

Mutual aid agreements

By Colin Deiner, chief director, disaster management and fire brigade services, Western Cape Government

Alexis de Tocqueville might not be a name many of us in this country are familiar with. It might also be strange that this French aristocrat, diplomat, political scientist, political philosopher and historian would appear in an article about fire fighting.

Allow me to explain: De Tocqueville is best known for his works *Democracy in America* (appearing in two volumes, 1835 and 1840) and *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (1856). In both, he analysed the living standards and social conditions of individuals as well as their relationship to the market and state in Western societies. *Democracy in America* was published after Tocqueville's travels in the United States and is today considered an early work of sociology and political science.

When travelling around the United States in the early-1800s de Tocqueville as part of his study of social conditions. He saw as unique the kind of "mutual aid" that existed in civil society. In his classic "Democracy in America" he brought to light the premise that individuals, families, villages and towns working together were the grassroots of a new social order. He saw it manifest in churches, service groups, fire brigades and militias where freedom, safety and welfare were ensured more by small communities than by bureaucrats in distant capitals.

Mutual aid agreements need not be complex documents requiring endless meetings and reams of drafts to complete. I'm sure that it wouldn't take more than a request to a similar size and type fire service would do the trick. You might even find some good examples on Google. There are, however, some important points to consider when

you get to the point of drafting your own Mutual Aid Agreement (MAA).

In this article I will attempt to discuss some of these points and hope that they give you some sort of guidance when you get called upon to embark on such a process. I will also give some background of the MAA system we use here in the Western Cape. Maybe Mr de Tocqueville would have been inspired by this!

What is a Mutual Aid Agreement (MAA)?

Mutual aid is the voluntary sharing of personnel and resources when an agency cannot deploy, sufficiently, its own resources to respond to an unusual occurrence. Resources are then requested by the affected agency through an agreement entered into by services in a common geographic region residing within different jurisdictions. The agreement may be done horizontally ie, different services on the same level or it can be overseen by a different sphere of Government such as the provincial administration.

As I will explain later, MAAs must be focused on specific assistance that may be required by a service, yet it is not the absolute legal route for the provision of assistance in all situations. Should the incident be of such a nature that it warrants the declaration of a disaster, mutual aid can become mandatory and services will be required to act under that legal mandate.

Why do we need MAA?

MAAs are primarily intended to assist (generally smaller) services who are called upon to deal with an incident that exceeds their resource capability. They might require more vehicles, equipment and personnel. They then invoke the MAA and

request the additional resources from a nearby service who is also a signatory to the agreement. This is not the only instance where it can be of value. It might be that a particular service needs a resource that they don't own but that exists in a service included in the agreement eg, aerial platform or foam tender. In this case only the specific unit can be requested.

It might also be that a specialised capability such as a hazmat team or a hi-angle rescue team might be needed. MAAs should also allow for this.

Within any given MAA, allowance should also be made for 'automatic-aid agreements'. This is necessary when remote rural services can be spread so far apart that it's common for an adjacent fire service to arrive first on the scene in its neighbour's jurisdiction. The automatic agreement will then enable the affected service to dispatch the closest resources available, despite the fact that it is in a neighbouring jurisdiction.

Automatic MAAs can also provide great value in the event of a wildland fire incident where early response could mean the difference between getting early control or ending up with a pro-longed and costly incident. The plan would entail services responding to pre-identified high-risk areas at the incipient stage of a wildfire, regardless if it is in their jurisdictional region or not.

The final MAA is that which exists between specialised fire services and Government (municipal) services. A large oil refinery might only have a service with minimum permanent staff and teams of part-time process operators making up the numbers. In the event of a significant incident,

they will be able to call on the surrounding fire services to assist in terms of the MAA.

Normally the spirit of the agreement will not require payment for the assistance provided ie "You help me this time, I'll help you next time"

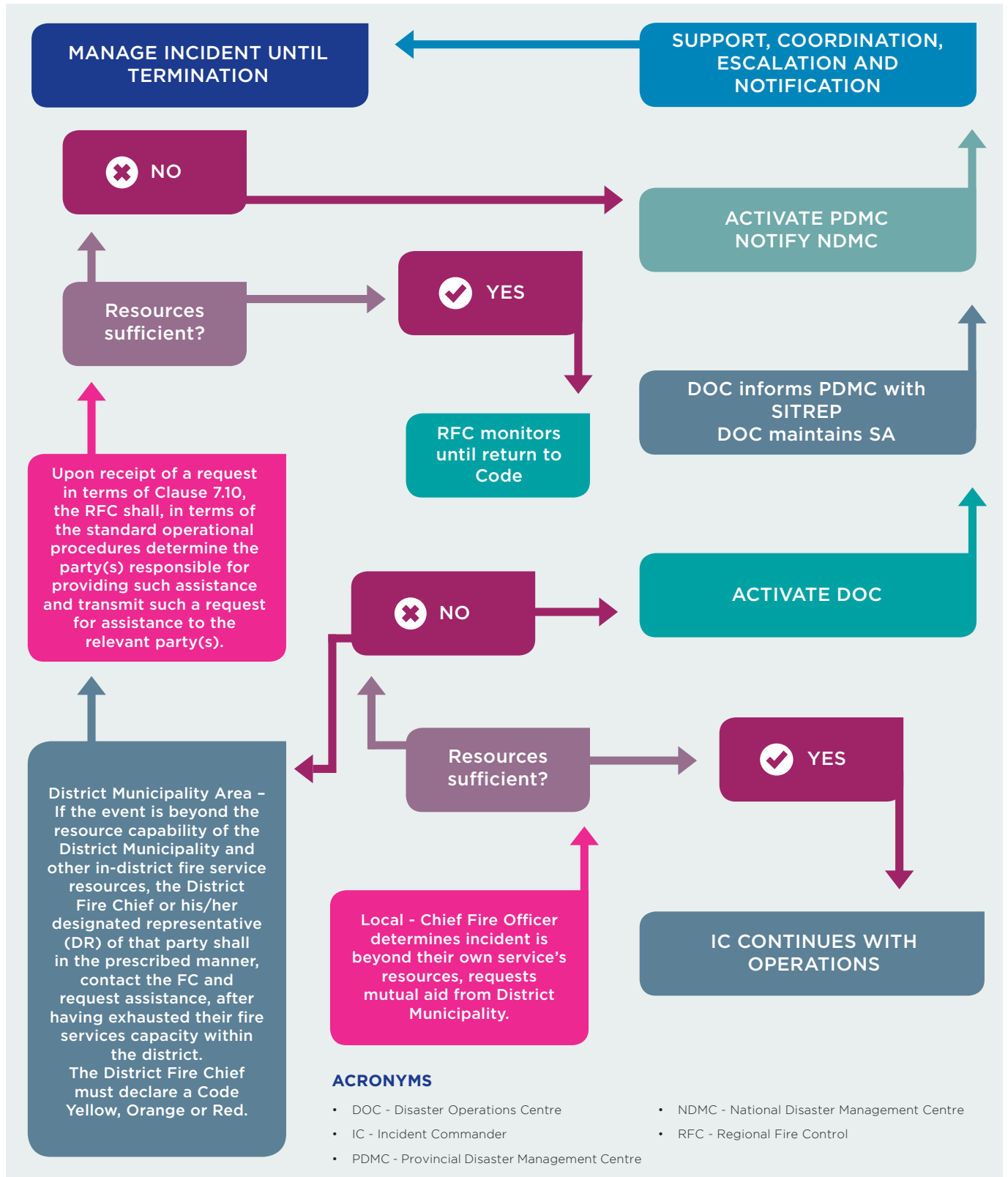
but in the case of a private service, this might not always be possible. Unfortunately, the bean counters are always watching.

Planned and scheduled community events do not meet the criteria for mutual aid and therefore should

include costs if required. Mutual aid may, however, be necessary in extraordinary situations.

The "how to"

So now that we have determined the need for a MAA, we must decide on how it should be coordinated. ▶



Mutual aid agreements

- ▶ In the Western Cape we do this on three levels:

Local: Chief fire officer determines incident is beyond own service's resources and requests mutual aid from district municipality.

District municipality area: If event is beyond the resource capability of the district municipality and other in-district fire service resources, the district fire chief requests mutual aid through the Western Cape Provincial Mutual Aid agreement. The district fire chief must declare a Code Yellow, Orange or Red. See table.

Province: If the resources within the impacted area are not sufficient, the provincial mutual aid coordinator may activate inter-provincial and national arrangements.

Although our system has been in operation for a number of years and is fairly frequently used, it is reliant on continuous reevaluation and review. The initial drafting of the document must include a stage where it is legally vetted. You will be delivering a service in a different jurisdiction and, most probably, not be charging a cent for it! There are also issues such as legal liability and insurance of equipment that must be addressed.

When drafting the MAA there are a range of points that must be addressed in order to ensure a robust and effective tool for this purpose. They include the following:

- **Definitions of key terms**

To make sure everyone is on the same page. All resources must be "typed" according to their capability and numbers. When a specific resource is called for by the officer on scene, he/she must know that the right resource is coming.

- **Procedures for requesting and providing aid**

The MAA must provide clear guidance on what the procedure shall be for each incident type. It will prevent a measure of "free-lancing" whereby the MAA is

invoked as a convenience. As an example: During the 2010 FIFA Football World Cup Emergency Services and Law Enforcement in the Western Cape adopted the METHANE acronym to build a report for alerting others about a major incident.

METHANE stands for:

- Major incident declared
- Exact location
- Type of incident
- Hazards
- Access
- Number and type of casualties
- Emergency services present and required.

- **Payment, reimbursement and allocation of costs**

Although the spirit of fire service MAAs doesn't specify payment, there will be instances where some form of reimbursement might be necessary. It might be that different municipalities have different revenue collection structures and this could be problematic after the incident. These issues must be clarified beforehand. Clarity must also be provided as to who will be responsible for the collection of funds for services rendered. Will the affected service be billed or will it go to the individual who required the service initially.

- **Notification procedures**

This will include the level of authority that may invoke the agreement as well as at which level the assisting service is authorised.

- **Roles and responsibilities of individual parties**

This will include issues such as the provision of food and accommodation, fuel and incident command.

- **Protocols for interoperable communications**

Communications is key on a major incident. Ideally all services must be able to communicate on the same system. If this is not possible a radio swap system must be implemented. Whichever system

will be implemented, it must be done at the early stages.

- **Relationships to other MAAs**

If you have an agreement with a private service (refinery), will you be able to invoke your MAA with other services to assist you there? Also ensure that the requirements of one agreement don't clash with another.

- **Liability and immunity**

This is important in ensuring that personnel can be legally deployed outside their areas and will be covered in the event of death or injury.

- **Exercises**

Training and exercising together is the best way to ensure effective response in an MAA invocation. At least one exercise should be held annually.

- **Provisions to update and terminate the agreement.**

Roll of the Province

Provincial fire services directorates can play a major role in the drafting, administration and coordination of a fire service MAA. Due to them having a birds-eye view of all the services within its province, it will be able to identify the capacity of the service and how it will be able to contribute to the agreement.

The province will also be best positioned to manage any resources arriving from outside the provincial boundaries. Any existing MAAs the provincial authority has entered into with other provinces can also be activated if necessary.

In closing

In the province I work in I can't recall any major incident outside of the city of Cape Town where our MAA was not activated. MAAs are a powerful tool for any service, especially in an environment where resources are limited and we are necessitated to rely on our neighbouring services. You will require careful planning and build a high level of trust among the participants where each service knows their responsibilities and how they can benefit from it. ▲

Mutual Aid Concept

Mutual aid is the voluntary sharing of personnel and resources when an agency cannot deploy, sufficiently, its own resources to respond to an unusual occurrence. Resources are then requested by the affected agency through the Western Cape Provincial Mutual Aid Agreement. This cooperative system may be executed on a local, district, metropolitan and provincial basis. The Western Cape has been divided into six mutual aid regions to more effectively apply, administer and coordinate mutual aid. Mutual aid can become mandatory following provincial and national disaster declarations. Generally, there is no reimbursement for providing mutual aid.

Authorities

- Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000) section 3 (as amended) and;
- Fire Brigade Services Act 99 of 1987, section 12 and;
- Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998

Mutual Aid Process

Local - Chief Fire Officer determines incident is beyond own service's resources, and requests mutual aid from District Municipality.

District Municipality Area - If event is beyond the resource capability of the District Municipality and other in-district fire service resources, the District Fire Chief requests Mutual Aid through the Western Cape Provincial Mutual Aid agreement. The District Fire Chief must declare a Code Yellow, Orange or Red.

Province - If the resources within the impacted area are not sufficient, the Provincial Mutual Aid Coordinator may activate inter-provincial and national arrangements.

Activation and Coordination Control Centre

City of Cape Town Fire Control (FC) shall be used as the Activation and Co-ordination Control Centre for the purpose of this agreement, should a District Municipality need assistance.

A District Municipality in need of assistance shall contact FC who shall have the right to co-ordinate and control the response if required.

When the City of Cape Town requires assistance, it must contact the relevant District Municipality Control Centre, who shall have the right to co-ordinate and control the requested response.

Channels for requesting Mutual Aid

See flow chart.

Mutual Aid Considerations

Disaster declaration not necessary to request and provide mutual aid. Use of National resources require approval by The National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC)/The National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure (Natjoints)/Joint Terminal Attack Controller (Jtac). National resources are to be used when local resources are committed to maximum. No service is required to unnecessarily deplete their own personnel, equipment and capabilities, in order to provide mutual aid. It is generally accepted that a reasonable response will consist of up to 50% of available resources.

The service receiving mutual aid is responsible for the care, feeding and shelter of responding mutual aid resources.

Planned and scheduled community events do not meet the criteria for mutual aid and therefore, should include costs if required. Mutual aid may however be necessary in extraordinary situations.

Mutual aid reimbursement costs may be applicable under local, provincial or national disaster declarations. Otherwise, all mutual aid costs are the responsibility of individual participating services.

Out-of-province mutual aid is coordinated through the PDMC unless as already specified in interprovincial agreements and MOU's.

Other state- owned entities can be tasked or requested to assist in providing mutual aid.

SITUATION CODES		
COLOUR	ACTION	ICS INCIDENT TYPING
GREEN - Normal.	Nil	Type 5 Incident: An incident that can be handled with one or two single resources with up to six personnel.
YELLOW - Incident occurs; provide back-up for area of jurisdiction.	Alert the service, which is required to provide back-up. Inform the PDMC. Monitor situation until code "GREEN" is declared. Inform the PDMC.	Type 4 Incident: An incident where several resources are required to mitigate the incident, including a task force or strike team.
ORANGE - Serious incident occurs, provide stand-by in area of jurisdiction, and require relief crews.	Alert the service which is to provide stand-by. Inform the PDMC. Co-ordinate arrangements for relief crews. Monitor situation until code "GREEN" is declared. Inform the PDMC.	Type 3 Incident: An incident which the needs thereof exceed the capabilities of the responding agencies.
RED - Serious incident occurs, require immediate assistance.	Immediately co-ordinate mobilization of assistance required. Inform the PDMC. Monitor situation and co-ordinate back-up for further possible incidents. Monitor the entire situation until code "GREEN" is declared. Inform the PDMC.	Type 2 Incident: An incident that extends beyond the capabilities for local control and is expected to go into multiple operational periods. A Type 2 incident may require the response of resources out of area, including regional and/or national resources, to effectively manage the operations, command, and general staffing. Type 1 Incident: A complex incident, requiring national resources for safe and effective management and operation.

NOTES ON CODE RED

- The Chief Fire Officer of the party requiring assistance shall, if necessary, inform his Chief of Disaster Management of the situation.
- A code "RED" situation may require formal Disaster Management action but immediate action under the agreement will, in any case, be initiated in order to speed up a return to a code "GREEN".

Reporting and Alerting Other Emergency Services

During the 2010 FIFA SWC Emergency services and Law Enforcement in the Western Cape adopted the **METHANE** acronym to build a report for alerting others about a major incident.

METHANE stands for:

Major Incident Declared

Exact Location

Type of incident

Hazards

Access

Number and type of casualties

Emergency services present and required

METHANE is now the recognized model for passing incident information between services and their control rooms. All services have used similar models for passing information in the past, but **METHANE** has instigated the use of a common model that means information is shared between emergency service providers in a quick, easy and consistent manner.

