

Volunteer Management

Reference:
NP-ADV-001

Purpose A National Plan Volunteer Management Advisory is provided to assist jurisdictions prepare for significant numbers of the public who spontaneously volunteer to assist in a maritime environmental emergency.

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

In the past, during marine oil pollution responses in Australia, community 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 community volunteers want to be more involved in other aspects of the response.

The drive for community members to be a part of emergency relief efforts as Volunteers, is driven by aspirations to support the community in times of adversity. The effective management of spontaneous 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 how best to engage and manage volunteers for marine pollution response events.

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 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.

Policy Considerations

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 several 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.

An effective Volunteer 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, and when to stand volunteers down.

The [Spontaneous Volunteers Management Resource Kit](#), developed by the Australian Government and the Red Cross provides a framework, communication strategy, and implementation plan for use of volunteers for all agencies with responsibility in emergency situations. This document can be a valuable resource for jurisdictions developing 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 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 PPE

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

Volunteer insurance

Generally, spontaneous 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 cover 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 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 as part of their contingency planning processes.

As part of any formal registration process, volunteers should be provided with written information which sets out their rights and limitations of the insurance coverage.

Decision making process

A risk-based approach should be used to determine if spontaneous volunteers can be used in a marine pollution response. The nature and extent of the risks that volunteers may be exposed to are generally known and listed in response plans. This should allow the States/ NT to develop decision-making processes based on the likely risks that volunteers may 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 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 agencies should have agreements in place with insurers for the ability to activate appropriate coverage at short notice, for the agency, supervising personnel, and the volunteers. (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

Whilst there is no specific function or unit within the AIIMS structure to manage spontaneous volunteers, a key principle of AIIMS is flexibility to build the team structure needed for the effective management of the incident.

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 Volunteer Section to manage and coordinate potentially large volumes of spontaneous volunteers. .

Volunteer units could then be embedded within Planning, Operations or Logistic sections.

General management procedures

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

- Policies and guidelines before an incident happens
- Access to volunteer information via web and social media communication. A website to provide information to volunteers and allow them to register their interest online
- 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 roles
- Stand down procedures
- Procedures for dealing with corporate, group and individual offers and donations of goods and services

The MV Rena Volunteer Program is available online and has useful suggestions for managing volunteers and procedures for implementation.

Communications strategy

Key stakeholders in the incident need to be identified for effective communication. This may include people effected by the incident, the general public, media, government agencies involved in the response and recovery.

Key broad messages need to be identified regarding the use volunteers for each stage of the incident including the initial and ongoing response, and stand down arrangements.

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 regarding 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 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:

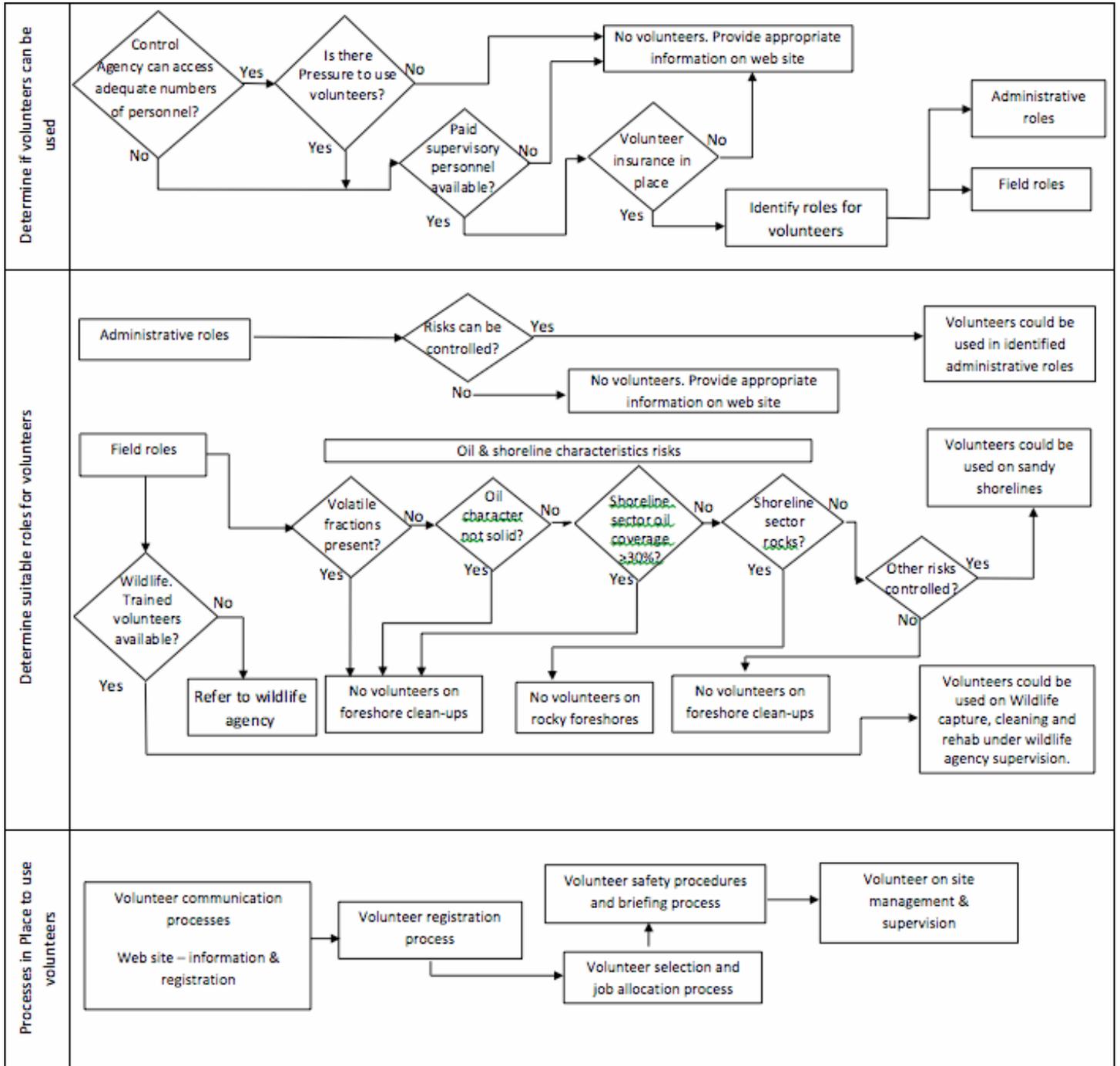
- Whether volunteers are permitted to participate in the response
- Type of work volunteers are permitted to undertake
- Registration process and fitness requirements
- Type of oil and its possible health impacts
- Methods of communications with volunteers
- Degree of training required before starting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

Appendix 1



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