

Lessons Management for ARFF (Learning from the past to improve the future)

All ARFF organisations traditionally understand lessons management and how applying these principles improves our operations. Indeed, ARFF procedures have been founded on lessons management principles, dating back aviation rescue and firefighting origins during World War 2.

ARFFS in Australia have recently implemented a formal Lessons Management System which will enable our staff to share their experiences, and importantly, learn from these experiences with an overarching aim of improving our Operations. In the past 12 months ARFFS responded to over 7,000 emergencies and saved 11 lives. Given this, for over 7,000 times ARFFS procedures have been tested. Knowing this, as an organisation, what did we learn from these responses? How did we share any learnings from these responses and our training to improve our operations?

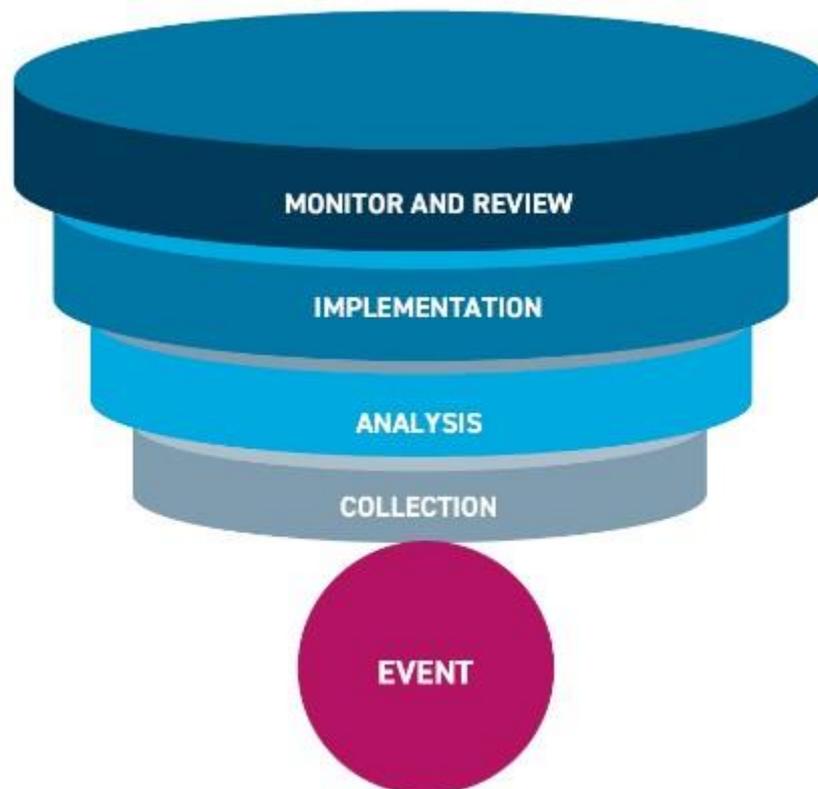
This is the goal of the ARFFS Lessons Management System; the sharing our experiences and learnings with each other to improve ARFFS operations.

ICAO is the key organisation that recommends the implementation of a lessons management system. Signatory organisations to ICAO are to ensure that there are systems in place to be a Learning Organisation. What is a Learning Organisation? A learning organisation embraces mistakes as an opportunity to improve. There is an underlying expectation that people feel free to share and discuss their experiences, both positive and negative, with others.

The benefits to having your ARFF organisation implementing a lessons management system include:

- Improved and informed decision making
- Increased efficiency in, and effectiveness of, service delivery
- Improved risk management practices
- More efficient policy and program development processes
- Greater engagement and collaboration with stakeholders
- Greater confidence in projects undertaken
- Improved capacity to innovate
- Improved personal performance
- Increased organisational knowledge

‘Lessons Management’ is an overarching term that refers to the collecting, analysing, implementing, and the monitoring and reviewing of information disseminated from an incident response.



Picture 1

These are the key four stages in the lessons management process after an 'event'. For ARFFS operational purposes, we give guidance that an 'Event' is something that occurs during either an operational response or a training scenario. After the Event, data is collected. Data is then Analysed. If change is required, it is Implemented. Finally change is Monitored and Reviewed to ensure that the original 'finding' cannot occur again.



Picture 2

In Collection, data is collected via various means. Primary to ARFF is debriefing either post-response or post-training exercises. Collection is the most important stage and the one we will all be frequently working in. In the ARFFS Lessons Management System we give guidance on how to conduct a debrief and how to collect Observations.



Picture 3

The second stage, Analysis, is where the Observations are collected and analysed. They are analysed at a local level for potential local change and a National level for ARFFS wide (or Organisational) potential change. The Observations are risk assessed, change options are considered.



Picture 4

The third stage is Implementation. Implementation has two learning outputs. That is an action plan for implementing change, and the sharing of lessons through Case Studies and Incident Reviews.

Firstly, the analysis of Observations may lead to change. This change could be for example how we do things, change in procedures or equipment. Generally, any change is followed through our Change Management System.

Secondly the sharing of lessons. Think is a notable response you have been on. Think of a response you heard about and would have liked more information on. Case Studies is a means of sharing these experiences so we can collectively learn from what the responding crews experienced. Case Studies are for communicating ARFFS (Australia) specific experience. Incident Reviews are used to analyse incident response that have occurred outside of our agency. This could be from Australian State Brigade responses or other ARFF agency incident responses.



Picture 5

The final stage, Monitor and Review is where the change is analysed for effectiveness. Was the change effective, have any new issues been created because of this change? This stage is seeking assurance that the change was effective to ensure the original Observation cannot occur again. Once it is determined that the original Observation cannot occur again, then it is determined as a 'Lesson Learnt'.

In summary, ARFFS has implemented a Lessons Management System to enable our service become a learning organisation. This overview of the Lessons Management System covered the involvement of ARFFS staff in reviewing incidents, conducting research and establishing appropriate outcomes with the aim of minimising and /or preventing future occurrences of similar incidents by applying the approach of continuous improvement to the Lessons Management process.

About Aviation Rescue Fire Fighting Service (ARFFS) Australia

ARFFS provide aviation rescue firefighting services at 27 of Australia's busiest airports with over 890 full-time firefighting staff. ARFFS fleet includes over 100 Rescue Tenders, various water rescue vessels and difficult terrain vehicles. In the past 12 months, ARFFS has responded to over 7,000 emergencies. For further information or guidance on setting up a Lessons Management system for your organisation, feel free to contact me on david.groer@airservicesaustralia.com

About the Author



Picture 6

Superintendent David Groer currently serves as the Local Operations Manager at ARFFS Launceston (Tasmania). He has served in various ARFF roles since 1994 and has been in the Operations Manager role for the past 7 years, managing a team of 24 full-time firefighters. David is the Lesson Management co-ordinator for ARFFS, serving in this role for the past 4 years. He holds Advanced Diplomas for both Fire Fighting Management and Fire Investigation.