

Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference

Uniform Policy White Paper

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At the ASRC Board of Directors meeting 7/14/2007, we discussed the issue of the ASRC uniform.¹ We agreed that some changes need to be made, and an Ad-Hoc Uniform Committee was formed, with members as listed above.

Here are some of the points briefly discussed:

- The current “official” ASRC uniform policy is fragmented, self-contradictory, and not well-followed.
- Groups often develop uniform jackets, T-shirts, etc. While these are supposed to be used on Group fundraising activities and the like, and are not supposed to show up on missions—but do tend to show up on some ASRC training and missions, and tend to defeat the purpose of the ASRC uniform.
- The ASRC uniform shirt doesn’t currently show anything to distinguish which Group someone comes from.
- It would be nice to be able to look at a fellow ASRC member you don’t know, look at the nameplate to see the member’s name, then look right above it to figure out which group the person’s from.
- Having some sort of Group identification on the ASRC uniform would encourage Groups to wear the ASRC uniform on fundraising activities, local training, etc.
- *Note: we decided to completely ignore, for now, the question of which activities are ASRC activities and which are Group activities, and whether an ASRC uniform, a Group*

¹ This was prompted by a discussion within AMRG which resulted in the following motion at the BOD meeting (which wasn’t seconded, but resulted in a committee being appointed to look into the issue):

Moved, that the ASRC modify the uniform policy to allow Groups to specify that members may place, above the nameplate on the right breast, a Group patch with the name of the Group, not to exceed 7 square inches in area.

The particular issue was that AMRG, whose members had been getting high-end outdoor clothing very cheaply from the Pro Purchase website of Cloudveil (pro.cloudveil.com), was contacted by Cloudveil with an offer for very nice and only moderately expensive custom softshell uniform jackets. AMRG decided “yes.” The question arose: “Group uniform jackets or ASRC uniform jackets?” AMRG decided that, in order to get discounts, they would see if at least one other Group was interested in going for a pooled purchase. This would mean it had to be an ASRC uniform jacket, and there was some feeling (though not universal) that this was a better way to go, anyway. But there was a desire to allow some Group identification on these jackets.

uniform, or a beanie with a propellor on top² is appropriate for any or all of these activities.

Subsequent email discussions by the ASRC Board of Directors and interested parties raised many issues peripheral but perhaps somewhat related to the uniform, including such questions as “should we buy a zillion uniform parkas exactly the same for everyone in the ASRC?” and “instead of pins, should we have rockers for 10, 20, 25 years of service?” and “is there any such thing as a Group mission, or are all missions by a Group therefore ASRC missions, and is the ASRC uniform therefore required instead of Group uniforms?” and “shouldn’t the ASRC raise funds to provide more value to the Groups?” and “what about wearing the ASRC patch on Group uniforms?” and “hey, what about patches on hats?” and “what about patches on jeans?” and “what is the sound of one hand clapping?” Such imponderables are hereby declared outside the scope of the Committee’s current charge. If we survive the existing charge and the BOD wishes, we may tackle some of those other questions—but only after the main current issues are decided.

Background:

I. Ancient History

(from the dim recesses of Keith’s memory)

In The Old Days, the ASRC uniform was just a shirt with an ASRC patch on the left shoulder. We discussed the idea of some sort of uniform parka. However, in the beginning, the ASRC was made up of rough, tough, nonconformist outdoor types who were very particular about their choice of parkas, so we abandoned that idea. We discussed various types of outdoor-specific material for a uniform shirt. But at the time (early 1970s) the only real choices for uniform-type shirts were cotton or wool. We picked a thin Sears Chambray cotton work shirt for the following reasons:

- cheap (especially important for student groups)
- lightweight
- good for summer, or in base
- when in the field for real, you can take off and wad up in your pack; and, because it is light cotton, it doesn’t take up much room or weigh much
- in winter, we’d probably not wear a uniform shirt anyway, we would wear proper personal outdoor gear
- available everywhere in the USA—every Sears had a big stock, as these used to be a virtual uniform for blue-collar workers

² If you think that humor in a document such as this is inappropriate: (1) you are taking this entirely too seriously, and (2) you should get a life.

There was also a feeling (and remember this was the 1970s—in general, trust of police and military was at an all-time low) that our uniform should be uniform, but we should look like at all like police or military—thus, a work shirt.

Originally we decided on a ¾” x 3” white-on-blue engraved nameplate, with the member’s name on top, and the words “Appalachian Search & Rescue” underneath. After several people got their chests punctured by the pins on them, we recommended Velcro for attaching these nameplates.

Later, we said that people should put their medical/first aid patches on the right shoulder, as this was pretty much a standard among EMS agencies at the time.

Much later (? late 1980s) we approved the alternative of a standard military name tape, with white on blue, as an alternate to the blue nameplate.

2. Past Discussions

(from the dim recesses of Keith’s hard drive)

In 1998, the BOD discussed uniforms:

Group Identity for training, etc. – One single agency on searches. Question, should Board vote to not allow teams to wear group identity on searches, Motion Peter, 2nd Hale

Discussion:

Hart – patches on packs & all gear

Frank – concern not with hats but outer garments

Mark – mission base vs. field task

Peter – several issues – Policy & uniformity, outerwear description specific

Hart – agrees there is an issue. Finds it difficult to regulate outerwear

Gene- building up over a period of time. Uniform to present one united agency. ASRC ballcap endorsement

Bob- Intent to present yourself as ASRC- would urge people to vote against it

Pepper – baseball hats???

In 1999, the BOD again discussed the topic of Group logos and patches vs. the ASRC uniform:

1117 Todd- Group Logos

- *Continuation of discussion on group logos on personal gear*
- *Concern that RA’s request 1 group and see several*

Russ G.- Standardized uniform important, but flipside is diminished group morale

- *Need standard for ASRC ballcaps, windbreakers, group patches, etc.*
- *Allow for unit pride*

Randy F. – Agrees, need standardized uniform w/group patch

Todd- Need for alternative shirt suitable for field ops

Pepper- Interested into looking into this shirt, but also noted need for an ASRC stores system

Rob M- Ex Officio & other companies investigated, want a preorder of 1500 shirts

Peter- Need to use popular shirt models like Sears workshirt

Rob- noted that Peter is old

Todd- could not find Sears work shirt in NOVA

Heidi- Fair Oaks Sears has this shirt

In 2005, one of the items for the ASRC Board Retreat was:

Should the structure of the Conference be reflected by its uniform? i.e Groups wear their group uniform with an ASRC flash or should the ASRC uniform be the dominant wear with group flashes?

3. What we have officially said

The 1989 ASRC Operations Manual stated:

All members responding to an incident will wear an ASRC uniform conforming to the following standards:

Shirt: A blue chambray or canvas shirt, to be worn either in base or in the field; or a yellow canvas shirt to be worn only in the field. A yellow ASRC T-shirt (with the Conference Logo on the front) is also acceptable base-camp wear.

Pants: Wool or cotton fatigues are acceptable. Other pants are acceptable, except that jeans are not to be worn.

Other: The ASRC patch is to be worn on the left sleeve, just below the shoulder; a patch showing medical certification is to be worn on the right sleeve, just below the shoulder. An ASRC name-tag (blue, approximately 3/4" by 3", with the member's name and "Appalachian Search & Rescue" in white) is to be worn over the right pocket. Over or on the left pocket, members may wear one of the following:

- *the small MRA Rescue patch (for members with Rescue Specialist certification),*
- *the MRA Support patch (for other members who are permitted to wear the uniform), or*
- *the Virginia Search and Rescue Council patch.*

*No other patches or emblems are to be worn on the uniform shirt.**

Members with the right to wear the ASRC uniform shirt may affix patches (ASRC and medical) and an ASRC nametag to personal parkas or other outer garments, provided that they are in the same positions as are specified for the uniform shirt and no other patches or emblems are worn on the garment. *Added October 1989*

Appearance on SAR incidents is an important way to buttress our professionalism in the eyes of other agencies and personnel. Members are required to appear and act professionally at all times during missions.

The current ASRC Administrative Manual, 2/02 says

Annex D. Allowable Use Of The ASRC Emblem

D.1 Statement of intent – The ASRC logo is used to meet several objectives. First and foremost, it serves as the organization’s primary means of identifying the ASRC and its members. Therefore, we must guard against unreasonable use of the logo.

D.1.2 Use of the ASRC Name, Patch, and Emblem/Logo – The ASRC name, emblem or logo, whether incorporated in the ASRC patch or in some other form, is the most readily recognized symbol of the organization. Its use on missions or for official business purposes is encouraged. However, general personal use of the name/emblem/logo provides unacceptable opportunity for misrepresentation of the organization. The use of the ASRC name, patch and/or emblem/logo shall be limited to official ASRC or Group business (including, but not limited to, training and incidents). This in no way prohibits the use of the name, patch or emblem/logo on personal items, provided those items are used solely while engaged in ASRC activities, or any ASRC identification is removed or concealed when items are used for non-ASRC functions.

D.1.3 Display of ASRC patches by Non-ASRC Organizations – Non-ASRC organizations/individuals may receive patches for display in patch collections (or other appropriate displays) through request to the ASRC Board of Directors.

D.1.4 Administrative Use of the uniform – The ASRC uniform may be used for administrative purposes, with the following constraints.

D.1.4.1 The ASRC uniform is described in two configurations:

(1) a long sleeve blue Chamberly [sic] work shirt, with appropriate patches, as seen in the following graphic, along with navy blue BD- type field pants; or – during warm weather – a yellow t-shirt with an ASRC logo on the front and/or back of the t-shirt, along with navy blue BD.- type field pants. The ASRC uniform is seen as an expendable garment subject to the rigors of wilderness search and rescue operations.

There is no additional cold or incimate [sic] weather uniform with regard to outer wear or headware.

D.1.4.2 Any member, in good standing, of the ASRC may wear the ASRC uniform provided they have achieved the training level of Call-out Qualified. Trainees may dress in uniform-like apparel, but may not utilize the ASRC patch or emblem/logo. Trainees may utilize the ASRC name tag if authorized to do so by their group training officer.

D.1.4.3 Members are encouraged to wear the uniform when representing the ASRC on missions or other functions. Team leaders and incident staff are

encouraged strongly to utilize easily visible ASRC identification (uniform or other) when serving in their respective functions.

D.1.4.4 Persons shall not wear the ASRC uniform, nor shall they display the ASRC name, patch, or emblem/logo, when engaging in non-ASRC activities.

The current ASRC Operations Manual, Version 3.1, 4/99, no longer contains any details of the ASRC uniform.

Note that the requirement for blue uniform pants was added in this transfer of the ASRC uniform specification from the Operations Manual to the Administrative Manual (? by Dave Carter) but

- I don't remember the BOD ever voting on this, other than voting to accept the new Administration Manual, and
- This is not consistent with the guide referenced below which is also included by reference in the ASRC Administrative Manual, and contradicts what we had voted on in the past and used to be official policy, which was in the old Operations Manual, quoted above, which said: *Pants: Wool or cotton fatigues are acceptable. Other pants are acceptable, except that jeans are not to be worn.*

The choice of blue pants is an interesting one. From a forensic standpoint, I suspect the influence of the military, especially the Air Force, which leads me to suspect this comes from TSAR. If it came from BRMRG in Charlottesville, where the preppy khaki chino pants are almost a uniform, khaki surely would have been specified. It also seems unlikely that the navy blue was put forth by dog handlers.

The attached graphic guide to the ASRC Uniform—which is not actually attached to the copy of the ASRC Admin Manual on the website, but is available at:

<http://www.asrc.net/asrc/uploads/operations/asrcunif.pdf>, says:

The ASRC uniform is really just a uniform shirt. It is a Sears or similar blue chambray work shirt with certain patches on it. It can be either short or long sleeve. If you want to wear an ASRC patch, it has to be on an official ASRC uniform shirt. You may, if you wish, turn an outer parka or other outer garment into an ASRC uniform garment by placing an ASRC patch on it. However, as with the shirt, the above patches and only the above patches may be worn on it. So, don't wear an ASRC patch on other uniform shirts, and don't wear any patches except for the above on an ASRC uniform shirt or parka.

Note that the Admin Manual says *There is no additional cold or inclimate [sic] weather uniform with regard to outer wear or headware* but the graphic of the uniform, which is included in the Admin Manual by reference, states: *You may, if you wish, turn an outer parka or other outer garment into an ASRC uniform garment by placing an ASRC patch on it. However, as with the shirt, the above patches and only the above patches may be worn on it. So, don't wear an ASRC patch on other uniform shirts, and don't wear any patches except for the above on an ASRC uniform shirt or parka.*

Specific Issues

1. Should we allow Group patches on the ASRC uniform shirt?

Arguments **for** allowing Group patches on the ASRC Uniform Shirt include:

- Provides better recognition for Groups which, according to many, has been somewhat lacking in the past.
- Makes Groups more likely to wear the ASRC uniform shirt for Group activities, as opposed to developing or using Group uniforms for such activities.
- “Unit patches” are widely used for large organizations that are broken up into distinct units, as with many military services.

Arguments **against** allowing Group patches on the ASRC Uniform Shirt include:

- Too many patches! Too many patches! Looks like a Boy Scout’s merit badge sash.
- The ASRC uniform provides uniformity among the ASRC members, which is one of the ASRC’s great strengths.
- Back in the days when men where men (and women too); back when we only had two people per litter carry; back when we all wore oiled-wool underwear even in the summer (none of that namby-pamby Capilene stuff); back when we all used to chant Beowulf before the Board meetings; back when we used ice-axes made from the wood of the Tree of Life Yggdrasil—back in those days, we didn’t need no stinkin’ commie pinko Group patches on our uniforms. (BTW, there was a group of people who really did chant Beowulf together before BOD meetings when we had them at Shenandoah National Park Headquarters...)

2. IF we allow a Group patch on the ASRC uniform shirt, where should it go?

- **Right Breast?** Since we allow an MRA or state SAR Council patch over the left breast, we originally thought of allowing the Group patch over the nameplate on the right breast.
- **Left Breast?** It was noted that, for many organizations, the left breast takes pride of place for the organization’s emblem, or for example, a law enforcement officer’s badge. Therefore it was suggested that we place the Group patch over the left breast, allowing the MRA or State patch to be placed over the nameplate on the right breast.

3. Should we change the specification for the ASRC uniform shirt?

- **Stay the same:** a Sears blue Chambray (white weft and blue warp, originally from Chambray in France) work shirt. Can’t. Sears doesn’t make Chambray work shirts any more, they only make twill work shirts in khaki, navy blue, and dark charcoal. (They do make some Wrangler Chambray shirts from time to

time, but they are much more of a casual shirt than a work shirt, are not available in all sizes, and are not the generic, widely-available shirts that were originally specified).

- **Pick another “standard” Chambray work shirt:** over the years, Sears has gotten out of the Chambray work shirt business. But others have taken over the slack. Unfortunately, none of these suppliers offer Chambray work shirts in women’s sizes. Carhartt is starting a line of women’s clothing, but as yet there are no Chambray shirts.
 - **Carhartt** (www.carhartt.com) offers standard cotton short-sleeve and long-sleeve blue Chambray work shirts both (≈\$36) online and in many outlets, including hardware stores. They are available in a wide variety of sizes. They have been selling these for a long time, and it seems likely they will be selling them for a long time more, as they seem to be growing. The design hasn’t changed appreciably in years, although there is no guarantee. Like Cabela’s and unlike Dickie’s, they have a soft hand and nice tailoring.
 - **Cabela’s** offers blue Chambray work shirts (≈\$26) in stores and via their Website (www.cabelas.com). Through their Corporate site (<http://corporateoutfitter.cabelas.com/product/901366>), they even offer to embroider over the left pocket (? maybe have the Group name embroidered rather than a patch). Cabela’s has been around for a long time, is growing, and is likely to be around for a long time. Their shirts have a softer “hand” and better tailoring than Dickie’s, but are a bit thicker than Dickie’s.
 - **Dickie’s** offers blue Chambray work shirts by internet (www.dickies.com) or by phone (≈\$21). Wal-Mart also carries Dickie’s shirts (≈\$15, “online only” but some stores may carry), also available at amazon.com. They are serviceable and similar to the old Sears work shirt.
 - **Pick a different kind of “standard” shirt:** there are many nice outdoor shirts for sale by outdoor equipment suppliers. But the designs, the materials, and the colors change every year or so. And the ASRC blue Chambray shirt is more of an ASRC trademark than our patch.
 - **Make a specification for the uniform shirt:** we could specify a blue shirt in Chambray (blue/white weft/warp) or some other fabric, a range of acceptable blue colors for material, and white or blue buttons, flaps on pockets, or button-through pockets. However, **finding** shirts that meet such a standard would be problematic.
- 4. Should we continue to specify blue pants, or should we revert to allowing whatever pants people want to wear except for jeans?**
- **Blue Pants?** The advantage of specifying blue BDU type pants is that it provides better uniformity. However, the range of types and blues (or browns, greens,

grays) of pants worn by members varies so greatly that the uniformity is not that great. We could be more specific about the blue of the pants, the material of the pants, and enforce the policy more carefully, even if just by making fun of people's pants in public.

- **Any appropriate outdoor pants?** The advantages of not specifying pants color or type are (1) that we give up the pretense of uniformity as far as pants, and can spend our uniformity efforts on shirts, which are more visible, and (2) members can select pants based on their appropriateness for the season, terrain and weather, rather than their color.

5. Should we have a standard—at least as far as patches—for “uniform” outer garments?

- Keep what the uniform graphic currently says, perhaps regularized a bit to fit into the Admin Manual style: *You may, if you wish, turn an outer parka or other outer garment into an ASRC uniform garment by placing an ASRC patch on it. However, as with the shirt, the above patches and **only** the above patches may be worn on it. So, don't wear an ASRC patch on other uniform shirts, and don't wear any patches except for the above on an ASRC uniform shirt or parka.*
- Keep what the Admin Manual says, perhaps cleaned up a bit: *there is no standard for an ASRC outerwear garment, and you are not to use ASRC patches except on ASRC uniform shirts.*
- Develop some other standard for ASRC uniform outerwear.