

State Council Decision Paper

Requirement for an Additional Breathing Apparatus Competency

December 2012

PURPOSE

This Discussion paper outlines the requirement for an additional Breathing Apparatus competency, to improve protection for volunteer members by enabling BA to be worn in non-structural environments.

BACKGROUND

The current BA competency is totally focused on use in a structural environment. The elements of the competency include:

- PUAFIR207B “Operate Breathing Apparatus”.
- Element 4 (Search and Rescue) of PUAFIR203B “Respond to Urban Fire”.
- Practical Drills – “Working in a smoke-filled, dark and hot environment”.

This structural focus has resulted in a lack of protection for members at non-structural fires. For example, around 80% of members in District 8 cannot access the benefits of BA to protect themselves from smoke in non-structural environments, due to limited training opportunities and/or budget restrictions. This situation is unacceptable, particularly in a highly urbanised environment.

The protective benefits of BA can, and should, be utilised in non-structural environments to protect members from smoke. Examples include car fires, dump-master fires, and flammable liquid fires. Further, BA can be used in non-structural environments during training at field training grounds.

It is clear that a paradigm shift is required in order to increase the level of protection available to members. We need to change our way of thinking. BA is NOT just for use in a structural environment. ***BA is a tool for protecting firefighters against hostile atmospheres***, and a new BA competency is required to reflect this.

PROPOSED ADDITIONAL BA COMPETENCY

It is proposed that PUAFIR207B “Operate Breathing Apparatus” be adopted as a new competency, to be referred to as the “Basic BA Competency”. This would enable members to wear BA in non-structural environments including car fires, dump-master fires, and flammable liquid fires.

This proposal will facilitate a significant increase in the number of members who can wear BA in non-structural environments, who would otherwise have no respiratory protection.

BA FOR STRUCTURAL FIREFIGHTING

This Proposal WILL NOT CHANGE the current training and competency required for use of BA in structural firefighting. It will NOT decrease the level of training required. However it will enable members to gain practical experience in BA prior to stepping up to complete the structural BA competency.

It is envisaged that this proposal will eventually increase the number of personnel who achieve the structural BA competency, because the proposed new competency will provide an intermediate step in training which will enable members to gain experience and confidence with the equipment.

TRAINING FOR THE BASIC BA COMPETENCY

Training for the proposed competency can be conducted on station by competent personnel. (It is noted that prior to the advent of career instructors, this training was successfully delivered by volunteer instructors.)

There is no requirement to undertake this training at a field training ground, nor is there a requirement to utilise particular instructors/assessors (career or volunteer), the only requirement being that the training is delivered and assessed by members that hold the appropriate qualifications and endorsements. This means that the level of protection for members will increase, while driving down the costs of training. It also means that volunteers will not need to travel to training grounds, resulting in time and cost savings to them.

Further benefits will be derived when members with this competency go on to undertake the structural BA competency. It is anticipated that their prior experience and confidence with the equipment will lead to a shorter course duration, and an increased course success rate, further driving down training costs and increasing the number of members with the structural BA competency.

FIREGROUND IDENTIFICATION

Members with the BA competency currently have the "BA" decal on their helmet.

There are two options for members with the Basic BA Competency:

- No decals. This will avoid any issues with non-qualified members being asked to enter a structure.
- A dual decal structure, consisting of BA1 for the proposed non-structural BA competency, and BA2 for the structural BA competency. This is the recommended system, because the competencies are made clear, and no decal at all means no BA qualification.

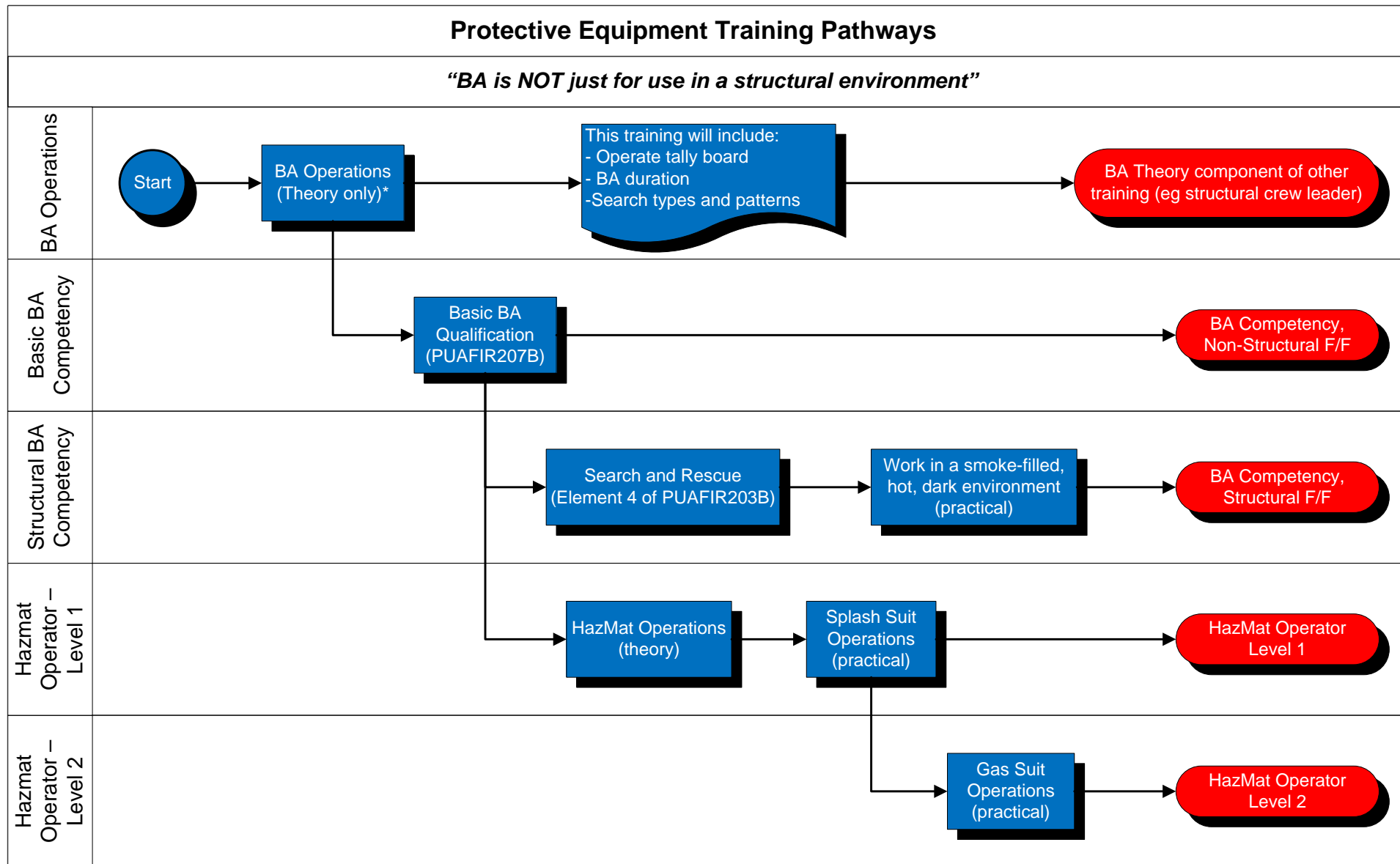
A similar decal system was successfully used many years ago, albeit for different reasons. No reason can be seen to prevent this system being used again.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The VFBV Joint Training Committee has successfully sought State Council endorsement for the commencement of a consultation and discussion process, driven through VFBV District Councils, with the aim of considering the following three recommendations at the State Council Meeting scheduled for 2nd December 2012.

Consequently, VFBV State Council would need to endorse the following:

1. That CFA create a new Basic BA Competency based on PUA FIR207B "Operate Breathing Apparatus", enabling the wearing of BA in non-structural environments;
2. Training in the proposed competency can be conducted on-station with volunteer instructors and assessors.
3. That CFA adopt a revised helmet decal system, with "BA1" denoting non-structural BA competency and "BA2" denoting structural BA competency.
4. VFBV work with CFA to achieve early implementation of Recommendations 1, 2 and 3.



*This module may be relevant to the proposed new CFA Module "Supervise Urban Incidents" (refer T Duckmanton proposal, August 2012)