

COMMUNICATION

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Highlights:

- Function of emergency volunteers in major natural disasters and emergencies where demand exceeds regular service capacity
- Implementation of allowances as financial incentives to reimburse volunteers for training and operational expenses
- Provide a reference for best practices to enhance the support and motivation of emergency volunteers

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A Comparative Study of Honorarium for Emergency Volunteers in Selected Cities

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Abstract The research paper examines the role of emergency volunteers in major natural disasters and emergency situations where demand for search and rescue exceeds the capacity of conventional services. It highlights the importance of volunteers in supplementing regular emergency personnel and explores the use of allowances to reimburse volunteers for expenses related to training and operational duties as an incentive for participation. The study focuses on six governmental emergency organizations across the Asia Pacific, included Queensland Fire Department (Australia), Technisches Hilfswerk (Germany), Volunteer Fire Corps (Japan), Hong Kong SAR, Fire and Emergency New Zealand, and Civil Defence Auxiliary Unit (Singapore), where volunteers perform operational roles comparable to regular staff, including firefighting, rescue, and paramedic services. By summarizing the honorarium practices in these jurisdictions, the research provides a reference for best practices aimed at improving the management and support of emergency volunteers.

Keywords: Volunteers; Emergency; Honorarium; Management

1. Introduction

In the context of major natural disasters and other emergency situations, the demand for search and rescue operations often surpasses the capacity of conventional emergency services. It is widely acknowledged that emergency volunteers play a crucial role in supporting regulars in life-saving efforts when emergency services become overwhelmed. To incentivize participation, certain emergency services have implemented allowances to reimburse emergency volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses incurred during training or operational missions.

To remain informed about current practices regarding the provision of allowances among emergency organizations and to gather relevant data. This research offers a summary of honorarium provided to emergency volunteers in selected regions, serving as a reference for best practices aimed at enhancing the management of volunteer rescue personnel.

1.1. Scope

Due to limitations in time and resources, the study focused on Queensland Fire Department (QFD) of Australia, Technisches Hilfswerk (THW) of Germany, Volunteer Fire Corps (Shobo-dan) of Japan, Hong Kong SAR (China), Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ), and Civil Defence Auxiliary Unit of Singapore, as these jurisdictions maintain government-affiliated emergency services that incorporate emergency volunteers. Notably, these volunteers performed operational roles that are equivalent to those undertaken by regulars, such as firefighting, rescue and paramedic service.

1.1.1 Queensland Fire Department (QFD) of Australia

Australia comprises a federation of six states alongside two self-governing territories. In Queensland has its own auxiliary firefighters under the State Fire and Emergency Services. The auxiliary firefighters perform same frontline operational duties alongside regulars, such as structural and environmental fires, road traffic accident rescue, swift water and technical rescue and community education (Queensland Fire Department, 2025).

1.1.2 Technisches Hilfswerk (THW), Germany

The THW is a nationwide emergency volunteer organization in Germany, operating under the

management of the Federal Ministry of the Interior. It offers specialized support to other emergency services during crisis situations (Technisches Hilfswerk, 2018). THW is an independent organization. Their trained volunteers are equipped to carry out a wide range of emergency response activities at the local level, including storm damage and flood management, emergency relief for affected individuals, search and rescue operations, technical support for infrastructure, and assistance with emergency command functions. Additionally, they provide humanitarian aid in international contexts (Technisches Hilfswerk (THW), 2023).

1.1.3 Volunteer Fire Corps (Shobo-dan), Japan

In Japan, Volunteer Fire Corps are organized within each municipality and operate under the authority of the respective local fire departments according to Fire Service Act. Financial assistance to these Corps is provided by the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, a central government entity. The focus of this session is on Tokyo Metropolis. Volunteers of the Fire Corps in Tokyo receive training and support from the Tokyo Fire Department. They engage in firefighting, flood response, and emergency evacuation operations alongside regular firefighters during crises (Mission of the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, 2023). Additionally, they contribute to the community by delivering public education on fire safety.

1.1.4 Auxiliary Medical Service (AMS), Civil Aid Service (CAS) and Government Flying Service Auxiliary Section (GFSA), Hong Kong China

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region of China. In accordance with the "One Country, Two Systems" policy, Hong Kong has its own emergency response agencies to address local emergencies. There are three voluntary emergency services: the Auxiliary Medical Service (AMS), the Civil Aid Service (CAS), and the Government Flying Service Auxiliary Section (GFSA) under the management of Security Bureau. The CAS and AMS are both independent organizations directly under the Security Bureau. The

GFSA is part of the Government Flying Service. During emergency situations, volunteers from the AMS provide medical services to support various government departments in emergency situations and at peace time (Auxiliary Medical Service, 2025). CAS volunteers engage in various emergency services in counter-disaster activities, including land search and rescue operations as well as combating vegetation fires (Civil Aid Service, 2025). Additionally, GFSA volunteers contribute to air medical operations and assist with air traffic control in coordination with regular officers (Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service, 2021).

1.1.5 Fire and Emergency New Zealand

Volunteers of Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) deliver a range of essential services to the community, including firefighting, traffic accident rescue, severe weather response, fire safety initiatives, and operational support (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2019). Notably, these volunteers constitute approximately 80% of the total workforce within FENZ (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2022).

1.1.6 Singapore Civil Defence Auxiliary Unit

Singapore is an island city-state. The Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) serves as the primary agency responsible for life-saving operations, encompassing firefighting, rescue, and emergency ambulance services, in addition to overseeing fire safety and civil defence shelter management (Singapore Civil Defence Force, 2025). The Civil Defence Auxiliary Unit (CDAU), a component of the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF), is comprised of volunteers. These volunteers undertake frontline operational responsibilities in conjunction with regular personnel, including firefighting, rescue operations, ambulance services, public education, and enforcement of fire safety regulations (Singapore Civil Defence Force, 2016).

2. Methodology

The methodology primarily involved online interviews and correspondence with relevant organizations via email and online studies. A total of five countries and one special administrative region were examined to gather a diverse range of perspectives and experiences.

2.1. Limitation

Since the majority of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) offering emergency services did not provide honorarium, these emergency-focused NGOs were consequently excluded from the scope of this study.

3. Discussion

In the study, the responding organizations offering various types of honorariums to emergency volunteers, which included:

- (a) hourly allowance;
- (b) per-attendance allowance;
- (c) incidental allowances for overnight deployments;
- (d) annual allowance / reimbursement and
- (e) others. These honorariums are disbursed utilizing public funds in compliance with applicable local regulations.

3.1. Hourly allowance

As the name implies, an hourly allowance is remunerated on an hourly basis. The study information indicates that the Auxiliary firefighters in Queensland of Australia, the three auxiliary services of Hong Kong SAR (China) and Auxiliary Unit of Singapore Civil Defence Force have applied this honorarium mode. For example, the QFD auxiliary firefighters are entitled to receive hourly allowances for duties, activities, and training in accordance with their respective ranks as stipulated by the "Auxiliary Firefighters' Award – State 2016." (Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, 2018)

In Hong Kong, the emergency volunteers from CAS, AMS and GFSA are entitled to receive hourly allowances for duties, activities, and training in accordance with the Auxiliary Forces Pay and Allowances Ordinance, commensurate with their respective ranks (Audit Commission Hong Kong, 2019). For the CDAU volunteers in Singapore also receive hourly allowances for performing duties (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2025) and undergoing training in accordance with the Civil Defence Act, which are in some ways similar to Hong Kong.

3.2. Per-attendance allowance

This type of honorarium is disbursed on a per-attendance basis. According to the legislation, the Tokyo volunteer firefighters are entitled to receive fixed allowances corresponding to each duty and training session (Fire and Disaster Management Agency, 2023).

3.3. Overnight deployment allowance

FENZ Volunteers are provided with a family allowance to assist with expenses incurred during

overnight deployments. This payment serves as supplementary support specifically for dependent care costs. (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2025).

Table 1. Comparison Table for honorarium and reimbursement practices across jurisdictions

	Hourly allowance	Per-attendance allowance	Overnight deployment allowance	Annual allowance/ reimbursement	Others
Queensland (Australia)	X				X Retention allowances
Germany					X Compensation to employer
Tokyo (Japan)		X		X	
Hong Kong SAR (China)	X				
New Zealand			X	X	
Singapore	X				

3.4. Annual allowance/ reimbursement

An annual award program has been established to recognize and express appreciation for the Tokyo volunteer firefighters, with distinctions made based on their respective ranks (Fire and Disaster Management Agency, 2023). Similarly, the FENZ Volunteers are eligible to receive an annual reimbursement designed to compensate for personal expenses incurred in the course of their duties (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2025).

3.5. Others

In addition to the aforementioned types of the honorarium, there exist several unique allowances. For example, when the THW volunteers participate in training sessions or emergency operations during their regular working hours, their employers may reduce their salaries to account for the time of absence. To alleviate any financial burden incurred by either the volunteers or their employers, THW provides compensation to the employers (Federal Ministry of the Interior and for Home Affairs, 2023).

A similar allowance framework is applicable to QFD auxiliary firefighters, who are entitled to claim supplementary compensation if they experience a loss of

regular wages as a result of attending training sessions or operational duties.

Furthermore, QFD incorporates retention allowance. To acknowledge and financially reward the dedication, expertise, and availability of experienced volunteers, thereby minimizing turnover, auxiliary firefighters receive annual awards contingent upon their participation in designated training programs and emergency response activities (Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, 2018).

3.6. Adjustment Mechanism

The purpose of the allowance is to reimburse out-of-pocket expenses, including those associated with food, transportation, and laundry. In addition to the allowance provided to compensate for salary losses, the allowances granted by the responding organizations have an adjustment mechanism, which undergoes periodic review, taking into account factors such as the allocated budget and the Capital Consumer Price Index.

For example, a biennial review is conducted in Hong Kong, which accounts for changes in civil servant remuneration and economic fluctuations (Civil Service Bureau, 2003). Similarly, New Zealand reviews every three years (Fire and Emergency New Zealand, 2017) to

assess whether the allowance amount continues to accurately reflect the costs incurred by volunteers during their participation in volunteer services.

4. Conclusion

The term “volunteer” is commonly defined as an individual who willingly engages in activities, particularly those aimed at assisting others, without coercion or financial compensation (Cambridge Dictionary). However, when examining the specific attributes of emergency volunteers, several key characteristics emerge:

- (1) they serve as a critical support system for emergency organizations during crises;
- (2) they often sacrifice personal time with family and friends to contribute to community; and
- (3) they inevitably face personal risk, including threats to their own lives, during emergency operations.

In this context, the implementation of an appropriate honorarium policy represents a potential means of

formally acknowledging the contributions of emergency rescue volunteers. It is a relatively common practice to offer volunteers hourly allowance to cover expenses incurred during their participation in training and operations. Moreover, this approach is comparatively more equitable and straightforward, as the allowance is determined according to the duration.

Such policies, however, must be tailored to the sociocultural and economic contexts of individual countries and the prevailing public attitudes. Indeed, the allowance provided is not comparable to the regular salaries of emergency responders, which underscores the volunteers' dedication and commitment to serving the community.

It is important to emphasize that organizations offering honorariums for volunteers should not function as temporary employment solutions for the unemployed, as this could lead to significant inefficiencies and resource misallocation following economic recovery as well as the rapid attrition of a significant portion of the workforce, thereby compromising operational efficiency.

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