



## Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference, Inc.

P.O. Box 400440 • Newcomb Hall Station • Charlottesville, VA 22904

Allegheny Mountain Rescue Group • Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group  
Delmarva Search and Rescue • Mountaineer Area Rescue Group  
Maryland Search and Rescue • Potomac Valley Rescue Group  
Search and Rescue Ohio • Shenandoah Mountain Rescue Group

# Memorandum

**Date:** 5 June 2016

**To:** ASRC Board of Directors Representatives  
ASRC Group Chairs

**From:** Michael Hansen, Chair

**Subject:** Memo from the Chair – June 2016

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### Introduction

In May, we enabled ourselves to be type of organization we envision. We did this by approving a suite of documents that updated our governance. I've taken a stab at describing the organization that we are now working towards, these are the hallmarks that differentiate us:

- A credentialing organization;
- A society of search and rescue volunteers that are aligned by improving the state of the practice, akin to many professional societies;
- A resource for exceptional search and rescue mission planning and analysis; and
- A multi-agency coordination center for large-scale missions in our region.

You might be able to think of a few more that I've missed. The point is that there are a lot of facets to our organization. To my knowledge, there is not another organization like ours out there. So the challenge is set forth, we have to do a lot to make this happen for ourselves. Success is not solely dependent on the officers of the organization, but also on the members of the BOD and the participation of our Groups. When you read the word "we" in this memo, you know I mean the officers, the BOD, and the Groups. This is your organization.

I use the word Groups and teams interchangeably in the remainder of this memo. At the end of some section headings, you'll find action items in italics. These are the items I think you can take today to contribute to moving the organization forward.

### Our Themes

I submit to you the following four themes that I'd like us to keep in mind as we work together to realize our collective vision. I've communicated these items to our officers already and we are aligned on it. Keep these in mind with every interaction your group has with the ASRC.

- **Productivity and excellence over perfection** - we don't want to hold up our productivity because we don't think a product is perfect yet. An excellent product that is shipped is better than a perfect product that is not shipped. I'm guilty of doing this in my professional

life and work hard to prevent it from happening. We have to ship products to our teams. Those products should be excellent, but they don't have to be perfect. It's easier to improve upon something already on the table.

- **Our product is information** - We have to have things to give to our teams and give them regularly. We offer many benefits as an organization, but our most prevalent product is information. I've already spoken with our officers and committee heads as to the products they will produce before the August BOD meeting. We will work on a quarterly schedule and our groups will get things no less than four times a year.
- **We are not a policy making club any more** – As I stated above, we did a lot of work to move the ASRC into the direction we think its needs to go and the direction we think our teams want it to go - based on their feedback. That was important and necessary work. Now we have to deliver this direction and not get lost in making more policies and debating existing policies. We can make incremental changes to policies and procedures already in place, but I don't want us to get mired in politics anymore. I think it's fair to say our member teams have debate and politics fatigue. Politics and debate are the number one reason this organization is contracting (see more below). We must resist the urge and find common ground quickly and move on. I'm relying on you – the chairs and the BOD representatives – to curb this, in the interest of moving forward.
- **We need to start talking about search and rescue again** - One of the major reasons our member teams joined the ASRC is so they can practice their craft better. We need to offer them ways to do that - this is what I mean when I say our product is information. Yes, we offer other “things”, but we can't rely on just insurance and a nascent credentialing program to provide value. We are going to do this by making sure we include something SAR related in every meeting and making sure our retreat is SAR focused. When you show up in person to a BOD meeting, there will be a SAR-related exercise for you to take part in before or after the meeting. When you come to the retreat, you'll walk away with a more SAR knowledge and have the opportunity to share your knowledge. I'd like to have quarterly webinars on SAR topics open to the membership with continuing education units offered. I'd like to see our groups share the terabytes of information we collectively have so our groups have access to training materials of excellence. I'd like to see the ASRC eventually create our own training materials that support our credentialing program. The information we have on SAR and the sharing of that information with our groups should be the hallmark of this organization.

The remainder of this memo touches on some other key issues that I think need to be put on the table now.

*Action Item – discuss these themes with your group and stress the importance of productivity over politics and limiting debate so we can find common ground quickly and move on. Communicate to your groups that each team's participation in the ASRC is important.*

### **The ASRC continues to contract**

Undoubtedly you are aware, Delmarva SAR announced their intention to discontinue their membership at the end of the year. A loss of any member group from the ASRC is not good for our organization. We lost Potomac Valley Rescue Group through their own attrition, and it is even

more impactful when a group voluntarily decides to leave. The ASRC should be growing, not contracting, and we will be sorry to lose Delmarva SAR. Until they discontinue their membership, we shall afford them all the rights and privileges associated with being a member of the ASRC and not treat them as if they are already gone. Of course, we hope that in the next six months this Board can make its argument to Delmarva SAR to renew membership next year. The BOD's actions and attitude will speak louder than words to the group.

Since I am member of Delmarva SAR, my status as chair at the end of the calendar year becomes fuzzy. As I stated at the AGM, I'm ready to step aside at any time if another candidate comes forward. I believe enough in the organization and our vision for the future, that I don't want uncertainty in its leadership to compromise its mission. Until such a candidate is realized, I will do my best to serve the organization until I am no longer eligible to do so.

I hope that this BOD reflects on the contraction that the ASRC has experienced over the last several years and collectively resolves to take action to prevent it from continuing. As an organization we need to grow, we need to identify candidate teams that we may want to recruit and we need to approach them and invite them to join.

*Action Item – continue to have an open dialogue with the leadership of Delmarva SAR to understand further their reasons for leaving.*

*Action Item – please suggest one or two teams that you know and trust that you'd like to see us market for membership.*

*Action Item – we need to find someone to serve as Chair if Delmarva SAR does not continue their membership at the end of the year.*

## **Credentialing**

Listed in the first section as a hallmark of our organization is the credentialing process. We wanted a process that built upon our training standards, had a third party component, and used up to date best practices. We integrated this credentialing system into our core governance documents and voted those documents in during the May BOD meeting. Now is the time to ramp this up. Your group's participation will make or break the credentialing system, so I hope you take it seriously. We need each group to appoint a person to sit on the credentialing board/committee. Each group is can identify a candidate they feel is best suited to that role. The folks who sit on this board/committee will be charged with implementing the process described in the documents. The faster your Group appoints a candidate, the faster we can get this going. I'd like this to happen prior to the August BOD meeting.

*Action Item – appoint a candidate to sit on the credentialing board/committee by 1 August 2016.*

## **The insurance question**

Insurance is a value-added component of group membership of the ASRC, but we should no longer rely on it being a primary benefit of membership. As our member groups have matured, many of them have also maintained their own insurance in some form or another. We need to better understand the value that our insurance brings to our groups and better communicate how ASRC insurance for each group and member works. We should find out if groups are providing their own duplicative insurance, why that is, and what if anything we can do to help streamline

costs for everyone. I'm looking for someone who we can empower to take on this project, ask the questions, and do the math. I think that we should explore this question using data and facts then have a candid discussion. Success of this project is predicated on your groups willingness to share information such as coverage limits and premium costs. I'd like to have this wrapped up by the end of the year so our groups can make their own decisions regarding their own insurance and we can make decisions regarding ASRC insurance.

*Action Item – We are looking for someone who can help us explore what value, if any, the ASRC insurance brings to our member teams by gathering data and running the numbers. If you have a candidate in mind, please put him or her forth and I'm happy to speak with them.*

## **Content**

In the above section on themes, I mentioned information is our biggest product we have to offer. We need to start generating content to provide to the members of our groups. We are taking action on this today. This is stuff that our individual groups have, so no one should have to generate something from scratch. I want to create a culture of sharing and open source if you will. The quickest way to deliver content now, I think, is to start a series of quarterly webinars. A 45 minute presentation by someone, anyone, on a SAR-related topic. We'll use a platform like google hangouts to run the presentation and have a question and answer period afterwards. So I'm looking for volunteers for to do one in July. This is a call for presentations.

This is also a call for abstracts and proposals for the January retreat. We are just about 6 months out and I want us to start putting together a schedule for the retreat. Please let your groups know. We want to hear at least once from each group and from different people. If you have a thought leader in your group, ask them to think of a topic to present on and get something to us. To have the type of retreat that talks about SAR, we need to start planning today.

I also consider credentialing as part of the content. Content is any product we are delivering to our member groups.

*Action Item – this is a call to volunteers to conduct a 45 minute presentation via webinar to share their knowledge, expertise, case study on SAR. If someone is interested, please have them contact me.*

*Action Item – this is a call for abstracts and proposals to present at the January Retreat. Send those in to me and let's get a few from each group.*

## **Governance documents**

I know that there are still concerns with the governance documents that were passed in May. I am committed to us making incremental improvements in each document as often as we can vote on them. I am not interested in a wholesale rewrite of any of the documents at this time, except the training standards. Most documents we can update on a quarterly basis and we will, others we can only update annually and will do so as necessary. We will set aside time during each BOD meeting to discuss this, but it will not dominate the meetings. Our meetings will be dominated by the projects we are moving forward and getting them done.

*Action Item – If your group has comments on documents, please prioritize them and consolidate them and get in contact with me. I want to know those items you “can’t live with.” Remember in the spirit of the themes, let’s pick our battles.*

## **Officer and Committee Projects**

There are a lot of people working on a lot of things for the conference and I think they get relegated to the background. Or talked about last. I want you to know who is working on what and I want you to communicate this to your group:

- Mike Hansen, Chair – complete the AMRG/MARG canine incident investigation and review results with the head of each group. Then I’ll be working on the Strategic Plan for the next four years.
- Don Ferguson, Vice Chair – I’ve asked Don to look into a platform where our teams can share digital information – presentations, documents, videos, etc. Aligned with creating content, we want to enable our teams to share the content they’ve already created so you have access to materials you need to improve your own training. While you likely consider your training materials proprietary, we hope you can find something to share and something of value.
- Jocelyn King, Secretary – I’ve asked Jocelyn to start work on a survey for each group that touches on a number of topics and issues, we want to understand, with data, what each group wants from the ASRC and values. This “user survey” will be sent out to each of the groups to complete. I hope we can have this ready by August 1 to send out.
- John Rogowski, Training – John’s main task is to start putting together the Version 8 training standards. I’ve asked John to come up with a schedule for doing so and a concept of what those standards are going to look like. We’ll discuss that at the BOD meeting in August.
- Vacant, Operations Officer – we need to fill this position. In addition to the duties outlined in our governance documents, I’ll ask that person to work on a particular project I’ve had in mind. That project includes transforming most of the draft Annexes from the perpetual draft Operations Manual into fact sheets. There’s a lot of good information in there that needs to be simplified and updated. If you know a candidate, please put them forth.
- Carl Werntz, Risk Management – I’ve asked Carl to pull together one or two safety moments for team to use. They’ll be simple one to two page documents that teams can use to create a culture of safety. In the Operational Guidance Manual, safety is a section on its own and we want our groups to keep that in the forefront.
- Victoria Airey, Treasurer – Victoria has agreed to stay on as treasurer but due to time constraints, won’t be able to take on any special projects. She wrote the check so we could submit the revised AOI to the state of Virginia.
- Keith Conover and Carl Solomon, Medical Committees – I’ve spoken with Keith but haven’t had the chance yet to speak with Carl. The medical committees are working on some wilderness first aid stuff they think they can wrap up by August. This will provide guidance, not policy, to our groups to select first aid courses they can use that meets up to date best practices. Their work will also serve to inform the first aid requirements, if any, to be included in version 8 the training standards. Their work will then transition to providing white papers and fact sheets that provides up to date information with respect to first aid practices in the wilderness and other austere settings. I want to note that these

committees understand they are producing guidance only, not policy. This is aligned with our theme of being productive.

- Vacant, UAV Committee – Carl Solomon had been playing dual roles, but has expressed his desire to find a replacement to head up the UAV committee. This committee was starting to do work on understanding the best way to deploy this emerging technology in SAR instances. We recognize it's more than just flying around with a video camera and we can be positioned to really be at the forefront of this work, but we need to find someone to help us.
- Don Scelza , Chair Emeritus – Don's provided me with his thoughts as outgoing Chair and we've discussed a few things. I'll continue to consult with him on a variety of topics and appreciate his continued support.
- Ben McCandless, Remote Support Training – Ben and a small group are working with Don F. to develop a curriculum to deliver remote support training to more people. This is a hallmark of the ASRC and we want to organize our thoughts, communicate clearly to the groups, and get more folks involved.

These are the folks who are already doing many things for the ASRC. I'm sure you could think of half a dozen more projects that the ASRC could be working on. If so, let's identify a person to lead it and get it going.

*Action Item – We need to fill the Operations Officer role, please identify a candidate and let's get that role filled. If your group has someone in mind, please have him or her contact me.*

*Action Item – we need to find someone who can lead the UAV committee to lead the research into the best practices for deploying UAVs on missions. If your group has someone in mind, please have him or her contact me.*

## **Closing**

Thank you for reading through this document. This represents what is on the forefront of my head when I think about the ASRC. This is your organization and it relies on the BOD to be productive. I hope you find the themes I've put forth are consistent with your Group's desires for the ASRC. We want to make forward progress on a number of projects so that every member of your Group can realize the value of ASRC membership. I have an open door policy and am available by cell at 443.812.1430 at any time.

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