

Volunteer Management

Reference:
NP-ADV-001

Purpose A National Plan Volunteer Management Advisory is proposed to assist jurisdictions prepare for the possibility that significant numbers of the public may wish to spontaneously volunteer to assist in a maritime environmental emergency.

Scope This advisory outlines the issues that should be considered when jurisdictions are preparing policy and procedures on the use of volunteers during a maritime environmental emergency and sets out a framework for using volunteers.

In the past, during marine oil pollution responses in Australia public volunteers have been restricted to wildlife collection, cleaning and rehabilitation. Recent national and international events (oil spill clean-up in Spain MV *Prestige*, floods in Queensland, fires in Victoria and the beach clean-up in New Zealand MV *Rena* incident) have indicated that public volunteers want to be more involved in other aspects of the response.

The drive for members of the public to be a part of emergency relief efforts as Volunteers, is driven by community aspirations to do the right thing and make things right. The incorporation or management of Volunteers is important in directing this effort in a controlled manner, removing the need for the general public to act independently, putting themselves and others at risk.

It is also recognised that using local volunteers can aid with community recovery and help build community resilience.

Jurisdictions are encouraged to work through the issues discussed in this advisory and develop decision making processes to determine if it is appropriate to use volunteers. Policy and procedures for both the use and non-use of volunteers should be developed in order to provide the public with appropriate information.

Definitions **Affiliated volunteers:** People who have an association with an official emergency management response agency and who may have relevant training, skills or experience.

Spontaneous volunteers: People who seek or are invited to contribute their assistance during or after an event, who are unaffiliated with any part of the existing official emergency management response and may or may not have relevant training skills or experience.

The policy The highest priority across all activities during a marine oil pollution response is the health and safety of people (responders and the public).

Oil and chemicals associated with the clean-up of a maritime emergency do pose significant health and safety risks.

Control agencies need to address the likely event of volunteers presenting to assist in maritime environmental emergencies by having an official volunteer policy. This policy needs to manage the control agency volunteer position - accepting or not accepting volunteer assistance - in particular the policy in relation to spontaneous volunteers who may present, either skilled or unskilled.

Use of affiliated volunteers already occurs across a number of State/NT environmental agencies, specifically in relation to wildlife matters - including injured wildlife, oiled wildlife and whale strandings. Under these arrangements Volunteers are registered and covered by either the same mechanisms as permanent government department employees (e.g. insurances, indemnities, codes of conduct etc.) or another specific cover for the group.

A volunteers policy for use of volunteers needs to incorporate the management of all volunteers including both affiliated and spontaneous, a communication strategy, and the methods for implementing the plan (e.g. when to enact plan, when to stand volunteers down).

The Spontaneous Volunteers Management Resource Kit, developed by the Australian Government and the Red Cross provides a draft framework, communication strategy, and draft implementation plan for use of volunteers for all agencies with responsibility in Emergency situations. This document can be a valuable resource for jurisdictions developing required policy and strategies for volunteer management.

ISSUES

Work Health and Safety Under Work Health and Safety (WHS) legislation volunteers have the same right as paid staff to be safe at work, so agencies have the same obligations to ensure the health and safety of volunteers as for paid staff. WHS issues for an oil spill response are paramount as breaches in standards could directly affect the health and well-being of the responders, volunteers and the public as well as exposing the liability of the response/control agencies.

Ensuring the WHS obligations are met pertaining to volunteers can be challenging - the following points need to be considered:

- The high turnover of volunteers.
- The complex nature of their commitment.
- The physical demands of the job.
- The requirement to wear uncomfortable PPE

Effective management strategies and clear policy's relating to volunteers need to address WHS requirements adequately.

Volunteer insurance

Generally, volunteers are not treated as employees under State/NT work cover legislation, hence are not usually covered by a control agency's insurance policy.

It is the control agency's responsibility to ensure that appropriate insurance cover is obtained to protect volunteers and should cover the following:

- Personal Accident Cover that covers volunteers for some expenses following accidental injury, disability or death.
- Public Liability Insurance to covers the control agency's legal liability to pay damages to a third party for personal injury or property damage accidentally caused by a volunteer.

Some government agencies (e.g. State environmental agencies) do have the capacity to register Volunteers formally providing both accident and liability insurances. Control agencies should investigate these opportunities relative to their individual jurisdictions and detail these arrangements to their contingency planning processes.

As part of any formal registration process, volunteers should also be provide with an appropriately worded document which sets out their rights and limitations of the insurance coverage and is signed by the volunteer.

Decision making process

A risk based approach should be used to determine if volunteers can be used in a marine pollution response. The nature and extent of the risks that volunteers could be exposed to are generally known as well as typical mitigation measures which apply equally to paid responders. This should allow the States/ NT to develop a decision making process based on the likely risks that volunteers could be exposed to.

A decision making process should address the following key aspects:

1. Ability of the control agency to access paid personnel (local and interstate), the location of the ICC and incident response area. This, to a certain extent will determine whether volunteers are needed.
2. Specific roles for volunteers should be identified and a set of minimum requirements for each role developed. Roles could include:
 - administrative roles within the ICC
 - administrative roles within shoreline staging areas
 - administrative roles within wildlife rehabilitation site
 - wildlife washing and rehabilitation (preferably trained prior to an incident)
 - shoreline cleaning
 - assisting with catering
3. Health and safety of volunteers is of paramount importance. Key decision processes as to suitable jobs should include:
 - Toxicity and physical characteristics of the oil initially and how they change over time
 - Amount of oil in the environment and its distribution on the foreshores.
 - Extent to which safety measures are required and can be put in place and enforced to mitigate risks
 - Availability of appropriate PPE
4. Access to sufficient paid supervisory personnel to manage the volunteers
5. Accident and liability insurance for volunteers.
 - Control agency should have in place with its insurers the ability to activate coverage, at short notice, for the agency, supervising personnel, and the volunteers themselves. (See Section 6)
6. Availability of "Just in time training" to skill up volunteers to meet their specific job roles and to provide the necessary WHS training.

An example flow chart is provided at Appendix 1 to show how a decision process might work. Whichever decision is made it should be clearly explained to the public via information on a website and media releases.

Framework

Management of volunteers within the AIIMS structure

There is no specific Function or Unit within the AIIMS structure to manage spontaneous volunteers. The most appropriate area for management of small numbers of volunteer management would be the Community Liaison Unit within the Public Information Function.

Where significant numbers of volunteers are available, consideration needs to be given to how they will be managed within the AIIMS principles and structure.

Consideration should be given to creating a new Unit (Volunteer Unit) within the Public Information Function to manage the volunteers and coordinate their work within the response structure. The Volunteer Unit would then work closely with the other Functions within the response structure. An alternate approach would be to create a new Function with a number of Units to deal with all aspects of volunteer management.

General management procedures

A set of volunteer management procedures should be developed that include:

- policy and guideline before incident, to include decision when to implement - deployment process
- Access to volunteer information via web and social media communication. A website to provide information to volunteers and allow them to register their interest on line
- Communications with volunteers including providing media outlets with information, the use of SMS, Facebook and Twitter to disseminate information to volunteers and the general public
- Formal registration and screening processes (includes health and physical)
- Standards for inducting and training
- Onsite sign on, sign off and management of volunteers
- Volunteer supervision and volunteer coordinator role
- stand down procedures
- Procedures for dealing with corporate, group and individual offers and donations of goods and services

The Report, The Rena Volunteer Program, available on line, has useful suggestions on management procedures and an example of their volunteer management plan

Communications strategy

Key stakeholders in the incident need to be identified for effective communication pathways, this will include; people effected by the incident, the general public, media, government, agencies involved in response and recovery, peak bodies.

Key broad messages need to be identified regarding the volunteers for each stage of the incident; emerging incident, initial response, ongoing response and the stand down message.

The States/NT should consider establishing a web site that is pre-loaded with information for people who may want to volunteer and should include:

General information:

- Simple safety information in regard to the effects of oils typically carried on ships (Bunkers and crude oil)
- The importance of staying away from oiled foreshores and oiled wildlife for their own safety
- The importance of keeping off oiled foreshores so that the oil is not transferred to un-oiled areas
- If volunteers are used, they must register with the control agency
- Health and fitness requirements
- Minimum age for volunteering
- Minimum work period per day
- Minimum and maximum work period requirements
- Commencement of work will vary from day to day depending on the tides and weather conditions
- Volunteers will be required to wear PPE specified by the control agency which may be uncomfortable and cumbersome

Information specific to an incident would include:

- Whether volunteers are permitted to participate in the response
- Type of work volunteers are permitted to undertake
- Registration process and fitness requirements
- Type of oil and its possible health impacts
- Methods of communications with volunteers
- Degree of training required before starting the work
- Physical working conditions
- Health and safety requirements

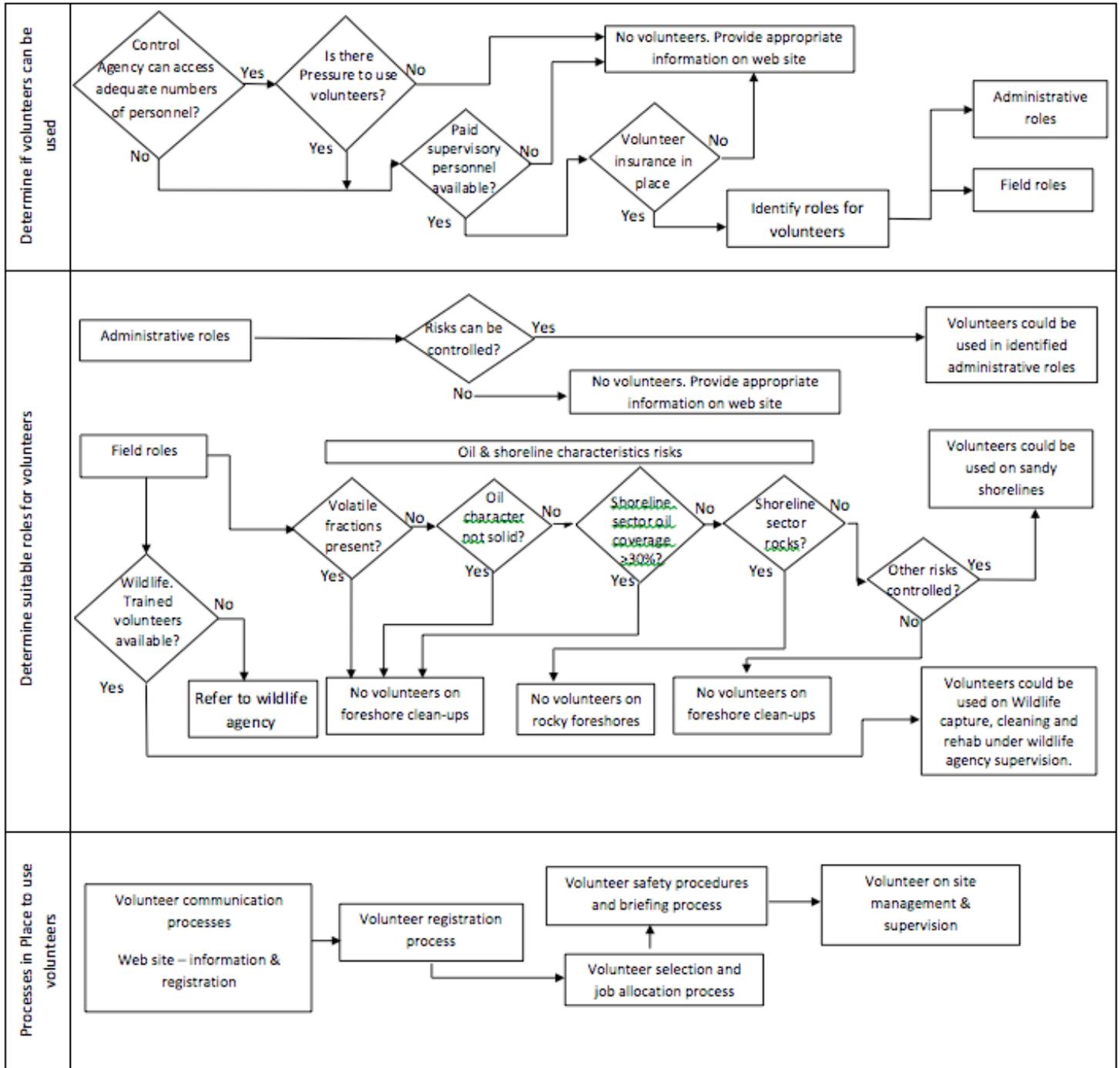
The control agency is encouraged not to underestimate the public interest in marine pollution incidents and be proactive in developing a website and associated support. The Report, The Rena Volunteer Program, available on line, has useful recommendations on establishing a suitable website.

The development of an information website may also provide a mechanism to demonstrate to the community that the response efforts are adequate and that contributions by volunteers or individuals independent of the response are not necessary.

The Australian Government has a Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit, www.dss.gov.au and redcross.org.au

For further information regarding this policy, please contact the Marine Environment Division on (02) 6279 5000.

Appendix 1



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