

The Incident Response Regiment

This article was produced by the IRR in order to inform the wider emergency management community of the roles and responsibilities of the Incident Response Regiment

The Incident Response Regiment was created in 2002 as part of the Australian Government's plan to meet the evolving terrorism threat and to enhance the Australian Defence Force (ADF) counter-terrorism capabilities. The Regiment is a unit of Special Operations Command contributing to a national approach to detecting, deterring, responding and managing any terrorist incident.

The Incident Response Regiment comprises command and logistic support elements, two specialist organisations, and its headquarters. The specialist organisations have key capabilities in conventional emergency response and enhance chemical, biological, radiological and improvised explosives hazard reduction. In accordance with Australia's treaty obligations, the Regiment contributes to the ADF's ability to conduct domestic security and off-shore operations.

The role of the Incident Response Regiment is to provide specialist response to incidents involving chemical, biological and radiological (CBR) and/or explosive hazards, including other hazardous material and situations including fire.

The Incident Response Regiment can trace its development history to the Army Fire Service and a number of specialist Royal Australian Engineer organisations. The Australian Army has responded to incidents involving fire since World War I with an explosive ordnance disposal capacity has been maintained and enhanced since World War II. During the 1980s, the School of Military Engineering developed Army's chemical

and biological response ability, incorporating a limited ability to respond to terrorist actions involving toxic chemicals.

Emergency Response Squadron

The Emergency Response Squadron was raised from the Army Fire Service in 1999 as a result of the inquiry into the June 1996 Blackhawk helicopter tragedy. The tragedy highlighted the need for land forces to be supported by

an emergency response capability. While the Emergency Response Squadron traces its lineage from the Army Firefighting Service, it has greatly expanded beyond firefighting operations. The Squadron now provides Army with a mobile and flexible emergency response capacity. Soldiers in the Squadron are trained firefighters, with specialist skills in crash and urban search and rescue. The fire fighters are able to perform their tasks in a contaminated environment



Medics conducting decontamination of team members before dispatch to triage



Explosive Ordnance Demolition technician examining an Improvised Explosive Device with x-ray equipment (RTR-4)

if required. The Squadron has detachments in Darwin, Sydney, Townsville and Oakey providing emergency response and rescue support to land forces.

Chemical Biological Radiological Response Squadron

In the 1980s, the School of Military Engineering formed the Chemical Radiological Response Team. The team's role involved the training of Navy, Army and Air Force personnel in nuclear, chemical and biological defence and, where required, limited response to domestic incidents. The intent was to respond to incidents involving World War II chemical munitions. During the 1990s the Chemical Radiological Response Team developed a limited ability to respond to terrorist actions involving toxic chemicals.

In June 1998 the National Security Cabinet Committee approved the establishment of a specialist response capacity. The decision involved the foundation of the Chemical, Biological and Radiological Response Squadron.

Worldwide trends highlight the potential threat from terrorists using chemical or biological weapons. Security planning for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games identified a need to increase the ability to respond to counter-terrorist activities especially involving complex CBR and improvised explosive device threats. The Chemical Radiological Response Team responsibilities were consequently transferred to the newly raised Joint Incident Response Unit.

Joint Incident Response Unit

The Joint Incident Response Unit was established in 2000 as a component of the ADF commitment to the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. The Joint Incident Response Unit incorporated the chemical, biological and radiological response squadron and technical specialist search and explosive ordnance disposal (for improvised and conventional explosive devices). The Unit's capabilities were employed as a component of the Sydney 2000 games inter-governmental bomb management and response plan. At the peak of the operational tempo the Joint Incident Response Unit totalled 501 defence personnel. The ADF elements were directly supported by a large scientific contingent from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The Joint Incident Response Unit ceased operational support to the Sydney Olympic Games in

November 2000 and was formally disbanded by March 2001. The subsequent long-term defence solution for response, high risk search and CBRN defence was achieved by forming the Chemical, Biological and Radiological Response Squadron.

Incident Response Unit

The terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 gave rise to the Prime Minister announcing an enhanced CBRN defence capacity within the ADF to counter the threat of “weapons of mass effect”. This announcement resulted in the creation of the Incident Response Unit (IRU). The creation of the IRU identified an opportunity to unite under one command the existing emergency response and chemical, biological and radiological response teams. During the IRU tenure further development plans were raised for a permanent chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive response capability.

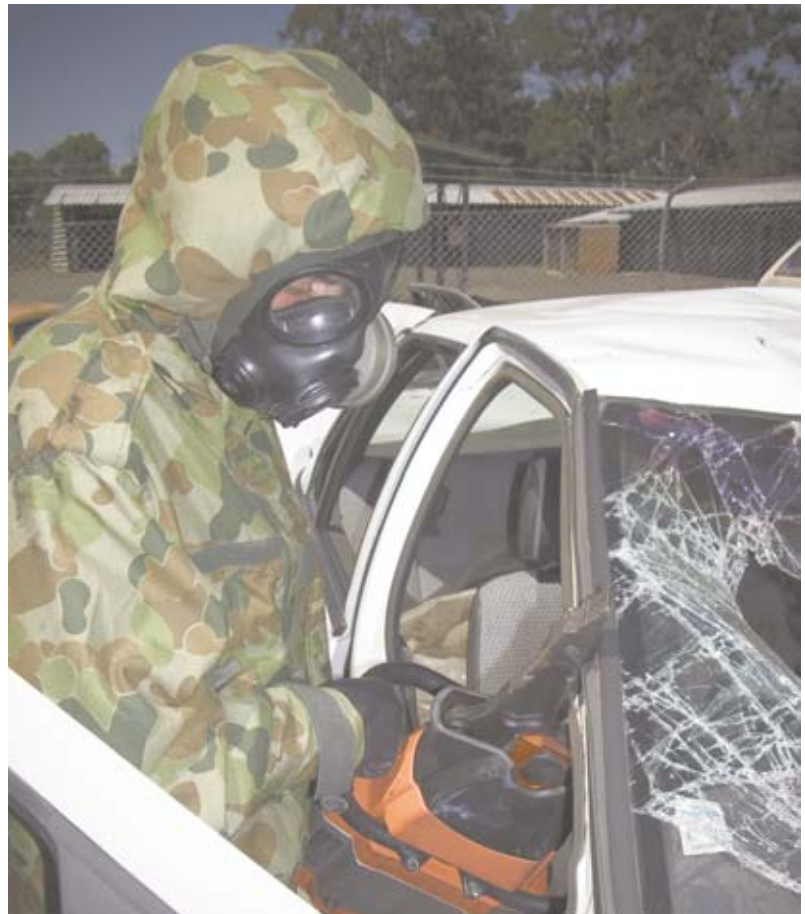
Incident Response Regiment

In May 2002 the Australian Government announced the formation of the Incident Response Regiment as a direct-command unit of Land Command Engineers. Given the Regiment's unique capacity and skills it was subsequently allocated to the Special Operations Command.

The Incident Response Regiment maintains a high degree of readiness, training and motivation. The Regiment is frequently involved in operations and training in direct support of Special Operations Command activities in Australia and offshore. The Regiment continues to interact and exercise with Federal and State agencies and is building co-operation with regional neighbours. The Regiment has about 300 personnel with strong representations from scientific personnel, Army Engineers, Signallers and Logisticians.



Recovery Medic team retrieving an injured team member



Member of Emergency Response Squadron using the Jaws of Life