Section 7: Authority for Incident Management

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Section 7: Authority for Incident Management

Introduction This document is Section 7 of the New Zealand Fire Service Incident

Management – Command and Control Technical Manual.

Authority for Incident Management

7.1 – Powers Granted by the Fire Service Act 1975

7.1.1 Significant powers Fire Service officers acting in an emergency response role are granted

considerable powers under the Fire Service Act 1975 to exercise authority over Fire Service personnel and resources, and also on occasion, over other agencies

and members of the public.

7.1.2 It is important that all officers understand the nature of these powers in order

that they may act swiftly and with confidence. These are outlined below.

7.1.3 Operational instructions

Section 17N of the Fire Service Act makes the National Commander responsible for the issuing of operational instructions.

7.1.4 Section 27A of the Act allows the National Commander to issue operational

instructions that relate to the operational requirements, duties and scope of the

Fire Service.

7.1.5 All members of the Fire Service who hold rank, volunteer fire Brigades (and

their members), and industrial and defence Brigades shall obey and be guided

by those instructions.

7.1.6 New or significant changes to Operational Instructions are communicated

through the Fire Service Gazette and on FireNet. Minor amendments are

notified through notice on FireNet.

7.1.7 Local Procedures are procedures that are developed from Operational

Instructions and used to meet local conditions. These provide guidance for implementing the Operational Instructions where local conditions or resources available mean that further definition or clarification is required, e.g. detailing the attendance at a special risk where the District does not have suitable 'special' appliances. In practice, local procedures are invariably required to

substantiate the intent of Operational Instructions.

1st November 2007

7.1.8 Powers of delegation

The powers detailed in section **28**, **28A**, **29** and **30** of the Fire Service Act 1975 are primarily granted to Chief Fire Officers who can then delegate them to members of the Brigade.

7.1.9

Section 28(1) gives the Chief Fire Officer direction of their Brigade and all other operational Brigades within their Fire District. **Subsection 2** requires the Chief Fire Officer or person for the time being in charge of the Brigade, to proceed to any fire or alarm of fire within their District. **Subsections 3** and **3A** enable the Officer In Charge to attend emergencies other than those with risk of fire, if they consider that the Brigade could be of some assistance.

7.1.10 General powers

One of the fundamental powers of the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) or the person for the time being in charge of the Fire Brigade (OIC) is the power to enter onto land, or into any building, which is on fire or at risk from fire. This includes the power to break into a building or structure in an emergency. In addition, the CFO or OIC may direct firefighters to take any equipment required into the building and to remove anything from that building which is flammable or dangerous.

Firefighters, when directed by the CFO or OIC, also have the power to pull down a building or tree which itself is on fire, or which is near a building or structure which is on fire. In these cases the expense of such operations must be borne by the owner.

7.1.11

Other powers which the CFO or OIC may exercise at the scene of an emergency involving fire, or risk of fire, include:

- Shutting off the water in any main or pipe in order to obtain greater pressure and supply of water
- Closing off a road, street, right of way, thoroughfare, or even a railway, in the vicinity of the fire or other emergency
- Removing any vehicle impeding the operation of the fire Brigades (and being permitted to use force to break into the vehicle for this purpose)
- Taking people away from the area of danger
- Removing anyone who interferes with the emergency operations
- Shutting off or disconnecting gas, oil, or electricity to any building which is on fire or endangered by fire.

Note: At emergencies not involving fire or the risk of fire, these powers may not be exercised without the authority of the person in charge of operations at the scene.

7.1.12 Responding outside the urban fire District

Section 28A of this Act enables the CFO to respond to fires or other emergencies outside of their Fire District into a neighbouring urban fire District or a rural fire District administered by a Rural Fire Authority. In practice these attendances are predetermined. CFOs can direct the Comcen to develop predetermined attendances via beat lists, which maximise the efficiency of response.

7.1.13

When responding to incidents inside other Urban Fire Districts, unless Region procedures state otherwise, firefighters and officers should be aware that the control of the incident remains the responsibility and prerogative of the OIC of the Brigade from the District that has the incident in its 'first response' zone – regardless of rank. It is the responsibility of the OIC of the Brigade entering that zone to liaise with the OIC of the incident to coordinate the efforts of their personnel and resources.

7.1.14

This aspect of command authority occasionally causes confusion. Consequently it is dealt with in greater detail at paragraph 7.7 of this section.

7.1.15 Powers for preincident planning and Fire Investigation

Section 29 allows the person for the time being in charge of the Brigade to have access to land and buildings for the purpose of pre-incident planning and post-incident investigation. This does not allow entry to private homes, and is subject to other legislation when dealing with a diplomatic residence.

7.1.16

The Fire Service Act enables Fire Service personnel to have access to land or buildings after a fire or hazardous substance emergency, to determine the cause of the incident.

7.1.17 Police assistance to Fire Brigades

The Fire Service Act implies that the Police recognise the authority of the Fire Service officer in charge of the fire Brigade at any incident, within an urban fire District, involving a fire or suspected fire. Police in attendance at a fire shall co- operate with the Fire Service officer in charge of the fire brigade at the scene. In some circumstances Police officers may be authorised by the OIC to exercise all of the powers of a CFO or the person for the time being in charge of the Fire Brigade.

7.1.18 Use of water

Subject to the overall requirements of a Civil Defence Controller during a state of civil defence emergency, the Fire Service is empowered to use water in any main or water in any river or watercourse, any lake, tank or pool, free of charge, for dealing with fires and hazardous substance emergencies (Section 30 (1)(a) and (b).

7.1.19

Water for training purposes can also be used within the Brigade's Fire District and outside the Fire District, with the consent of the person or authority who supplies the water.

7.2 – Powers Under the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms (HSNO) Act 1996

7.2.1 Main provisions

The Fire Service's main interest in the provisions of the HSNO Act is in emergency situations. In a hazardous substance emergency, **Section 135** of this Act extends the definition of Enforcement Officer to cover any member of the Fire Service who is exercising the powers of a Chief Fire Officer under section 28, 28a, 29 or 30 of the Fire Service Act 1975. This means that the officer has the emergency powers assigned to an enforcement officer listed in Section 137 of this Act.

7.2.2

These powers include the power to enter premises and requisition property that may be needed in the emergency.

7.2.3 Limitations of liability

Section 139 provides enforcement officers with a limitation on liability when acting in good faith. This limitation on liability also covers firefighters who are acting in the capacity of an enforcement officer pursuant to this Act.

7.2.4 Public compensation

Officers need to be aware that the requisitioning of property under the powers provided by the HSNO Act may result in claims for compensation. The exercise of such powers may create a liability if things go wrong or damage occurs to the property requisitioned. **Section 138** allows members of the public to apply for compensation for any property requisitioned pursuant to **Section 137**, except where they were involved in the cause of the emergency.

7.2.5 Fire Service Act primacy

Officers should understand that the Fire Service Act generally empowers them to manage all hazardous substances incidents. Consequently they should seek to operate under the Fire Service Act in preference to any other legislation. However there are circumstances when the HSNO Act can provide additional authority.

7.2.6

In order to ensure protection from potential liability and compensation issues, the OIC should transmit a radio message declaring that a hazardous substance emergency does exist and that he/she is managing the incident under the Fire Service Act or the HSNO Act, whichever is the most appropriate. As stated above, preference should always be given to the use of the Fire Service Act.

7.3 – Powers under the Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977

7.3.1 Context

Both the Forest and Rural Fires Act (1977) and the Fire Service Act (1975) provide for a focus of cooperation between Rural Fire Authorities and the New Zealand Fire Service. This is specifically confirmed in Section 17P of the Fire Service Act which is headed 'Coordination schemes for fire control'. In particular, section 17 P (1) requires that:

The National Commander shall, subject to such policy direction as may from time to time be given by the Commission and conveyed by the Chief Executive to the National Commander, continue to operate ... cooperative schemes between Fire Brigades ... and Fire Authorities... for the purpose of:

- 1. Reinforcement at serious fires
- 2. Fire protection in rural areas.

7.3.2 Main Provisions – Section 16 agreements

Where local circumstances permit, it is sensible to make arrangements for the resources of urban or industrial Brigades to be available to assist with firefighting in neighbouring rural fire Districts.

7.3.3

Under Section 15(1) of the Forest and Rural Fires Act, any rural fire authority may arrange with the New Zealand Fire Service Commission, or with the Crown, or with any employer of an industrial fire Brigade that the services of the Brigade are available for fire control by agreement.

7.3.4

All Fire Service officers should be aware of what agreements have been made for their fire District under Section 15.

7.3.5 Main Provisions – Section 36

Section 36 of the Act outlines the powers of:

- The Principal Rural Fire Officer (PRFO)
- The Rural Fire Officer (RFO)
- A rural fire authority for the purposes of controlling fire.

7.3.6 Working with the PFRO

At a vegetation fire, Section 36(b) grants the PRFO or RFO control (but not command) of:

• Any Fire Service, volunteer or industrial Brigade registered under the Fire Service Act 1975 present at the fire

and control and command of:

- Any persons who voluntarily place their services at his disposal
- Any persons (not being engaged in essential services) whose services they require.

7.3.7 Exception

An exception is provided in the case of any event occurring within the greater vegetation fire incident that would normally fall under the jurisdiction of the Fire Service, e.g. structure fires (buildings), motor vehicle accidents, hazardous substance emergencies etc. In these circumstances the OIC Fire will retain control of firefighters and resources for the purpose of dealing with these aspects of the greater incident. The OIC Fire must be the most senior officer attending or the first arriving officer if of the same rank. See Section 36(1)(b).

7.3.8 Powers of access

Section 36(1)(c) empowers the PRFO/RFO or any person acting under his direction and authority to:

- Access any land, house, building or premises
- Break open any doors of any house or building which may be on fire or in the near neighbourhood of any fire for the purpose of taking any steps which he deems necessary.

7.3.9 Powers to use plant/equipment

Section 36(1)(d) empowers the PRFO/RFO or any person acting under his direction and authority to take (or direct others to take) any apparatus into, through or upon any land, house, building or premises considered convenient.

7.3.10 Powers to enforce withdrawal

Section 36(1)(i) empowers the PRFO/RFO or any person acting under his direction and authority to order and (if necessary) enforce the withdrawal of any persons who:

- Interfere with firefighting operations
- Are present on any land, in any building or premises then burning or threatened by fire unless they have a pecuniary (financial) interest in the property or in any goods located there.

7.3.11 Powers to act upon structures

Section 36(1)(j) empowers the PRFO/RFO or any person acting under his direction and authority to pull down or shore up any wall or part of a building which is in his/her opinion sufficiently damaged by fire to represent a danger.

7.3.12

Fire Service officers in charge of a structure fire incident within a greater rural fire incident are provided with such authority under the general powers of the Fire Service Act (see paragraph 3.1.4). Consequently they do not need to apply to the PRFO for permission to act upon structures in these circumstances.

7.4 – Powers under the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002

7.4.1 Retention of powers

Section 6 of the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002 states that:

'Unless this Act provides otherwise, this Act does not limit, is not in substitution for, and does not affect the functions, duties or powers under the provisions of any enactment or any rule of law'.

7.4.2

The effect of this statement is that powers available to Fire Service personnel under the Fire Service Act 1975 are not affected by a declaration of a civil defence emergency. Consequently all those powers (described in Section 7.1 of this chapter) remain in place. In effect this means that we shall assist Civil Defence but continue to operate with full authority under the Fire Service Act.

7.4.3 Additional powers

In very exceptional circumstances a wide range of additional powers may be exercised.

7.4.4

If a civil defence emergency has been declared, or a person authorised by the Civil Defence Emergency Management Group believes the situation is of sufficient urgency, he/she may apply for a warrant to obtain entry to premises or property to obtain urgently required information.

7.4.5

This may mean that Fire Service personnel are required to assist civil defence directly or (more usually) assist Police officers acting under warrant, in forcing entry for the purpose of obtaining required information. In these situations Fire Service personnel may:

- 'Use any force that is reasonable in the circumstances for the purposes of effecting entry, and for breaking open anything in or on the place searched.' Section 80(1)(c)
- 'Search for and seize the information required and for that purpose:
 - Take copies of any document, or extracts from any document
 - Require the person who has a document in his or her possession or under his or her control to reproduce, or to assist the person executing the warrant to reproduce, in usable form, any information recorded or stored in the document.' Section 80(1)(d)

7.4.6

If information obtained by the Police under section 80(1)(a) is provided to the Fire Service for operational purposes, it must be returned to the person from whom it was seized when it is no longer required. Section 81(2). Any information obtained in these circumstances may not be disclosed except for the purposes of the Act. Section 83(1).

7.4.7

If a civil defence emergency has been declared, and the Civil Defence Controller or the police believe that action must be taken to preserve human life, they (or any persons authorised by them) may act to ensure:

- 'The evacuation of any premises or place, including any public place' Section 86(a)
- 'The exclusion of persons or vehicles from any premises or place, including any public place.' Section 86(b)

7.4.8

Fire Service personnel may therefore carry out these operations, provided they are acting with the knowledge and authority of the Civil Defence Controller or the Police.

7.4.9

In the event of a civil defence emergency being declared, Fire Service personnel, acting on the authority of the Civil Defence Controller or the Police, may enter or break into property if they believe it necessary for:

- 'Saving life, preventing injury, or rescuing and removing injured or endangered persons' Section 87(a)
- 'Permitting or facilitating the carrying out of any urgent measure for the relief of suffering or distress.' Section 87(b)

7.4.10

If a civil defence emergency is declared, Fire Service personnel acting under the authority of the Civil Defence Controller or the Police, or (if granted), the direct authority extended to them under the relevant civil defence emergency plan, may close roads or public places in order to limit the extent of the emergency. Section 88.

7.4.11

If a civil defence emergency is declared, Fire Service personnel, acting under the authority of the Civil Defence Controller or the Police, may requisition property if use of that property is deemed necessary for saving life (Section 90(2). In these circumstances Fire Service personnel may take control of any:

- Land
- Building
- Vehicle
- Animal
- Boat
- Apparatus
- Implement
- Earth-moving equipment
- Furniture
- Bedding
- Food
- Medical supplies
- Medicine
- Construction materials or equipment
- Any other equipment, materials or supplies.

7.4.12

If such powers of requisition are invoked the officer doing so must provide the owner of the property, as soon as possible under the circumstances, with a written statement detailing what has been requisitioned and under whose control it has been placed. Section 90(5).

7.4.13

In the event of a civil defence emergency being declared, Fire Service personnel, acting under the authority of the civil defence controller or the police, may:

- 'Direct any person to stop any activity that may cause or substantially contribute to an emergency' Section 91(a)
- 'Request any person, either verbally or in writing, to take any action to prevent or limit the extent of the emergency.' Section 91(b)

7.4.14

In the event of a civil defence emergency being declared, Fire Service personnel, acting under the authority of the Civil Defence Controller or the police, may:

• 'Examine, mark, seize, sample, secure, disinfect or destroy any property, animal or any other thing in order to prevent or limit the extent of the emergency.' Section 92.

7.5 – Powers under the Land Transport Act 1998 and Rules

7.5.1 OIC responsibilities

It is recognised that the turnout and response aspect of incident management is a potentially a period of high risk, for both Fire Service staff and the general public. It is essential that Officers In Charge of responding appliances maintain full and proper control by ensuring that they are driven in accordance with:

- Existing land transport rules
- Fire Service policy (NCI 58)
- The prevailing road and weather conditions.

This responsibility cannot be delegated to the driver.

7.5.2 Driver Qualifications

Fire Service policy aligns with the requirements of the Transport Act and Rules. Consequently Fire Service vehicles may only be driven by appropriate personnel. This means that they must:

- Hold a current driver's license for the class of vehicle concerned (see NCI 58 for vehicle class descriptions)
- Be trained and qualified in any skills required in addition to driving in normal traffic conditions, e.g. driving a vehicle whilst loaded (including carriage of hazardous substances), driving a specialist type vehicle (e.g. 4WD), or driving a vehicle in emergency situations
- Be appointed by their manager as a Brigade emergency response driver

7.5.3

Chief Fire Officers/Officers In Charge of Fire Service appliances must ensure that vehicles are driven in accordance with Fire Service policy.

7.5.4

Section 5(4) of the Land Transport Act requires that 'a person driving a motor vehicle must produce without delay his or her driving licence for inspection whenever required to do so by an enforcement officer'. Fire Service drivers are not exempt from this. Officers In Charge should therefore ensure that drivers are able to produce their license if asked to do so by a police officer.

7.5.5 Maximum response speeds

Land Transport Rule 5.1 (1) requires that drivers must not exceed the 'applicable speed limit'. However, Fire Service drivers who exceed the applicable speed limit may offer a defence in law providing that:

'The vehicle was an emergency vehicle being used in an emergency and was operating a red beacon or a siren or both' - Rule 5.1(3)(b).

7.5.6

NCI 58 sets out the maximum speeds to be observed relevant to the range of posted and open road speeds, and also to intersections and crossings. Officers In Charge must be familiar with these stipulations and ensure that they are adhered to.

| 7.5.7 Use of warning devices | Land Transport Rule 7.4(1) states that a driver 'must not operate a vehicle that creates noise that, having regard to all the circumstances, is excessive.' |
|------------------------------|---|
| 7.5.8 | However, rule 7.4(4)(a) states that 'the use of sirens fitted to an emergency vehicle used on urgent occasions' is authorised'. This includes the use of sirens for the purpose of signalling a general evacuation from a building or from the incident ground. |
| 7.5.9 | Rule 8.5(b) authorises the use of beacons provided they are fitted to an emergency services vehicle being used in an emergency situation. |
| 7.5.10 Use of seat belts | In accordance with NCI 58, Officers In Charge are to ensure that all personnel wear fitted seat belts while the vehicle is in motion. |

7.6 – Powers under Fire Service Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding

| 7.6.1 | Although officers are not expected to be able to draft these agreements, they are expected to know if such an agreement exists, if it applies within their Region, and how to deal with a situation that arises within it. |
|-------|---|
| 7.6.2 | S 38 of the Fire Service Act 1975 provides that the Commission may enter into an agreement with the territorial authority for the protection from fire of any rural area outside of the Fire District. This means that a response to this area is made in accordance with this agreement and the conditions of it. |
| 7.6.3 | S39 of the Fire Service Act 1975 allows the Commission to enter into agreements with Harbour Boards or owners of property outside the Fire District. A response to this area should also be treated in accordance with the agreement. |
| 7.6.4 | S15 of the Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977 allows any Fire Authority to enter into an agreement with the Commission to provide specific equipment or services in the event of fire within a rural area. |
| 7.6.5 | S16 of the Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977 extends the provisions of s15 to incorporate owners of any property in a rural area entering into agreements for the purpose of fire control. |

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7.7 - Sectorisation - Internal Command Authority

7.7.1 Types of Fire District/Fire Authority

Experience has shown that when an officer and his/her crew are called upon to assist a neighbouring Fire District, or to provide support, and protocols are not agreed in advance, problems can occur over just who is in charge and has responsibility for the incident. It is important that Fire Service staff have a good understanding of the types of Fire District/Fire Authority in New Zealand and who exercises authority within them.

7.7.2 Urban Fire Districts

Under the Fire Service Act (1975) the Fire Service is mandated to protecting life and property from fire and other hazards, primarily within urban areas. Depending on their size urban areas will be assigned to one or more Urban Fire Districts. Within these Districts, the appointed Chief Fire Officer or the person for the time being in charge of the Brigade exercises their own powers and authority.

7.7.3 Rural Fire Authorities

The following is a useful description of the various types of Rural Fire Authority.

'Outside urban areas, the National Rural Fire Authority promotes and encourages rural fire co-ordination under the Forest and Rural Fires Act (1977), with the responsibility to prevent, detect and extinguish fires falling on Rural Fire Authorities.

Rural Fire Authorities are independent organisations with responsibilities for fire control measures including prevention, restriction and suppression of fires in forest and rural areas.

Each Rural Fire Authority falls into one of the following categories:

- State Areas
- Rural Fire Districts
- Territorial Authorities
- Defence lands.

7.7.4 State areas

The Minister of Conservation, through the Department of Conservation, is the Rural Fire Authority for the lands administered by the Department. This may include a one-kilometre fire safety margin around Conservation land.

7.7.5 Rural Fire Districts

Landowners looking to provide greater fire protection for their lands, or territorial authorities that wish to amalgamate their fire protection responsibilities with neighbouring authorities, may establish a Rural Fire District. Rural Fire Districts ranging in size from several thousand hectares to three million hectares are currently in existence. The New Zealand Defence Force is the Rural Fire Authority for eight Rural Fire Districts covering their lands.

7.7.6 Territorial authorities

Areas that are not covered by an Urban Fire District, a Rural Fire District, or a State area are the responsibility of the Territorial Authority, which becomes the Rural Fire Authority.

The National Rural Fire Authority provides support and co-ordination to Rural Fire Authorities.' Source – National Rural Fire Authority.

7.7.7 Clarity of command

The command relationship between the Fire Service OIC and the Principal Rural Fire Officer has already been explained (see paragraphs 3.3.6 and 3.3.7).

The command relationship between Fire Service Officers In Charge from neighbouring urban fire districts is less obvious. An example of typical issues would be when two Brigades respond to the same incident and the persons in charge of each Brigade hold significantly differing ranks. If the person in charge of the 'first response' Brigade is junior in rank to his/her counterpart from the neighbouring Brigade (e.g. he/she is a Senior Firefighter while the other is a Senior Station Officer), this can cause confusion over who should take command. Where no protocols have been established in advance between neighbouring Brigades, the more senior person should assume command. This should be effected with agreement of both parties. In the interests of successful incident management neighbouring Brigades should ensure that appropriate protocols are established and clearly understood by all personnel who might be called upon to act in a command role.

7.7.8

Section 28(4)(a) of the Fire Service Act states that the person, for the time being, in charge of the fire Brigade that responds to an in-district incident, will control and direct all fire Brigades that attend. Practically, this means that the most senior officer from that district may be seen as the Incident Controller. However, at times this may not be the safest or wisest decision, e.g. when an officer of greater seniority and experience arrives from a neighbouring District.

Regions should have clear guidelines that establish who should act as the person, *for the time being* in charge of the fire Brigade. This may take cognisance of seniority, experience and delegations to ensure that a commonsense approach is taken with regard to incident command under these circumstances.

7.7.9

The most senior officer in attendance from the District retains responsibility for the incident, even if a more senior ranking officer subsequently arrives from another district. However, the in-district OIC can choose (but cannot be forced) to place their resources at the disposal of a more senior officer out-of District officer and the latter will then become the incident controller.

Note: It is expected that officers will always co-operate in the best interests of professional management of the incident.

7.8 – Control of Incidents Involving Multi Agency Response

7.8.1 CIMS environment

Incidents will be managed according to the protocols of the Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS).

7.8.2

In summary this means that normally the function of incident control will be performed by the most senior person from the 'lead agency'. The lead agency will be the organisation with legislative or agreed authority for control of the incident in question.

7.8.3

In practice the role of Incident Controller may have to be handed over if the most appropriate lead agency is not first on the scene, or the situation changes significantly (e.g. a fatality is discovered at a house fire or evidence of a crime is discovered). In these situations the Police would take over as lead agency.

Extract

''Initially, the Incident Controller will be the senior ''first responder'' to arrive at the scene. As additional responders arrive, control will transfer on the basis of which agency has primary authority for overall control of the incident. As incidents grow in size or become more complex, the responsible jurisdiction or agency may assign a more highly qualified Incident Controller.''

Source - CIMS Blue Book 1998 Edition

7.8.4

Command of personnel within each attending agency is retained intact and performed by the most senior officer available from each agency.

In most cases, the designation of lead agency is obvious and unproblematic, and directly related to the primary operational functions of agencies. However, with complex incidents there is a possibility that confusion or even conflict can occur over who takes on incident control. Situations like these are best managed through 'unified command,' i.e. controlling the incident on a 'committee' basis. This requires that each agency involved understands the responsibilities of the others and cooperates fully in assisting them.

7.9 – References and further reading

7.9.1 Brookers Library

The full text of the following may be obtained online via:

FireNet → Fire Applications → Brookers Library → Legislation Links

- Fire Service Act 1975
- Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996
- Forest and Rural Fires Act 1977
- Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002

Further information on qualifications and standards for emergency response driving can be obtained on line via:

FireNet \rightarrow Training/PDU \rightarrow Training Materials \rightarrow General \rightarrow Links to Manuals.