

Centre stage

The State Operations Centre at NSW RFS Headquarters in Lidcombe is a world-class facility which allows the Service and its partners to effectively oversee and coordinate incidents. The staff within the Centre monitor developments, analyse their potential and provide a variety of specialised resources to the Incident Management Teams and firefighters on the ground.

On 'bad' fire days it is unusual for there to be just the one fire. It's not uncommon for

there to be dozens, and there can sometimes be hundreds. Someone needs to keep track of all that is going on. This includes directing stretched resources to where they can do the most good across the State, providing specialised support, making sure the right people get the right information to take action, keeping the whole community informed, checking things are running well and advise, support or even intervene if needed when

things are going 'pear-shaped' in places.

Holding this 'big picture' overview is the job of the State Operations Centre.

During major periods of heightened fire danger State Operations has four main functions:

- Readiness
- Command, Control and Coordination
- Specialised Support
- Intelligence Support

The design and layout of the State Operations Centre was the subject of detailed analysis and planning prior to 2004, when the NSW RFS Headquarters was built. The room consists mainly of three concentric circles:

The Centre Circle (also referred to as the "Centre of the Room")

State level officers are stationed here including the State Operations Controller (SOC), the Strategic Overview Officer (SOO) and the State

Public Liaison Officer (SPLO) and their assistants. The circular design of the desks reflects the flow of information. Information flows inwards and decisions flow outwards from the Centre Circle to the concentric circles around it.

Middle Circle

The four regional Major Incident Coordination teams (MIC teams) are set up around the middle circle and act on behalf of the SOC to interact with various parts of the State –

North, South, East and West. The MIC teams, which are led by a Coordinator, are the point of contact (or 'one stop shop') for Incident Controllers across NSW, and provide scrutiny and support for incident management activities.

Outer Circle

The outer circle consists of representatives from Key Functional Areas including various agencies and authorities who may have a supporting role to play

during major fire activity. These can include transport, communications, water supply, electricity, welfare and other specialists. They help coordinate actions such as maintaining key services, shutting down key infrastructure threatened by fires (and re-opening them as soon as feasible), and feeding back information from their operators in the field.

There are also areas for technical specialists, including the Bureau of Meteorology

(BOM), fire behaviour analysts and geographic information services (GIS) to operate. They produce weather forecasts, track critical weather changes, provide predictions of likely fire behaviour using computer models and generate maps of fires from reconnaissance data.

1 The Knowledge Wall

Quite literally 'the big picture' – this state of the art facility displays levels of readiness, weather information, State-wide fire activity, current levels of warning/alert for each incident and key intelligence products for the whole of NSW. The latest feeds of information from ICON, BOM, helicopters cameras, Twitter and other social media, are displayed directly on the Knowledge Wall. The Wall allows everyone in the room to see the same information at the same time. At any given time, anyone in the room can check the latest information being received and being broadcast by glancing up at The Knowledge Wall.

2 State Air Desk

The NSW RFS has more than 100 aircraft available each bush fire season and their movements along with their support units such as refuelling points, are coordinated by the State Air Desk.

3 Police and Other Fire Agencies

Agencies such as Fire and Rescue NSW, National Parks, Forestry Corporation and NSW Police work within the State Operations Centre helping to ensure consistency of information and a coordinated effort.

4 Key Emergency Management Functional Areas

Functional areas include utilities like power telecommunications and water as well as agencies including transport, health, Ambulance Service of NSW, Department of Defence, Public Works and welfare.



5 Fire Behaviour Analysis

Weather is a critical factor in the firefighting effort. Forecasters from the Bureau of Meteorology provide the latest information while NSW RFS Fire Behaviour Analysts provide fire predictions.

6 Public Liaison Unit

This team coordinates information and assists with the delivery of warnings to the community such as through the NSW RFS website media, social media and the Bush Fire Information Line.

7 Touchscreen table

A large touchscreen that allows a group of people to examine COP (Common Operating Picture), maps, incident overlays and other detailed graphical information related to fire intelligence and planning.

8 Emergency Alert Operator

Here operators develop and send out Emergency Alerts telephone/SMS warning and/or advice to the fire-affected communities in consultation with local Incident Controllers and the SOC, SOO and SPLO.

9 Regional Major Incident Coordination

NSW is divided into four regions – North, South, East and West. These teams help coordinate the firefighting effort in their region making sure local teams have got the resources they need.

10 State Public Liaison Officer (SPLO)

This officer maintains contact with the Public Liaison Officers on local Incident Management Teams. The local PLO provides information and warnings to the local community.

11 State Operations Controller (SOC)

A key player at the "centre of the room", The State Operations Controller, maintains overall awareness of the firefighting effort across the State ensuring information and warnings are being distributed and resources are being allocated where needed.

12 Strategic Overview Officer (SOO)

Supporting the SOC, this position gathers information and intelligence to ensure that the SOC and other position holders are able to make the most informed decisions possible. The SOO is constantly analysing what is occurring at incidents and what is likely to occur based on current and forecast conditions.