

Fire Service Engagement in Civil Disturbance

Executive Development

Fire Service Engagement During Civil Disturbance

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### Abstract

The research investigates initiatives by other fire services to develop a contemporary standard operating procedure to enhance responder safety, operational preparedness and community outcomes during civil disturbance. Action research was employed to identify fire services involvement, risks and impacts of engagement and procedural development. A literature review, fire service comparisons, focus groups and telephone interviews of Australia's major metropolitan fire services supported the findings that fire services are extensively involved in these activities, risks are significant, training and equipping supported by procedures are key success mechanisms. The researcher recommended that, civil disturbance procedures are implemented, a multi agency threat management group, mutual aid agreements and training between agencies be developed and the Victorian State Emergency Management Arrangements incorporate civil disturbance.

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## Introduction

The Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFESB) operates within the greater metropolitan area of Melbourne in the State of Victoria, Australia. The MFESB emergency response area spans approximately 1200 square kilometres. Melbourne has a large multi cultural and transient population of approximately 3.5 million people and like many major cities around the world, has a diverse range of hazards. These hazards require highly trained and motivated staff that are well resourced to operate within the current threat environment.

The Government of Victoria and indeed the community hold the MFESB in high regard in relation to their ability to mitigate emergencies and for emergency management planning capabilities.

In recent times, civil disturbance activities have tested the capability of the MFESB. These events have resulted in deliberately lit fires causing property damage and increased community risk. Incidents of this nature have been escalating over the past 4 years bringing fire fighters into direct conflict with protest groups.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the initiatives being undertaken by other fire services in response to engagement during times of civil disturbance and to develop a contemporary standard operating procedure that will enhance responder safety, operational preparedness and community outcomes.

Historical, descriptive, evaluative and action research methodologies are employed to answer the following questions:-

To what extent have fire services been engaged in civil disturbance activities?

What are the risks associated with civil disturbance engagement?

What are the impacts of fire service engagement in civil disturbance?

What procedures, if any, have been developed?

### Background and Significance

The Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board (MFBB) was established following a parliamentary review in December 1890 resulting in the establishment of a full time permanent fire fighting service in Victoria. Prior to 1890, insurance company brigades operated within the outer regions of the city while insurance company financed brigades operated within the city of Melbourne.

In 1997 another parliamentary review considered the role of the MFBB and recommended that the organisation reflect the services it provides to the community. This resulted in a name change to MFESB.

The MFESB is a statutory body within the portfolio of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The area of jurisdiction (Greater Melbourne) is approximately 1200 square kilometres and is located on the south eastern seaboard of Australia in the State of Victoria. The annual operating budget is approximately \$AUD225 million and service delivery is achieved through 47 strategically located stations. Approximately 1500 full time professional firefighters provide emergency response activities and are supported by 330 support (non uniform) staff. The MFESB's planning activities extend to major events such as the Australian Formula 1 Grand Prix, Commonwealth Games (2006) and other events considered to have potential impact and risk upon the community. Emergency response activities as legislated within the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act (1958) are broadly premised upon any call for assistance. The MFESB, however, is the controlling authority for a number of specific incidents, including fire suppression, hazardous materials response, rescue from heights, road accident rescue, urban search and rescue (USAR) and emergency medical response. These accountabilities are clearly

defined within the Victorian Emergency Management Arrangements 1995, part 6, under the auspices of the Emergency Management Act, 1986. During 2003, the MFESB attended approximately 34,000 emergency incidents (MFESB Annual Report, 2003).

There has been a significant increase in recent years of civil disturbance activity within Melbourne, which have resulted in a response by the MFESB. Of note was the World Economic Forum (2000), which attracted in excess of 10,000 protestors. During this event, fire fighters were responded to extinguish many fires and manage fire and chemical related threats to the environs of the forum. Whilst there were no injuries to fire fighters, many injuries were sustained by police officers during confrontations with protestors. Malicious damage was caused to vehicles located in the vicinity of the event and many businesses were closed because of the violence and potential spread into neighbouring areas. The consequent management of events in terms of fires and chemical release are the legislative accountability of the MFESB to mitigate.

Police on numerous occasions have requested the MFESB to support their efforts during civil disturbance. This has extended to requests for equipment such as hose lines for police use, rescue activities to remove locking devices from protestors and fire fighting.

More recently Melbourne's Greek community gathered in the central business district to celebrate their countries position during the European World Cup finals. Although police were present, the crowd became unruly and ignited a number of fires in the street and signal flares were thrown about the crowd. The MFESB was responded to support police and extinguish the fires. Whilst in attendance, fire fighters and their equipment were surrounded by the crowd. Whilst no fire fighters or police were injured during this incident, the potential for injury, damage to equipment and confrontation between responders and revellers was high.

Irrespective of these recent events, no response protocols have been established for civil disturbance response, despite the legislative accountabilities of the MFESB for the protection of life and property, the workplace safety of responding fire fighters and the expectations of the community.

This research addressed a shortfall in the MFESB's response and preparedness capability and fire fighter safety. It relates specifically to:

A reduction in the loss of life of fire fighters and

The ability to respond appropriately in a timely manner to emerging issues,

as identified within the objectives of the Executive Fire Officer Program study guide 2004.

#### Literature Review

This section will identify elements of the current body of knowledge in regard to civil disturbance in order to answer the research questions. Information sources were gathered from the United States (US), Australia and the United Kingdom (UK) for this literature review and comprised journal and magazine articles, federal government reports, fire service operating procedures, previous research and books. The structure of this literature review mirrors that of the research questions.

*Research question 1. To what extent have Fire Services been engaged in Civil Disturbance?*

The extent of fire service engagement varies upon the individual circumstances which cause the event. The breadth and scope of engagement is also influenced by the nature and root cause of the disturbance. Riots & civil disorder may result from a combination of factors. These include:- social conditions either ethnic, socioeconomic or both, (Pearson & Kirby, 1993; Miranda, 2004; Shah, 2001) sporting results (Anderson, 1996; Stewart, 2002) or strained relationships among social sectors (Pearson & Kirby, 1993).

Fire service engagement in civil disturbance activities will normally take one of the following forms:

- Proactive and strategic with detailed planning. Where economic calendar events can be identified well in advance of proceedings providing an opportunity to plan.
- Crisis and intervention where fire services deal in consequence management. Where spontaneous disorder acts, are targeted by groups or individuals, awaiting a response from the authorities.

There have been numerous recorded events of civil disorder, many of which have resulted in sustained campaigns by the fire services. Some of the more notable examples are identified.

The Los Angeles (L.A.) riots of the 1960's resulted in the development of the National Advisory Commission report on civil disorder, known as the Kerner Commission. Bruno (1992) explains that this report provides a study into the social and economic conditions that breed riots, and methodologies for the mitigation of and reaction to events.

Whilst many lessons were learnt during the early 60's in the United States, (Bruno, 1992) similar mistakes were made by response agencies again during the 1992 Los Angeles riots (Bruno, 1992; Lakamp, 2001). These riots were considered to be the largest civil disturbance in the United States since the Civil War (Lin, 1992) resulting in 4500 incidents & 862 structure fires requiring a significant fire service response.

During December of 1999, Seattle hosted the World Trade Organisation conference, where thousands of protestors took to the streets against what they saw as global economic domination by developed countries. The Seattle Fire Service was engaged in the planning for this

major event, capitalising on the learning's from the Los Angeles riots previously described. This event, however well co-ordinated, resulted in considerable community unrest and numerous arrests. Damage to the city was substantial and retail losses alone accounted for \$US17 Million (Freitag 2000).

At the World Economic Forum in Melbourne, Australia, in the week preceding the 2000 Olympics, the fire service was actively engaged in preplanning for civil disturbance activities. Police established a multi agency committee and were very concerned about potential violence during any protest. A radical group known as "S11" were offering other protestors training in protest tactics and were grooming greenies and students from Melbourne University. They claimed that they would bring Melbourne to a stand still and boasted that 10,000 protestors would be on hand to disrupt proceedings (Bolt, 2000). During the protest, the area for 4 blocks around the venue was severely disrupted as protestors allegedly threw missiles, damaged vehicles and assaulted numerous persons.

Cincinnati Fire Department became a victim of civil disorder where a number of its fire stations were damaged when three fire stations were abandoned because of rioting. Upon return to their stations, firefighters were confronted with vandalised quarters (Lakamp, 2001).

Moscow firefighters were attacked by an angry mob and fire appliance windows were smashed following a World Cup qualifying football match (Stewart, 2002) between Russia and Japan. Both the Chicago fire department and U.K. Brigades are familiar with this type of behaviour (Alexandersson, 1996) where street gangs have used sporting occasions to justify disorder.

Fire fighters supported police in the Sydney suburb of Redfern, Australia in 2004 at the scene of civil disturbance with fire suppression and rescue activities, where racial issues over boiled following the death of a young aboriginal boy during a police chase (Miranda, 2004). This incident created enormous tension between the aboriginal community, the Police and Government of New South Wales (NSW). In response to these riots and ongoing tensions, the Government established a police riot squad and has ensured the all personnel stationed in the area of Redfern receive riot control training (Kennedy, 2004). During the incident at Redfern, the fire service was photographed supporting police and appeared to be preparing to hose the crowd. This was due to the angle of the camera, however, the media had been successful in distorting the facts. The then Commissioner of the NSW Fire Brigade, Mr Greg Mullins, was called to explain the fire services involvement and advised that the hose streams were to extinguish and protect structures from molotov cocktails. In another incident in 1999, protestors set fire to buildings and threatened to use petrol bombs at the Greek consulate in downtown Sydney (Buxton, 1999).

In dealing with civil disturbance, Fire Services have been engaged in providing hit & run fire suppression activities in order to mitigate fire spread. This has involved the use of external fire fighting attack (Buxton, 1999; Coleman, 2001; Lakamp, 2001; Miranda 2004) and medical runs (EMS) with and without police support. These strategies have been borne out of a number of attacks upon fire service personnel and equipment attempting to deal with the consequence of civil disturbance actions (Askens, 1992; Coleman, 2001; Lakamp, 2001; Stewart, 2002; Task Force on Civil Unrest, 1994).

The list is extensive, and it is within this context that uncertainty between law and order, roles & responsibilities can conflict with fire service accountabilities (Alexandersson, 2001; Coleman, 2001). In a number of instances fire fighting personnel have been asked to support law enforcement agencies to disperse crowds (Buxton 1999). This type of request is normally met with resistance from the fire service and as identified in one instance, a Battalion Chief was threatened with arrest (Coleman 2001, p.20) if he did not co-operate with a police request to “hose down the crowd”. In a sign of community strength the crowd voiced their agreement and support for the Fire Service position on this occasion.

*Research question 2. What are the risks associated with Civil Disturbance engagement?*

### *Trust*

Communities hold the fire service in high regard. This is evidenced by the numerous surveys conducted on various professions which identifies fire services as respected and trusted organisation (Coleman, 2001).

The story in Australia is no different where recent annual surveys have reinforced this position. Undertaken annually by Readers Digest, the survey respondents considered that being kept safe was a major reason for their selecting fire services as trusted organisations (Readers Digest, 2002)

Fire fighters enjoy their relationship with the community because of services they provide. These encompass response for assistance and information, education and planning, all of which result in benefit to the community. These activities have been the cornerstone of building trust.

Trust is a commodity that takes time to develop but can be lost almost overnight according to a round table editorial by Coleman (2001), where participants agreed that community investment creates perception and expectations. The notion of deviating from traditional roles (expectation) in emergency response and community education can blur the image of the profession and confuses the public's mindset about fire fighters.

This confusion has enormous potential to erode trust and goodwill. But what of community expectation? What of trust? Fire fighters for many years have identified and discussed with law enforcement authorities drink drivers at accidents and suspicions at fire scenes, all of which is more about public good, rather than public trust (Coleman, 2001).

The notion of public good over public trust is valid. On one hand we have a group of demonstrators who have a legitimate right to freedom of speech (Alexandersson, 2001) and the democratic process who are determined to ignite fires and cause substantial damage (Stewart, 2002). Yet on the other, the fire service is chartered with the legislative responsibilities for the protection of life and property (Metropolitan Fire Brigade Act 1958). The balance between the two is one of ensuring these legislative accountabilities can be complied with and ensuring a conflict or exchange does not emerge between responder and protestor (Coleman 2001). Fukuyama (1996) considers social virtues including honesty, reliability, cooperativeness and a sense of duty to others to be the key elements of trust. Trust is critical to the functioning of society and to the success of brands and institutions. Despite this, fire fighters in Gothenburg were at first pelted with stones until angry protestors realised they were the rescue service and not police (Alexandersson, 2001).

*Fire fighter Safety*

Risks to fire fighters in civil disturbance are well documented (Alexandersson, 2001; Almond, 2001; Asken, 1992; Lin, 1992; Coleman, 2001; Lakamp, 2001; Stewart, 2002; OKeefe, 2004; Task Force on Civil Unrest, 1994). These include threatened shootings, missile throwing, verbal attacks, vandalism of fire houses and equipment. It is little wonder a number of fire services have in the past requested the use and supply of body armour (Coleman, 2001; Lakamp, 2001; Technical Report on Civil Unrest, 1998) in order to respond with added safety.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) code 1500, provides excellent guidance on fire fighter safety during civil disturbance events or acts of terrorism. Of particular note is the need for fire service personnel to receive specialist training in support of law enforcement operations. In support of this, Roseville fire department was requested to support police following intelligence information being received that Police were to be targeted and doused with gasoline (Coleman, 2001). The fire service refused the request and advised that fire fighters would not be exposed to civil unrest. This is a common theme in Coleman's round table discussions, however, a number of the respondents to the round table were also aware of the political, potential community trust breaches and public relations impact of any participation. Evident in L.A. 1992 where the community acknowledged the fire service as a worthy organisation in the days preceding the event, only to see 4 fire fighters shot and another 59 injured.

*Research question 3. What are the impacts of fire service engagement in civil disturbance activities?*

Approximately 173 years ago the home office (United Kingdom) legislated the Remedies Against the Hundred Act, 1827, which ensured compensation against riot damage. Today a derivative of this Act remains gazetted, the Riot Damages Act, 1886 (Home Office).

A riot is considered to occur where 12 or more people who are present together, use or threaten unlawful violence for a common purpose and the conduct of them is such to cause a reasonable person at the scene to fear for their reasonable safety (Home Office, 2003, pg.4).

This view is supported by a 1994 joint report on civil unrest by Fire & Police agencies under the auspices of Federal Emergency Management Agency & United States Fire Administration. However, Morales (2000) claims that civil disturbance is nothing less than democracy in action. It is this understanding of riot which impacts the fire services role in the community, the legislative accountabilities of the agency during civil disturbance, and the safety of its personnel (Coleman, 2001).

The literature identifies that there are substantial impacts upon fire services in the lead up to and during civil disturbance. Preplanning, consultation and an ability to gather information and to be in the intelligence loop on events is critical to strategic planning development (Lin, 1992). Many months may be spent planning for an event that may only last a single day or less. The unpredictability of civil disturbance, where emotions run high and the potential for violence increases significantly, requires a different strategy to every day response methodologies.

The Task Force on Civil Unrest (1994) points out that training for fire personnel, particularly for command staff, who require skilled liaison techniques and an ability to respond to changing situations is necessary during these types of operations. Memoranda of understanding and clear comprehension of accountabilities between fire service personnel and law enforcement agencies need to be developed and exercised regularly. Equipment management, placement and security emerge as key success factors against potential threats to responders. Clear exit routes, dedicated staging areas and fall back strategies are necessary precautions not to be taken lightly.

*Policy Reviewed and Lessons Learnt.*

Civil disturbance requires a different set of operating parameters to daily operational activities. Civil disturbance events are no different to hazardous industrial environments, in that they too require detailed planning (Bruno, 1992).

*planning and preparedness.*

Preparedness (Freitag, 2000) was a major initiative of the City of Seattle in the lead up to the World Trade Organisation demonstration in 2000. This planning minimised the impact to responders and brought the stakeholders together in a coordinated manner. There have been a number of lessons learnt as a result of fire service involvement in civil disturbance.

Every potential scenario of fire service involvement will need to be strategised and exercised, requiring skilled staff and resources. Of course where time permits and resources are available, a program can be developed well ahead of the event. However, as identified by the Task Force on Civil Unrest (1994), not every event of civil disturbance has the luxury of time. Therefore, it is essential that fire services have at their disposal an appropriate and contemporary procedure to deal with civil disturbance.

The following is a summary of key recommendations and strategies identified by past researchers (Alexandersson, 2001; Almond, 2001; Asken, 1992; Bruno, 1992; Buxton, 1999; Lin, 1992; Coleman, 2001; Lakamp, 2001; Stewart, 2002; O’Keefe, 2004; Task Force on Civil Unrest, 1994).

The establishment of a multi agency committee, represented by key stakeholders is a success strategy. The committee is to be chartered with the responsibility to identify and critically analyse threats and risks to the community and the development of a detailed emergency management plan. The plan should outline:

Roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved.

Coordination, command and control issues.

Concept of operations.

Communications.

Logistics resource mapping.

Information resources.

Mutual aid procedures and,

Joint training initiatives.

The plan provides a platform for cooperation and joint understanding of the capabilities, impacts and interdependencies of the stakeholders. Complementing this will be the development of agency specific response plans and strategies.

*response strategy.*

The safety of crews in the development of any response strategy is paramount. Therefore the strategy must include elements contained within NFPA 1500 on civil unrest, in order to

maximise the safety of personnel and resources. Detailed information must be made available to fire service personnel by police (Lakamp, 2001). The response strategy should include the following:

- Establishing a dedicated command centre.
- Identifying staging areas.
- Engaging police escorts for personnel entering into the hot zone.
- Obtaining reconnaissance information of the target site.
- Employing a hit and run fire fighting strategy utilising an external attack methodology.
- Prioritising emergency response. Deployment procedures may need to be modified to adjust for risk factors.
- Task force and strike team responses.
- Developing communications protocols and the establishment of dedicated radio talk groups.
- Providing logistics support to ensure ongoing operational readiness.
- Mapping of impact areas, and breaking them down in to manageable pieces.
- Information capture and documentation of activities and events.
- Identifying routes of escape.
- Constant liaison with government officials and media.

*Research question 4. What procedures if any have been developed?*

Numerous procedures have been employed by fire services in dealing with civil disturbance, accounting predominantly for their specific role. These procedures are normally

developed as a result of a local incident or an incident that occurred in a neighbouring jurisdiction, (Alexandersson, 2001) rather than at the strategic level.

The Task Force on Civil Unrest, (1994) compiled a comprehensive report titled *Dealing with Organisations and Operations during civil disturbance*. The report provides a framework and platform for the fire service community and police agencies to build and develop standard operational procedures. A report compiled by Groves (1999) indicated that only 69.77% of surveyed respondents had contingency plans, policies or procedures in place to deal with civil disturbance. Yet the author found many examples of procedures on civil disturbance that were readily available and accessible from the respective fire services.

#### Procedures

The desired outcome of the research was the development of a contemporary procedure to better respond to civil disturbance events. The development of the procedure was underpinned by a variety of empirical data from literature reviews, surveys, comparative analysis amongst other fire services and professional judgement. In order to identify currency of practices and procedures in Australia, a convenience sample telephone survey was conducted of all the major metropolitan fire services. The research method employed was a combination of historical, descriptive, evaluative & action research.

From the literature review common themes emerged and were built upon during a series of telephone interviews conducted on August 23, 2004. The researcher surveyed Senior Command Officers who are assigned to emergency management policy areas of the respective survey group.

Because of the small number of fire services in Australia, and as the majority of the country's population resides in the capital cities, all of the major metropolitan fire services in

Australia were surveyed, including the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board for the purpose of this research. This small number (8) ensured that a 100 percent response would be achieved.

Those surveyed included:-

Mr Jim Hamilton, Assistant Director Special Operations, New South Wales Fire Brigades.

Mr Chris Maguire, Assistant Regional Commissioner, Queensland Fire & Rescue Service.

Mr Bob Naumann, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Northern Territory Fire & Rescue Service.

Mr Kevin Cuneo, Director Community Safety, Fire & Emergency Services Authority, Western Australia.

Mr Brenton Keen, District Officer South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service.

Mr Greg Kent, Deputy Chief Fire Officer Canberra Fire Brigade.

Mr Gavin Freeman, District Officer Tasmania Fire Brigade.

Mr Michael Walker, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board.

The survey instrument was designed to ensure that a historical perspective of engagement was identified. Past experiences were considered as a driver for the establishment of contemporary action strategies (Alexandersson 2001). It was considered necessary to identify the degree of engagement, reason for engagement, risks involved and impacts in accordance with the research questions. The instrument was tested with a senior operational management group

within the MFESB for appropriateness, and validated by the MFESB Geospatial information unit.

The surveyed participants were requested by e-mail to participate on 12 August 2004. A copy of the survey instrument was provided to assist participants in gathering information. The researcher decided to interview the survey participants rather than by written response survey because of:

Ease of access to respondents,

Clarification of responses and

Personal insight.

A copy of the survey instrument is contained in Appendix A.

The surveys were reviewed including hard copies of any existing civil disturbance procedures. The surveys were analysed for content, currency and comparison amongst one another and the literature review. The outcomes of this analysis were discussed during a focus group discussion with senior operational command staff of the MFESB to identify key outcomes for further development. Following these discussions a final draft procedure was prepared for review and consideration by the Director Operations (see Appendix B), being the ultimate outcome of this research. This procedure has been integrated into the MFESB as an operational procedure.

#### Assumptions and Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this report. Firstly the sample size. As the roles and responsibilities of the respective fire services in Australia are relatively constant, it was considered reasonable to limit the survey to Australia. This small convenience sample survey

group can be considered insular in nature, however, the survey was also validated against the literature review.

The author was unable to find large quantities of contemporary information sources on this subject, either in the US or Australia, as commentary on civil disturbance is considered reactive in nature. This therefore, was another limitation.

The research was mainly concerned with the fire services aspect of civil disturbance though recognises the multi-agency impacts that these events create. As a result, no research was undertaken specifically to embed multi-agency interdependencies, particularly from a policing perspective and is therefore seen as another limitation.

The researcher has made a number of assumptions. Firstly it was assumed that the existing operational procedures do not adequately cater for civil disturbance activities. Secondly the Australian capital city fire services have experience and knowledge suitable enough to contribute to the body of information through the survey, and finally, that the Director Operations, MFESB, would implement the outcomes of this research.

## Results

A new procedure for the MFESB has been developed after consideration and analysis of the results (Appendix B). This section of the report presents the findings of the convenience sample survey instrument (Appendix A) and is formatted in line with the research questions.

*Research Question 1: To what extent are Fire Services engaged in Civil Disturbances?*

*Survey question 1: Has your organisation been engaged in Civil Disorder response in the past 5 years? If so, has this been to:-*

- support Police
- for the protection of life and property

- other

The respondents to the survey had all been engaged in civil disturbance activities in the past 5 years to varying degrees. The larger cities, Sydney, Brisbane & Melbourne all sighted multiple occasions of response. The smaller cities identified fewer incidents of this nature in line with community demographics.

All agencies identified life & property as the dominant reason for engagement, however, agencies along the eastern seaboard had also attended events to support police operation. The same agencies also indicated that they had significant involvement in emergency management planning for these types of events.

*Survey question 4: What roles have you performed during civil disturbance response?*

The roles performed by respondents included extinguishment of fires, standing by at staging areas, asset protection advice and rescue support for protestors who had suspended themselves from heights. Two respondents identified that that they had provided decontamination facilities to support other responders who had been contaminated with restraining agents such as mace and capsicum spray and other potentially harmful materials. All agencies reported that they had some involvement as a member of an emergency management team and or liaison role within a coordination centre, particularly where early notification to authorities had provided opportunities for pre planning.

*Survey question 6: What would you consider to be the average time resources are engaged in these events?*

The length of engagement was as varied as the roles performed. All agencies cited examples of long duration involvement, particularly where planning was involved. To

concentrate only on the response phase of civil disturbance was considered unfair by most respondents (75%) as this ignores the behind the scenes' activities such as attending meetings. It was generally accepted that the average time involved by agencies was 8 hours. This however, was dependent upon the cause of the disturbance and the size of the protest group.

*Research question 2: What are the risks associated with fire service engagement in civil disturbance?*

*Survey question 2: What was the main cause of the civil disturbance?*

There were a number of causes of civil disturbance identified by responders. Events of a political, racial and globalisation nature were considered the most common cause for the disturbance. Other reasons identified included industrial disputes, sporting and social events. The respondents also identified that there was a direct relationship between the type of event, length of involvement and role of responding agency.

*Survey question 3: Have you provided resources (equipment) for Police use at civil disturbances, if so what?*

All agencies discussed the difficulties in providing resources for police use. Only 4 of the 8 agencies surveyed had provided resources to support police operation. The most common resources provided were extinguishers, hose lines and branches. These resources were provided to allow police to extinguish small fires if necessary. Interestingly, two respondents discussed the removal of fire service logos and emblems from the equipment supplied. One respondent commented that at a particular incident, police commandeered all of the fire service equipment on scene.

*Survey question 5: Were there any risk or injuries to fire service personnel. Was there any damage sustained to fire service equipment?*

Agencies were very concerned at the potential of injury to fire fighters who attend these types of events. However, there were only two instances where firefighters had sustained injuries. One agency also reported that a firefighter was hospitalised after bricks were thrown during a disturbance in relation to racial tensions. There were numerous instances communicated by all respondents of damage being caused to vehicles. This included broken windscreens, stolen equipment and slashed hose lines.

*Survey question 8: Has there been any community backlash as a result of your involvement in civil disturbance?*

There were no reports of community backlash by respondents to this question. In contrast a number of agencies (6) felt compelled to discuss the positive comments relayed to them and to their organisations by community representatives. All respondents discussed their neutral position in these events, which they saw as a positive driver against community concern.

*Survey question 7: Has there been any media attention as a result of your involvement in civil disturbance?*

Civil disturbance is always the subject of media attention according to all survey participants. A number of agencies discussed intense scrutiny of their involvement and activities. One respondent raised serious concerns about media scrutiny of events and responder participation sighting camera angles and pictures from elevated positions distorting the facts and sensationalising responder involvement.

*Research question 3: What are the impacts of fire service engagement in civil disturbance?*

*Survey question 9: Has there been any political influence in your organisations decisions to engage in civil disturbance activities?*

There were no comments provided on this question by respondents that identified political influence as an impact on fire service activities. All agencies were keen to point out that as long as the agencies operated in accordance with their Statutory obligations, there was restricted potential for political involvement.

*Survey question 11: Do your staff undertake multi-agency exercises on civil disturbance response?*

Only 50% of respondents provided a positive response to this question. Two respondents discussed joint exercises with detention centres and considered that events in these environs were similar to other disturbances, though potentially safer to control. However, all respondents discussed the relationships that were built during planning activities and that where multi agency planning was undertaken, joint exercises usually followed.

*Survey question 12: Does your organisation have specific training for civil disturbance response?*

None of the respondents surveyed provided specific civil disturbance response training to fire fighters.

*Research question 4: What procedures if any have been developed to support civil disturbance response?*

*Survey question 10: Does your organisation have Civil Disorder response protocols or procedures in place?*

Six of the eight respondents have procedures in place to deal with civil disturbance. However, the standard of the procedures varies significantly amongst respondents. The depth and quality of these procedures is relative to the civil disturbance experience of the respective agency.

*Survey question 13: Are you aware of any mutual aid agreements in place with other agencies and are you aware of police policies in relation to civil disturbance?*

Only one respondent has mutual aid agreements specifically relating to civil disturbance response. This mutual aid document, however, relates to disturbance at prisons and therefore is outside the scope of this review. All respondents discussed in depth understanding of the relative roles and legislative accountabilities of other agencies and how they had shared understandings between law enforcement agencies and themselves. These comments were used to justify the lack of joint agreements.

*Survey question 14: Are there any major events programmed for your jurisdiction in the next year which may result in civil disturbance?*

All respondents considered that the looming Federal election (October 9, 2004) could be a catalyst for civil disturbance activities.

## Discussion

Whilst it is recognised that the management of civil disturbance is the role of law enforcement agencies, the consequences of these events are usually the domain of other authorities. This research has identified that fire services are engaged in civil disturbance on an ongoing basis. The amount of involvement however, is determined by the nature and root cause of the event (Pearson & Kirby, 1993). Events relating to global trade forums, race and political agendas, have resulted in sustained efforts by the fire service. The results in terms of effectiveness however are mixed. To be effective, fire services need to be well briefed and have access to timely information, both of which have been lacking in past engagements (Bruno, 1992). This point was stressed by all survey respondents and was well documented within the literature (Coleman, 2001).

Fire fighter safety in time of civil disturbance is paramount (Coleman, 2001). However, a conflict emerges between the legislative accountabilities of agencies and their ability to perform their tasks safely. It is recognised that there is potential for property owners to exercise common law actions against fire services, who do not act in accordance with their Statutory framework. It is at this point where response accountability conflicts with Occupational Health and Safety legislation.

The Australian Fire Services by comparison to U.S. counterparts are somewhat conservative. Despite the risk of injuries, fire services in the U.S. go to what could be considered extraordinary lengths to perform their duty. Whereas fire service in Australia, see no benefit in positioning themselves between protestors and law enforcement agencies. This research recognises that fire fighters and their equipment should not be put in a position where their safety is compromised by protestors. The literature and other research are consistent in approach, in that

police escorts are necessary safety mechanisms for fire services to mitigate incidents. However, in Australia, the researcher observed no support for firefighters to be equipped with armoured vests despite this protection being widely used and identified as necessary for fire fighters in the U.S. (Lakamp, 2001).

As discussed by Fukuyama (1995) the trust and bond between fire fighter and the community is not to be stretched. Stories have emerged through the research and evidence has been presented, of crowds attacking fire fighters for their response involvement. Whilst in other scenarios fire fighters have experienced support, particularly from crowds where they have taken a stance not to intervene and be neutral. This is particularly evident when activities by fire services are considered to be against a crowd. The lessons are clear, agencies should only engage in their specific roles when an assessment of crowd behaviour can be effectively measured. Community relations and expectations (Coleman, 2001) can be damaged by media coverage of events. To minimise these impacts, liaison officers need to be in a position to provide media with up to date and timely information on situations jointly with other responder agencies. The media as an entity is a powerful tool and should be used to advantage where possible.

Past experiences have resulted in the development of detailed procedures (Alexandersson, 2001). The establishment of procedures for civil disturbance response is a key success strategy for safe engagement. Experience has shown that preplanning combined with clear accountabilities and understandings between responders is critical. Response strategies are dominated by safety for responders, therefore, hit and run tactics are common, combined with dedicated and pre-planned escape routes, significantly reducing the risk to responders (Lakamp, 2001).

The fine line between law enforcement needs and the accountabilities of agencies is at times confusing. Fire Services have taken a clear stand on these boundaries. Most misunderstandings between responders are caused by the absence of procedures (Alexandersson, 1996), agencies operating in isolation and poor communication pre event. These misunderstandings can be eliminated where procedures reference other agency accountabilities. Effective communication in multi agency tasking assists in defining the parameters of each agency. The impacts of joint and multi agency training must be factored into agency training plans if the fire service is to use procedures effectively (Task force on civil unrest, 1994). Legislative, equipment and training deficiencies will be highlighted by these activities.

It is expected that the procedure developed in Appendix B and the implementation of the recommendations contained in this research paper will ensure enhanced emergency management practices, co-operation and integration amongst agencies.

#### Recommendations

As a result of this research it is recommended that the following actions be implemented by the MFESB. That:-

- a) The procedure contained in Appendix B is implemented.

The procedure provides clarity in relation to MFESB accountabilities, clearly identifies civil disturbance as a law enforcement activity and provides a strategic response framework to ensure fire fighter safety.

- b) A mutual aid agreement is developed between the MFESB and the Victorian Police.

This mutual aid agreement will enhance the understandings between the respective agencies and ensure role clarity.

- c) Multi agency exercises be undertaken annually and to be co-ordinated by the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner.

Exercising will establish effective communication links between the key parties engaged in civil disturbance response and test operational preparedness. A primary outcome will be the identification and resolution of issues that emerge from such exercises.

- d) Agency specific training is adopted for civil disturbance activities and to be developed jointly by the MFESB, Police and Ambulance service.

Training is an essential factor for response operations to events of civil disturbance. These events are considered relatively low in frequency, however they are high in consequence, therefore personnel need to be prepared to engage with short notice.

- e) A multi agency threat management group is established for civil disturbance activities.

All stakeholder agencies need to have the opportunity to identify and openly discuss the risks of civil disturbance. Responder effectiveness and safety will be determined by appropriately managed and communicated information.

- f) The Victorian State Emergency Management Arrangements incorporate a section on the roles and responsibilities of agencies in relation to civil disturbance.

This will ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities amongst the emergency management community of Victoria.

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**COMPILED IN CONFIDENCE**

**As part of the Executive Fire Officer Program, U.S.**

Australian Fire Service

Civil Disturbance Engagement Questionnaire

**Name:** .....

**Organisation:** .....

**Date of Interview:** ...../...../.....

**Shane Wright**

Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Melbourne, Australia

1. Has your organisation been engaged in Civil Disorder response in the past 5 years? If so has it been to :-

- support Police
- for the protection of life and property
- other

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2. What was the main cause of the disturbance?

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3. Have you provided resources (equipment) for Police use at civil disturbances and if so? If so, what?

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4. What roles have you performed during civil disturbance response

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5. Were there any risk or injuries to fire service personnel. Was there any damage sustained to fire service equipment?

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6. What would you consider to be the average time resources are engaged in these events?

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7. Has there been any media attention as a result of your involvement in civil disturbance?

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8. Has there been any community backlash as a result of your involvement?

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9. Has there been any political influence in your organisations decisions to engage in civil disturbance activities?

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10. Does your organisation have civil disorder response protocols or procedures in place?

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11. Do your staff undertake multi-agency exercises on civil disturbance response?

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12. Does your organisation have specific training for civil disturbance response?

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13. Are you aware of any mutual aid agreements in place with other agencies and are you aware of police policies in relation to civil disturbance?

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14. Are there any major events programmed for your jurisdiction in the next year which may result in civil disturbance?

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15. Are there any major events programmed for your state in the next year which may result in civil disturbance?

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<b>Metropolitan Fire &amp; Emergency Services Board</b>		
<b>PROCEDURE</b>		<b>Reference No: ER010</b>
<b>Civil Disturbances</b>		<b>Author:</b> Shane Wright
<b>Issue Date:</b> 21/09/2004		<b>Verified:</b> Tony Murphy

**PURPOSE:** To describe the procedures to be followed by MFB personnel when attending events of civil disturbance.

**SCOPE:** All events that involve or may potentially involve civil disturbances.

**RESPONSIBILITIES:** Incident Commanders and Senior Operational Staff

**DEFINITIONS:** “Civil Disturbance”: shall mean the spontaneous or planned hostile behaviour causing public disorder by a group or groups of people who may also be inflicting random damage to persons and/or property.

**INTRODUCTION:** Civil disturbance events are the responsibility of the Police to control. However, the MFB can be called, without warning, to attend incidents either in the vicinity or as a direct result of civil disturbance. These events have the potential to escalate rapidly, increasing the risk of injury to fire fighters and the community. Because of the unpredictable nature of these types of events, alternative response strategies will need to be considered. Operational staff may become targets of hostile behaviour, therefore, the safety of MFB personnel is to be maintained at all times.

**ASSESSMENT:** The MFB Commander when assessing a potential civil disturbance situation is to consult with the Police. In the absence of the Police it may not be possible to determine whether a disturbance is likely to escalate.

**MFB ROLE:** The MFB is chartered with the responsibility for the protection of life and property. During response to civil disturbance events, every effort is to be made to:

- Ensure the neutrality of the MFB and
- Not participate in law enforcement activities.

**PROCEDURE:**

**1. Response to civil disturbance:**

The Communications Centre will:

- Ensure that 2 appliances are dispatched to all civil disturbance calls.
- Advise responding appliances of all information received at the time of call and the location of the staging area.
- Notify the senior duty officer of all MFB responses to civil disturbance.

The Officer in charge of an appliance will:

- Ensure all personnel have the appropriate PPE.
- Ensure that all equipment on vehicles is appropriately secured, and that all windows are closed.
- Where Police are not in attendance, ensure that Police are requested to attend the scene and withdraw to a safe location. This area will then become the Staging Point.
- Liaise with the on scene Police command post and have a police liaison officer assigned to the crew.

- Approach the area of the disturbance without the use of red lights or sirens.
- Maintain constant radio communications with the Communications Centre.
- Develop an exit strategy from the staging area.
- In conjunction with the Police, undertake a risk assessment of MFB involvement.

## **2. Operations**

### **Command and Control**

The Police are the control agency for civil disturbance activities. The MFB commander is responsible for all MFB activities and will decide if the MFB will be engaged in life and property protection activities.

At all times the safety of personnel must be considered.

The MFB commander will:

- Implement an Incident Control System in accordance with SOP ER007 (Alarm of fire)
- Ensure that police protection is provided during rescue or fire fighting operations.
- Provide a fire service liaison officer to police command to ensure effective co ordination between response crews and police command.
- Ensure that crews are at all times well briefed on the civil disturbance situation and procedures that are to be followed during the event.

### **Fire fighting:**

#### **General**

When attending incidents within an area of civil disturbance the MFB Commander shall:

- Exercise extreme caution at all times and withdraw if appliances and crews are at risk.
- Ensure Emergency warning lights and audible signals are not used.
- Ensure Brigade crews do not work in isolation. Consider task forcing appliances.

- Ensure appliances are not left unattended.
- Ensure an escape route is identified, and reviewed periodically.
- Ensure where possible only water from tank supply is used. If it is necessary to use a hydrant, connect hose with branch attached directly to standpipe and remove hose key. Do **not** use the appliance pump.
- Ensure crews do not become involved in crowd control or remove any barricades etc.
- Ensure that no MFB resources are used for crowd control or law enforcement matters. Requests to support police operations are to be relayed to the Senior Duty Officer.

### **Tactical**

The following tactical fire fighting strategies are to be considered:

- Not committing resources to interior fire fighting attack.
- Allowing fires burn if not in endangering life or adjoining property
- Minimising the number of appliances committed on scene at incidents
- Not permitting fire fighters to work from roofs
- Not using aerial appliances.

### **Note:**

**If the MFB commander considers the safety of fire fighting crews is threatened, then he/she shall withdraw the appliances and crews to a safe location. This location should be determined in consultation with the Police prior to entry into the disturbance zone.**

### **3. Liaison**

The MFB Commander shall liaise with Police and other agencies to:

- Be briefed on the current situation.
- Discuss operational tactics.
- Ensure Police protection is provided within the cordon in which personnel can operate.
- Determine safe routes into and out of civil disturbance area/s.

### **4. MFB Co ordination**

For the duration of the civil disturbance, the Senior Duty Officer shall determine the need to open the MFB Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). If the need is identified, the EOC will:

- Monitoring calls in civil disturbance area and prioritise MFB response
- Liaise with Police through Brigade representative at the State Emergency Co ordination Centre to determine extent and potential escalation of civil disturbance.
- Initiate a Strategic planning cell to determine an appropriate MFB response policy.