

Management by Objectives (MBO) for Firefighters — Field Guide

Purpose: Provide a concise, operational guide to applying Management by Objectives (MBO) in Australian fire and emergency contexts, aligned with ICS and the PPRR cycle.

1. Overview

MBO is a practical method for turning strategy into action. Leaders define clear, measurable objectives, communicate them, monitor progress, and review outcomes. In multi-agency operations (CFA, FRV, SES, Police, Ambulance, Local Government), MBO reduces ambiguity, improves accountability, and supports safer, faster decisions.

2. Core Principles (SMARTER)

- Specific: State exactly what must be achieved (e.g., "Protect 12 houses on the western flank").
- Measurable: Quantify success (containment line at 3.2 km within 2 hours).
- Achievable: Match objectives to resources and conditions (crew capability, weather, fuel).
- Relevant: Tie to strategic intent (life first, then property, then environment).
- Time-bound: Include clear time windows and review points.
- Evaluated: Track progress via check-ins and objective status boards.
- Reviewed: Adjust to changing conditions; capture lessons learned.

3. Applying MBO Across PPRR

Prevention — reduce risk; Preparedness — build capacity; Response — execute safely; Recovery — restore and improve.

3.1 Prevention (Risk Reduction)

- Objective examples: "Reduce residential smoke alarm non-compliance in Morwell by 25% by 30 June."
- Actions: inspections, school programs, vegetation management with councils, targeted comms for high-risk streets.
- Measures: inspection pass rates, ignition sources identified, community reach metrics.

3.2 Preparedness (Capacity & Readiness)

- Objective examples: "100% crew leaders to complete updated ICS refresher by 1 December."
- Actions: scenario drills, pump tests, comms checks, cross-agency exercises with SES and Police.
- Measures: training completion, equipment serviceability, exercise evaluation scores.

3.3 Response (Operations)

- Objective examples (initial): "Life safety ensured within 15 minutes of arrival; fire spread held north of Ridge Rd."
- Actions: task assignments by objective (Search/Rescue, Containment, Traffic Control).
- Measures: time to primary search, perimeter growth rate, LACES compliance observations.

3.4 Recovery (Restoration & Resilience)

- Objective examples: "All displaced families sheltered within 24 hours; community meeting held within 72 hours."
- Actions: relief centre support, damage assessment with council, utilities liaison, psychosocial support.
- Measures: time to services restored, assistance uptake, community satisfaction feedback.

4. ICS Alignment

- Incident Controller sets incident objectives; Operations/Planning translate them to operational periods.
- Objective board: visible, simple, current (status: Not Started / In Progress / Achieved / Deferred).
- Briefings use "Objectives → Strategy → Tactics"; debriefs use "Objectives → Outcomes → Lessons".

5. Crew Leader Playbook (Quick Use)

- Before rolling: confirm 1–3 clear objectives and constraints (wind, terrain, trigger points).
- On scene (first 5 min): validate objectives, update risks, allocate tasks by objective.
- During ops: 15–30 min check-ins; update board; escalate resourcing gaps quickly.
- Comms: state the objective in every tasking ("Bravo, objective is...").
- Safety: embed LACES within each objective; halt/adjust if conditions trigger red flags.

6. Measures & KPIs

- Life safety: time to all-clear; rescues completed.
- Containment: perimeter growth rate; line completion % vs plan.
- Resource effectiveness: task completion on time; utilisation rates; downtime causes.
- Community impact: evacuations supported, welfare checks completed.
- Comms quality: missed call rates; message accuracy in read-backs.

7. Case Vignettes (Australia)

- Kinglake recovery (post-Black Saturday): measurable targets for temporary housing and counselling improved coordination.
- Brisbane floods (2011): SES set street-clearance timeframes; daily objectives dashboards guided volunteer tasking.
- WA bushfires: aerial support objectives tied to daylight windows; line construction targets reduced spread.

8. Objective Library (Copy & Adapt)

- Life safety: "Primary search complete in all structures on Maple Ct by 14:30; secondary search by 15:15."
- Containment: "Establish a wet line from Point A to Point D (3.2 km) by 18:00 with 3 tankers + 1 dozer."
- Traffic: "Implement detour and maintain ambulance access (avg delay < 3 min) by 13:00."
- Public info: "Issue community update (plain English) each hour until contained; translate into top 3 local languages."
- Relief: "Register and shelter all displaced residents within 24 h; deliver first recovery pack within 6 h of registration."

9. Micro-Templates

9.1 Incident Objective Card:

- Objective: _____ Time: _____ Owner: _____
- Why it matters: _____ Risk controls: _____
- Done when: _____ Status: NS / IP / ACH / DEF

9.2 Briefing (ICS) — 90 seconds:

- Situation → Objectives (3 max) → Strategy → Tactics → Safety → Comms → Triggers.

9.3 After-Action Questions:

- Were objectives appropriate and clear? What changed? What will we standardise, stop, start?

10. Common Pitfalls & Safeguards

- Too many objectives → limit to three per op period; park the rest.
- Vague wording → enforce measurable outcomes and end-states.
- Poor visibility → post the board where crews see it; update on radio.
- No review loop → schedule brief debriefs; capture lessons into SOPs.
- Mismatched resourcing → request early; negotiate objective scope/time.

11. Preparedness in 5 Minutes (Station/Household)

- Charge radios/phones; check spare batteries.
- Confirm trigger points (wind change, FDI, plume behaviour).
- Top up water; lay out PPE; test torches.
- Agree evacuation route & rendezvous.
- Post your top 3 objectives on the fridge/whiteboard.

12. Quick Contacts (Australia)

- Emergency: 000 • SES: 132 500 • Poisons: 13 11 26 • Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Local Council & Relief Centre (check council site)
- Energy outage line (your local distributor)

13. One-Page Summary (For Clipboards)

- State 1–3 clear objectives tied to life/property/environment.
- Assign an owner and a time for each.
- Say the objective in every tasking and radio message.
- Update status every 15–30 minutes.
- Debrief against objectives; log lessons into SOPs.