

Responder Guidance

Incidents Involving Animals - Initial

Situational Awareness



Incidents Involving Animals – Initial Situational Awareness

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Overview

1. What are the 10 Steps to Situational Awareness?

The 10 steps to situational awareness is a process which can be used by emergency services to support the resolution of incidents involving animals. It follows the principles of normal risk assessment, but gives an appreciation of the additional aspects of an animal incident that might not be recognised without training. It is important to ensure that all response agencies have a joint understanding of risk where animals are involved and therefore this subject follows established JESIP principles aimed at equipping agencies with sufficient knowledge to be effective.

2. Who might this process be relevant for?

This process can be utilised at many levels in an organisation, or as a wider planning tool for Local or National Resilience. For instance, it may provide emergency planners with an understanding of local risks, support managers in identifying staff training needs or provide essential guidance for operational personnel making mobilising or tactical decisions during emergencies and disasters.

3. How does it work?

Each step builds a picture of what is happening currently or what may happen, what are the actual and anticipated risks and what agencies, skill sets and resources are required to resolve an incident. It is designed to take the recipient through a fact finding journey to build a clear picture of the nature of the situation.

This process forms the cornerstone of basic risk awareness and action for emergency crews. It allows flexibility for individual agencies to take an example of a foreseeable event and work through a process to determine if they have the skills to resolve it alone or whether further support is required from internal or external resources.

4. How should it be used?

Whilst there is an element of training, the main focus of this package is to give organisations a tool kit to use internally which will help identify organisational training, policy and procedural requirements in respect of their Integrated Risk Management Plans. Following completion of an IRMP, organisations will have an appreciation of how and where their staff will encounter animals and these case based models can be assessed against the 10 step process to help inform the needs of the organisation in addressing the areas of risk identified.

Step 1: Consider Species

1. Why is knowledge of the species important?

The type of animal will have a significant bearing on the nature of risk and directly influence behaviours at the scene of operations. For the purpose of emergency service training, animal species have been split into five distinct groupings; Livestock, Exotic, Domestic, Equine and Wildlife.



An appreciation of key behavioural and responsive differences between these species groups is important as they all require a specific approach. However, a species category is not in itself sufficient to make definitive judgments in relation to planning, responding to or managing an incident.

Critical to establishing risk, resource requirements and levels of expertise required to support an incident, is knowing the specific animal group involved, numbers and the context in which they are normally owned or housed.

2. Why does the context matter?

Previous guidance categorised animal rescues in two groups, large or small. There was debate where to draw the line and the conclusion was that a large animal equated to anything more than the average sized dog and requiring a 2 person lift. Therefore, the provision of large animal rescue training and mechanical lifting equipment was the focus of development.

Mobilising criteria related to animal rescue large or small, however, this simplistic approach does not account for the specific skills required across species types or additional hazards associated with the context in which they are kept or found in.

A domestic dog kept as a companion animal may pose a risk if scared or in pain, however, a dog used in a security setting will have added risk factors from breed characteristics and a varying level of trained aggression.

3. How does context impact on tactical decision making?

Some animals fall into the context of research which may be subject to strict levels of safety, cleanliness or security. They may also have been the result of many years of genetic breeding and their loss would be significant both financially and in relation to their public health value.

Some may be non indigenous species which might make it an offence to release them from an entrapment.

Others may be placed in situations where, on occasion there are unusually high concentrations of human activity, such as shows and events which add to the level of human and animal risk.

Task: Think about the types of animals you might find in your operational area and the context in which you might find them?

Step 2: Assess Situation

1. How will knowledge of the situation be important?

Having a basic understanding of animals involved and the context in which they are kept is the first step to situational awareness. Animals can be found in almost any operational context. However, it is essential to determine the situation that involves an animal because this will impact on resources and urgency of any response.

There are a range of situations where emergency responders might be called to assist an animal. Operational experience has demonstrated that animal life may be at risk, for instance; fires and floods; they may be trapped or entangled, loose or marooned.

There may also be requests to support welfare of compromised animals through assisting other agencies. These agencies may equally be called on to support when emergency responders have encountered animals and find themselves with temporary responsibility due to an owners incapacitation, such as a fire or road traffic collision.

2. Could the context determine the level of response?

For any animal related incident it is essential to establish the threat to human life or safety. This risk may be direct or indirect. Examples of direct human life risk are where someone is trapped by an animal, for instance, under a horse or crushed by a cow. This could also relate to someone attempting rescue of a dog from an icy lake or animals from a house or stable fire.

Indirect human life risk applies where an animal is in distress or a life threatening situation and people are at the scene ahead of a professional arriving and taking control. Experience proves that animals in distress cause people to act irrationally and frequently take extreme personal risks to save animals. Therefore, understanding who is at the scene and what they intend or are likely to do, will enable correct asset mobilisation based on the nature and level of risk.

Indirect risks may relate also to the environment surrounding the animal or the potential for unnoticed disease transmission from the animal or environment.

The same direct and indirect life risk terminology can be applied to animals. Animal life may be directly at risk in many different contexts for instance as a result of; fire, flood, entrapment, or loose on a highway. It is a straightforward assessment based on a tangible hazard.

Indirect life risk relates to situations where animals may be affected by a foreseeable escalation of an emergency, such as flood, structure or wildfire, or where situations may lead to a detrimental effect on animals, for example; loss of power to heated fish tanks or vivarium after a fire; boundary or containment failures; effects of being downwind of smoke plumes or livestock transporters stuck in traffic due to an unconnected RTC on a hot day.

Once the category of life and injury risk is established, the context will have a bearing on the nature of the situation and the organisation that may take the lead in final resolution or risk mitigation.

3. What legislation should responders be aware of?

Legislation should be a factor to determine whether there is direct or indirect responsibility for action. The Animal Welfare Act promotes the relief of suffering and under this legislation an emergency responder may by default be placed in a position of temporary responsibility for that animal if there is no owner capable of fulfilling their responsibilities for it.

Animal Welfare Act 2006 Section 4 “It is an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to an animal by an act or failure to act”

There are many situations where first responders will have to facilitate the needs of an animal and pre-planning for these situations will avoid unnecessary suffering and scrutiny that might follow if there is a perception of unattended, continued suffering.

There are pieces of legislation that may prevent emergency responders acting in an instinctive way. For instance the protection of badgers act would require external agency assistance and legal authorisation to investigate or extract a canine from a badger sett. The control of non indigenous species may require certain wildlife species that are trapped or entangled to be euthanised rather than released. It is important to know these legislative restrictions to provide the correct response.

The Fire and Rescue Services Act Sect 11, Power to Respond to Other Eventualities, is the legal framework that supports the FRS in being equipped to deal with a foreseeable situation that affects the life and health of plants or animals. In addition, within the same subsection it describes a situation that causes a member of the public to become ill, injured or dies.

All of these examples can be applied to an incident involving animals and therefore in situations of public or animal risk, it is likely that FRS's will lead on risk mitigation and safety. If for instance an incident occurs in a coastal environment, the lead organisation may be HM Coastguard, supported by other trained and equipped responders such as the FRS or RNLI.

It is important to ensure that all response agencies have a joint understanding of risk where animals are involved and therefore this subject simply follows established JESIP principles.

Sometimes the animal component may form part of another incident type falling into separate legal jurisdiction of an agency and they may have a responsibility to deal with the animal issue as it is affected by the primary incident type.

Therefore, a decision must be made as to whether the lead organisation has the capabilities to deal with the animal component to completion or where further agency assistance may be required.

For instance, where animals are involved in fire or trauma, veterinary treatment is required and facilitation of transportation should reflect the size and nature of the casualty animal. Pre planning and agreement with RSPCA, local animal ambulances or known animal rescue sanctuaries should be considered.

Task: Consider the animal legislation that might apply in your operational area and the connections you might need to establish for support?

Step 3: Consider Environment

1. How will the environment affect the means to resolve a situation?

Crucial to assessing the needs of an incident is the nature and context of the environment surrounding it. National Operational Guidance for the FRS discusses the rescue of animals from various environments such as height and depth, enclosed spaces, water, ice, unstable ground or physical entanglements.

The context surrounding the environment will determine the lead agency and dictate the skill sets required.

For example, in some jurisdictions, rescue from height in a coastal environment would attract HM Coastguard rope team attendance, however inland might be the FRS. The RSPCA also have rope access teams and may be a lead or support agency. In many hazardous environments the Ambulance service HART would also be mobilised.

Therefore all agencies that may be expected to carry out rescue of animals from height, or are faced with an animal component at a human rescue from height, should be situationally aware of risks and rescue techniques.

The same principle applies to situations involving fire, flood, transportation or hazmat.

2. Why are case studies so important to this training?

The environmental risks and contexts offered as examples in this initial training are not exhaustive but designed to promote discussion within teams to determine whether an organisation tasked with risk mitigation has the prerequisite skills to deal with animals in a range of operational contexts.

Task;

1. Think of the scenarios you could conceivably attend involving your skill sets, in your local area and determine if you have the prerequisite skills to deal with the animal component?
2. If it's out of the scope of your current training, think about who might be called to resource that incident now or if you need to consider resourcing that incident in another way?

Step 4: Impact of People

1. How will the presence of people affect the process?

A considerable factor in resource mobilisation will be the presence of people and the risks they face, or indeed, pose.

At a fire or other seemingly risky environment with a human-only focus, the public generally await professional assistance and do not endeavour to intervene except in extreme circumstances. Injuries usually occur at time of initial impact or emergency event and responders arrive to return the situation to normality.

Rarely are injuries received after the initial event. However, where animals are involved, between time of call and attendance of responders, there is a high likelihood that someone will take matters into their own hands and attempt to intervene on behalf of the animal. This is particularly prevalent with canines and equines in distress.

In an American survey 83% of the public when questioned, said they would risk their lives for an animal. This is borne out through daily experiences of UK responders.

2. Where does the management of risk begin?

Command and Control is a key element of a well orchestrated plan and the management of a scene begins at the time of call with the safety advice of mobilising or call handling staff.

When considering response plans, a large factor will be the impact of people on scene and expected behaviours. When responding at the request of another agency that is already on scene, a different level of initial response may be considered, due to the expectation of risk being managed by an associated professional.

3. How should we assess animal owners or keepers?

Some animal species may be accompanied by expert handlers or advisors and emergency plans may provide access to reliable sources of specialist advice. These should be utilised wherever possible.

The more challenging situations often involve pet animals where the owner is unlikely to demonstrate emotional control or stability, therefore internal or associated agency support and expertise should be sought as soon as possible.

4. Why do animal incidents attract media attention?

An important consideration for emergency planners and organisations is the likely use of social and mainstream media where animals are involved. Therefore, it is important to have confidence in the abilities of responders and to include in training the management of expected public interest and organisational impact.

5. Human animal bond and levels of emotion?

Finally, in regard to how people perceive and interact with animals in distress, it is important to consider the emotional impact of a situation.

Teams are encouraged to manage an incident with compassion but not emotion. It is likely however those agencies that exist to support animals may be affected by a scene and should be factored in to the emergency service debrief and follow up welfare checks.

Members of the public too may be affected and removal of distressed people from the scene should be an early consideration.

Task: At animal incidents you've attended, consider the people, their behaviours, your reactions and how you might manage that in the future?

Step5: Determine the Task

1. What is the task we are being asked to perform?

Another factor in determining which organisations and agencies are required is the actual task, what needs doing.

Rescue or evacuation of animals from known hazards will form the basis of many fire and rescue service animal rescue interactions. However, managing risk to or from the animal may be the imminent need and adopted by a number of response agencies.

Evacuation of animals from imminent danger is likely to be a priority for owners or keepers in all circumstances of animal accommodation, whether, domestic, commercial, research or welfare.

Uncontrolled release may present grave risks to responders and not having a plan and the skills to carry out the plan will encourage risk taking by lay people, who should be the first priority for keeping safe.

A fundamental rule that applies to animal rescues is never to release an animal unless the plan accounts for the final safe and secure destination. There is a risk at many animal incidents of exacerbating the problem through lack of preparedness. Working with animals of all kinds places strong emphasis on planning and preparedness.

When stressed, anxious or feeling under threat, animals will resort to natural instincts of flight or fight. As an example, when emergency responders have priorities such as attending to a human casualty in the home or gaining access to a premises to fight fire, the presence of a dog can be a huge disadvantage to progress.

A canine companion animal may display defence and guarding behaviours which are an immediate risk to responders. Acknowledging the potential problems and training to deal with them before they occur is key. Having some basic understanding of likely behaviour and assessment of the type and context of an animal, first responders may be able to efficiently mitigate the risk before it escalates.

Dogs identified with certain breed characteristics or trained aggression, however, are likely to require more experienced and equipped personnel to manage.

On occasion, attendance of emergency responders is to facilitate access for agencies without capabilities such as cutting equipment for trapped animals or ladders for situations at height. A thorough understanding of potential risk is still required in order to support an incident.

2. Pre-Veterinary Immediate Emergency Care

Fire and rescue service national operational guidance refers to the delivery of first aid to animals where veterinary care is not accessible in a timely period. Facilitating post incident veterinary care is an important aspect of an incident but it is likely that first responders will seek to intervene initially where life threatening injuries occur.

The most common scenarios might be a pet suffering smoke inhalation following a fire, dog requiring rescue from water or animals found in transit during RTC's.

Pre-veterinary Immediate Emergency Care in its simplest form is delivery of oxygen to support recovery. As there is moral and legal justification for these actions, supporting information within this initial training gives some basic parameters to work within. Important factors are the control of the animal, ability to remain safe whilst delivering immediate care and options for achieving veterinary care.

On occasions emergency responders might be called to support a veterinary practitioner with an animal in a clinical situation, for instance to lift a recumbent large animal or remove an item embedded in or around an animal.

Whilst under the care of a professional, it remains important to have basic awareness of animal psychology and associated risk factors.

Task: Think about the various situations that you've attended and interacted with animals and the various tasks required?

Step 6: Identify Additional Animal Risks

1. What additional risks should we be aware of?

A number of WATCHOUT situations exist when assessing animal incidents which may compound a situation with additional risks or operational considerations.

Some animals may fall under Dangerous Wild Animal legislation and may be encountered in private collections including domestic residences as well as more traditional environments such as zoo's and wildlife parks. When encountering exotic animals the need for specialist advice is critical.

Status dogs are used to protect owners and will be encountered in domestic environments. Some are known to have been trained to attack uniforms and these present a significant threat of serious injury when encountered

Canines used for guarding or security purposes will possess trained aggressive traits

Maternal instinct in practically any species will be a risk that requires careful consideration.

Entire males should be treated with caution, particularly for some during certain times of year such as male deer during the rutting season. Bulls must always be respected.

Understanding species group behaviours will help identify obvious stressors such as lone herd animals or those that are injured. Animals out of their natural environment are likely to be more dangerous as they will be anxious and possibly more aggressive or unpredictably volatile.

Unsocialised or wild animals will be extremely fearful, especially if cornered or trapped. If an animal has escaped from containment or is likely to escape due to inappropriate containment facilities, the risk to the public, responders or the animal must be assessed and acted upon.

Infection or disease can be vectored through the environment or animal, some of which can be debilitating, or fatal to humans. Reducing exposure, hygiene, personal protection and post incident protocols will limit the effects of Zoonoses: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/zoonoses.htm>

2. What would pose additional risk to an animal?

This section also affords opportunity to consider additional risks to the animal itself and determine the effects of proposed actions or inaction.

The outcome will be based on competing priorities, identified risk factors and capabilities of responders, however a situation should not occur where animal suffering is not factored in to the operational plan.

Capture Myopathy describes a stress reaction which can lead to instantaneous or subsequent death. This is largely observed in trapped or injured wildlife during or following human interaction and should be carefully considered before committing to an operational plan.

Task: Are you aware of any animals kept under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act in your local area?

Step 7: Planning

1. What should be considered when planning for incidents involving animals?

Animals are the crosscutter; they cut across all disciplines and incident types, from small scale scenarios to wide scale disasters and major emergencies. They may affect any frontline emergency service, posing an unpredictable hazard that historically has received little in the way of pre incident planning.

2. What sources of information are available?

Information regarding animal risks can be sourced in a number of ways. Local knowledge and on site expertise are probably relied on most; however neither are guaranteed or totally reliable.

One area that should be considered is gathering site specific risk information (SSRI) for establishments that house animals. In the event of an emergency the presence of animals may pose a risk to responders, hinder operations and present ongoing practical challenges.

Therefore, consideration for animal issues before an emergency will assist in preparing and planning for incidents involving animals. Associated risk based training and knowledge sharing, coupled with resilient emergency plans by owners and keepers are also essential.

The broad spectrum of knowledge required to resolve animal incidents, unpredictability of behaviours both human and animal, cross discipline applications and frequent requirement for specialist advice or resources demonstrates the benefits of tactical advisors for incidents involving animals.

This role is proven within the fire sector to support the command team in bringing about pragmatic, welfare and safety centred tactical plans.

3. What are key components of planning at an incident?

Managing a scene and having good situational awareness are crucial at incidents involving animals. Important too is to ensure that all responders have a joint understanding of risk, to present an informed, united and cohesive approach to the resolution and management of risk.

Unlike humans, but essential for animal welfare, is an early assessment of viability. This may be from a medical or safety perspective and a reason to plan for securing the attendance of veterinary support or other specialist advice early on.

The use of euthanasia is an important consideration, the effects of which should be carefully considered on scene, particularly in respect to the people who are in attendance, both responders and owners. For some animals, physical capture, control and containment are options, others will require chemical capture and control. Any release should be pre planned and carefully managed.

Task: Think about the type of animal housing you might encounter, if you have sufficient information on the hazards and your access to specialist advice?

Step 8: Determine PPE and Equipment

1. Will our PPE and equipment be sufficient?

Some interactions with animals will require early intervention in order to save human life or prevent rapid escalation of an emergency situation before specialist resources or equipment are available.

Risk assessed situations may allow for responders to take action that will support the safety, welfare or viability of an animal within their capabilities at initial training level. Other situations will require intermediate levels of PPE, knowledge and skills from the outset.

Some species groups or tasks will be out of the scope of initial or intermediate training and require advanced, more specialist measures.

Having a good understanding of the animal, situation, task and environment will lead to an assessment of capabilities and levels of PPE. Some responders will already possess a level of PPE that may be deemed acceptable for the required action and where the benefit outweighs the risk.

Structural firefighting PPE should be considered the default minimum for unpredictable situations with animals that pose a known and considered risk.

Other responder groups without the same basic level of PPE should exercise caution and determine whether additional resources from other more equipped responders should be utilised.

An example of this might be attempting forcible entry into a property to attend to a human casualty where a dog is inside. If a dog is demonstrating signs of aggression or is of a size or breed that would pose a risk if behaviour escalated, then consideration for a higher skilled responder with purpose made protective clothing and equipment is recommended.

PPE is the last form of defence and organisations expecting staff to interact with animals directly, should consider upskilling operators with appropriate level, practical species group specific training.

When interacting with animals in a given environment, responders should consider whether the PPE worn is sufficient for both animal and environmental hazards.

Task: Have a think about the situations where you might not have the appropriate PPE and equipment for the task, animal and environment?

Step 9: Appropriate Skill Sets

1. What levels of training are available?

BARTA are developing skill sets that are grouped Initial, Intermediate and Advanced. Initial training is designed to give personnel sufficient situational awareness that they will make risk based judgements on a given incident. This will allow them to take safety critical action where required, make a plan and resource the incident in line with informed environmental, hazard or animal welfare requirements.

It should not be assumed that a given incident will be managed by initial trained crews as animal incidents are inherently varied and unpredictable. Therefore sound operational decision making is essential at every organisational level.

Intermediate training is recommended for animal interaction and most rescue types where a good understanding of behaviours, control techniques and rescue or handling techniques are required. If a generic risk is identified that requires additional PPE or expertise, this is probably the next go to level for most incidents involving animal rescue. For instance a large animal rescue responder team would be considered an Intermediate level.

Advanced training reflects skill sets of a technical rescue team or a tactical advisor.

2. A modular approach to training

With an understanding of the needs of an incident, an assessment of the skills required to resolve it can be determined. Skill sets may come from within the lead agency or from alternative agencies or experts. It is important to plan for incidents involving animals to ascertain who will contribute to the safe resolution of an emergency or disaster.

Future training will be split into animal modules and technical modules. Each subject area will be available at Initial and Intermediate level. Some will also fulfil an advanced criteria. Elements will make up wider qualifications or following organisational requirements, singular modules may be applicable.

For example, traditional AR2 trained large animal rescue responders would currently receive equine and livestock intermediate modules followed by recumbent animal and lifting/winching at intermediate level, coupled with other subject areas at initial level.

With a menu based modular approach, an organisation could identify a certain risk profile and pick that module/s for their staff.

Advanced training for the rescue of animals from water, height or unstable ground are likely to be modules bolted on to specialist roles and created in due course with assistance from species and technical work groups.

Task: Consider the specialist skill sets you have, environments you might encounter animals in and determine if you have the right skill sets to manage the risks?

Step 10: Communicate Actions

1. Having a plan and communicating actions

At an incident, using the 10 steps to Situational Awareness will result in a risk based tactical plan with associated actions.

The choices will be to accept risks and operate within agreed skill sets or to manage a scene until more specialised resources arrive. Either way, this will be based on sound principles with multi agency Joint Understanding of Risk and agreed actions.

This, if done effectively will promote a welfare centred plan based on safe working practices

Useful Website Links

National Operational Guidance

NOG Incidents Involving Animals: <https://www.ukfrs.com/guidance/incidents-involving-animals>

NOG Legislation Page: <https://www.ukfrs.com/guidance>

Advice and Welfare

RSPCA Advice and Welfare: <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare>

Non Native Species Secretariat: <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/factsheet/index.cfm>

Companion Animals

RSPCA Advice and Welfare (Pets): <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets>

SSPCA Advice - Domestic Animals: <https://www.scottishspca.org/advice/domestic>

Equines

RSPCA Advice and Welfare (Horses and Ponies): <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/horses>

SSPCA Advice - Equines: <https://www.scottishspca.org/advice/domestic/equines>

Livestock

RSPCA Advice and Welfare (Livestock): <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/farm>

SSPCA Advice - Farm Animals: <https://www.scottishspca.org/advice/farm>

HSE – Agriculture – Zoonoses: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/zoonoses.htm>

Exotics

RSPCA Advice and Welfare (Exotic Pets): <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/other>

SSPCA Advice - Snakes: <https://www.scottishspca.org/advice/domestic/snakes>

Wildlife

RSPCA Advice and Welfare (Wildlife): <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife>

SSPCA Advice - Wildlife: <https://www.scottishspca.org/advice/wildlife>

British Deer Society – Deer Species: <https://www.bds.org.uk/index.php/advice-education/species>

Woodland Trust (Mammals): <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/animals/mammals/>

Woodland Trust (Birds): <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/animals/birds/>

Woodland Trust (Reptiles and Amphibians):

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/animals/reptiles-and-amphibians/>

V1.3 May 2020: This guidance document has been created by BARTA in collaboration with their stakeholders and their Large Animal and Companion Animal Working Groups. These groups have within their membership a wide range of experts in veterinary care, academia and emergency response to incidents involving animals.

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