident or near miss with no harm arising
LIKELIHOOD	**5** Very likely to occur	25	20	15	10	5
	4 Probable	20	16	12	8	4
	3 Possible	15	12	9	6	3
	2 Remote	10	8	6	4	2
	1 Improbable	5	4	3	2	1

Appendix 3 – Process flow chart

The following diagram demonstrates the process that should be used at incidents when determining whether decisions made at the incident need to be recorded and, if so, which type of record is most appropriate. The IC will always need to gather information, identify objectives, carry out a DRA, implement suitable control measures, and initiate an appropriate plan.
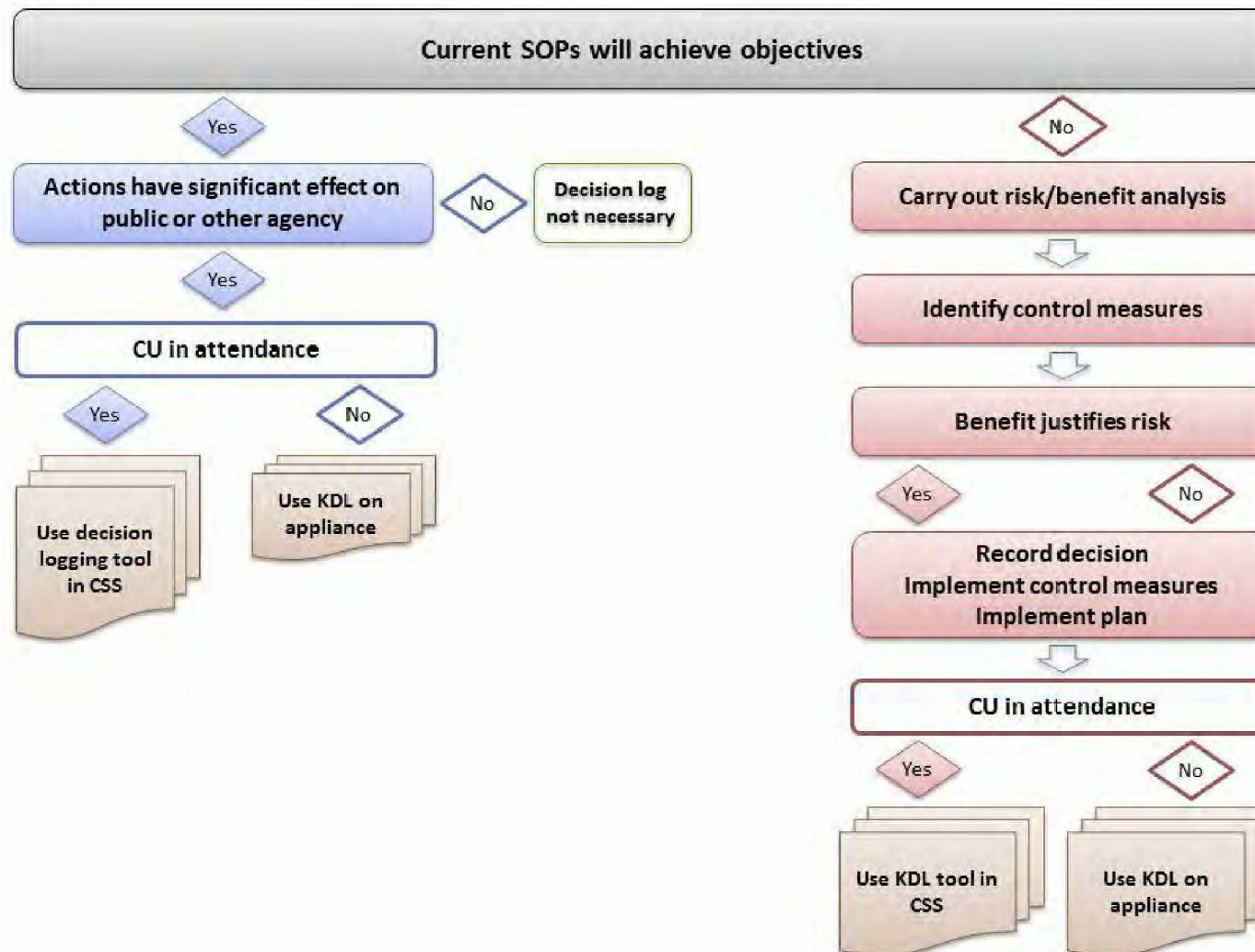
Document history

Assessments

An equality, sustainability or health, safety and welfare impact assessment and/or a risk assessment was last completed on:

EIA	22/08/2012	SDIA	22/08/2012	HSWIA		RA	26/09/2012

Audit trail

Listed below is a brief audit trail, detailing amendments made to this policy/procedure.

Page/para nos.	Brief description of change	Date
Page 12	'Subjects list' table - template updated	05/12/2014
Page 2	Updated MOBIS to BOSS.	24/10/2016
Page 6, para 6.4	Paragraph updated and policy marked as current.	17/01/2017

Subject list

You can find this policy under the following subjects.

Decision log	Records management
Risk management	Decision making
Incident command / management	Command support

Freedom of Information Act exemptions

This policy/procedure has been securely marked due to:

Considered by: (responsible work team)	FOIA exemption	Security marking classification