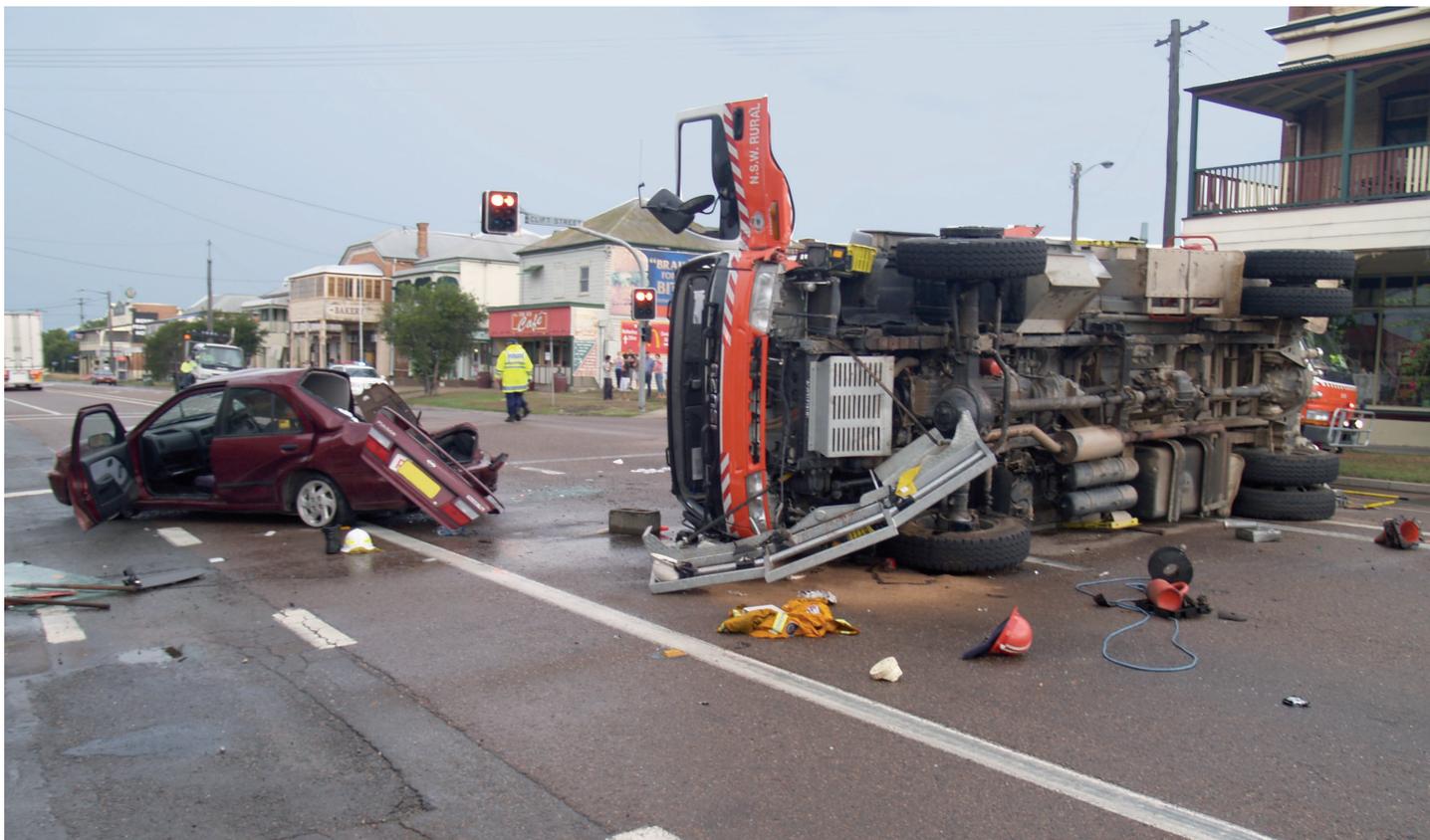


# RESPONSE DRIVING



## Driving Under Emergency Conditions

Generally RFS vehicles are required to 'respond' as part of the initial response to an emergency incident, under the instruction of the Incident Controller (IC), District/Team/Zone Manager (D/T/Z) or other person with delegated authority.

Driving under emergency conditions starts from receipt of the instruction to 'respond' in an RFS vehicle and stops when there is no longer a risk at an incident or a requirement to respond.

A response by the RFS is defined as driving beyond normal traffic regulations but within the exemptions under the Australian Road Rules, using lights and sirens as appropriate for the conditions, to provide both adequate warning to and maintain the safety of other road users.

**Remember – if you have an accident en-route to an emergency incident you have defeated the purpose for which you were responded.**

Members in private vehicles driving to the brigade station or direct to the incident are to observe all Australian Road Rules at all times.

Support vehicles (communications, catering, CABA support, lighting, supply, crew transport, etc.) and appliances called later to assist should proceed (i.e. drive normally, obeying all traffic rules and without using lights and siren) to the incident unless there is an explicit instruction to respond by the IC, D/T/Z Manager or other person with delegated authority.

## RFS Standard Operating Procedures

Certain exemptions for emergency vehicles exist under the Australian Road Rules 1999. Rule 306 provides certain exemptions for drivers of Police and other emergency vehicles to operate 'outside' traffic legislation under limited circumstances provided that 'reasonable' care is taken. However, even the most serious emergency does not legally excuse a reckless disregard for the safety of others.

**Regardless of legislated exemptions, RFS drivers are to come to a complete stop and not proceed until it is confirmed as safe, if they encounter:**

- Red traffic lights or a 'Stop' sign.
- Unguarded railway crossings with limited visibility or if a train is approaching.
- Blind intersections.
- Intersections where traffic in some lanes is not visible.
- Intersections where the RFS vehicle does not have right of way.

**RFS drivers are to slow down to a speed which will allow them to quickly stop and avoid a collision, and stop whenever it is not confirmed as safe, if they encounter:**

- 'Give way' signs.
- Pedestrian crossings (unoccupied).
- Buses setting down passengers.
- The vicinity of schools when students are arriving or leaving.

## Traffic Rules

RFS drivers will comply with specific regulations from the Australian Road Rules and the NSW Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Regulation, which include:

- Speed limit in a school zone.
- Speed limit when passing school bus displaying an illuminated 40km/h speed limit sign/lights.
- Stopping at a children's crossing.
- Giving way at a pedestrian crossing.
- Not entering a level crossing when a train is approaching.

## Road Works

Drivers responding under emergency conditions will comply with the speed limits posted at locations where road works are in progress and will also stop when instructed by traffic controllers (Note: traffic controllers are required to progress emergency vehicles when safe to do so).

## Pedestrians

Pedestrians do not have to assist the passage of an emergency vehicle. The driver of an RFS vehicle can't force a passage through pedestrians, but whilst pedestrians may choose to give way, the driver must be prepared to stop for pedestrians at all times.

## Other Road Users

**Regardless of the urgency, no exemption gives the RFS driver the authority to force another road user to break the Australian Road Rules.**

# RESPONSE DRIVING

## ALWAYS WEAR SEATBELTS



### Responding on FREEWAYS AND HIGHWAYS

- 1 Take note of **speed advisory signs** - they are a good indication of how fast a truck can safely travel
- 2 Know where **emergency vehicle u-turn bays** are located
- 3 If using the **left-hand breakdown lane** use extreme caution



### Responding in URBAN AREAS

- 1 **Stop at red lights and stop signs**
- 2 Don't travel too close to **other responding emergency vehicles**
- 3 Be ready for **unexpected reactions** from other drivers



### Responding in RURAL AREAS

- 1 **Watch out for cattle**
- 2 Watch out for **slow moving farm machinery**
- 3 **Slow down when crossing fords or narrow bridges and observe weight limits**



### Responding in RURAL TOWNS

- 1 **Stop at unguarded railway crossings**
- 2 Watch for **cars parked rear to curb** suddenly pulling out
- 3 Watch when going from **tarmac to dirt roads**



A motor vehicle accident (MVA) is really a misnomer, as all accidents could be avoided if the circumstances were different, so more realistically they are motor vehicle crashes. Crashes are influenced by three main categories of factors: our behaviour and distractions; our vehicle and its capabilities; and the road or track on which we are driving coupled with the accompanying weather conditions.

**There have been 84 incidents involving RFS service vehicles reported to State Operations since 2000 of which 62 were crashes, 19 were affected by fire and 3 which were subjected to the impact of a falling tree.**

Within the last twelve months Brigades responded to approximately 1,600 accidents within Rural Fire District, many of which were fatal. According to the Australian Transport Safety Bureau there were 1636 fatalities during 2005 of which 518 were in NSW. Unfortunately such fatalities are so numerous that many do not even make the daily news unless there are multiple fatalities, an innocent victim is killed, there is some specific media interest or it occurs over a public holiday period. It should also be noted that according to Roads and Traffic Authority statistics there are around 26,000 people injured annually, many of whom are seriously injured requiring longer term hospitalisation, with ongoing trauma which often results in total disruption of their family life and their career.

## Visible and Audible Warning Devices

**Visible and audible warning devices (lights and siren/two tone air horns) must be used at all times, whilst driving 'outside' traffic legislation under emergency legislated exemptions, however sirens may not be appropriate**

**on private lands or in remote or rural areas in circumstances where there is livestock, there is no other traffic or there is no safety advantage to be gained by their use. Visible warning devices are still to be used at all times.**

The driver must have control of the visible and audible warning devices and shall make decisions on the applicability of their use.

Driving under lights and sirens may adversely affect a number of drivers, particularly when the adrenalin is flowing and there seems to be an urgency to get to an incident.

**You must consider the type of incident and determine whether it is life threatening and adjust your driving accordingly. Will a few seconds make any difference to the outcome?**

## Distractions

Talking on a mobile phone or text messaging is illegal and can distract the driver, but equally providing a SitRep over the radio will provide a similar distraction so care must be taken. Trying to read a map and drive is also very hazardous.

Other distractions may include personnel in the vehicle. For example the Officer in Charge should ensure that they do not distract the driver when briefing the crew en-route.

## Our vehicle and its capabilities

Many of our members are used to driving motor cars rather than heavier trucks so the driver must always be aware of increased stopping distances, reduced manoeuvrability and different cornering dynamics.

**Seat belts must always be worn by all members except when direct firefighting on the fireground and generally it is also safer if the windows are fully wound up.**

## The road or track on which we are driving coupled with the accompanying weather conditions

Consider the particular type of road, track or trail surface, coupled with the width and number of lanes, road markings, particularly unbroken double lines, the posted speed limit and advisory speed signs. Then add to this the results of adverse weather conditions such as wet or icy surfaces, minor flooding, foggy conditions and of course darkness and you are starting to identify some of the aspects which contribute to crashes. Always look ahead to identify all hazards and adjust your driving accordingly.

The Rural Fire Service has introduced a Crash Free Driving Course, so when this becomes available to you, it would be great to take advantage of the opportunity.

## Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Act 1999 and the Crimes Act 1900

**There are no exemptions for drivers for negligent, furious, reckless, predatory or menacing driving, negligent or dangerous driving causing death or grievous bodily harm, driving at a speed or in a dangerous manner.**

Failure to meet the requirements of "reasonable care" may mean that the driver is subject to civil and/or criminal liability in the event of a collision.

Chief Superintendent Alan Brinkworth AFMS  
Manager Operations, Policy and Standards