
Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference
Eastern Region, Mountain Rescue Association
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Irvin Lichtenstein
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Dear Mr. Lichtenstein,

I hope you forgive me for taking so long to reply to your letter. The Appalachian Search & Rescue Conference currently is the Eastern Region of the MRA. We were tested by the MRA in November 1987 and, because of our unique method of responding to search emergencies, were granted special status by the MRA as a one-team region. Your team will NOT have to join the ASRC to become members of the MRA; I am just explaining our status. Your team WILL have to be ready to be active in MRA-associated activities. In our case, we are scheduling regular bi-annual simulations in different areas of our territory (Maryland-Virginia-Pennsylvania) that require differing types of responses from swamp SAR in the Norfolk area to high-angle vertical rescue in the Blue Ridge and Alleghenies. We also try to send representatives to the MRA meetings and seminars. Since they are virtually all held west of Colorado, we have had varying amounts of luck with this.

Now, for the MRA requirements. I am going to quote heavily from the MRA Information and Policies manual. It's easier for me to type than to find a friendly copier, so you're getting it excerpted. I hope this answers the questions you need answered. If you need more, I will bite the bullet and copy the whole thing!

The MRA team requirements are: "open to any mountain rescue unit or similar organization approved by the (MRA) Board of Directors." Under the "Policies of the Mountain Rescue Association":

B. REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE MRA:

1. Applications for membership must be submitted in writing by the rescue unit to the Executive Secretary of the MRA. Applications must include first year's dues (except Ex-officia) and four (4) copies of the following:

- a. Constitution and Bylaws
- b. The roster of rescue and support members on call
- c. Detailed information on how governmental agencies, or other rescue groups request help of the unit.
- e. The method used to assemble personnel.
- f. Description and extent of areas for which the unit will normally provide coverage.
- g. The list of all operations and activities, including training schedules, during the previous two years.
- h. Statement of willingness and ability to support and cooperate with nearby MRA units.
- i. An explanation of the leadership structure.

2. Requirements for Regular Membership

- a. There must be a need for a mountain rescue unit in the area, considering terrain and incidents.
- b. The unit must be a volunteer non-profit, public service organization.

- c. The unit must be self-governing with elected membership.
- d. The unit must have a minimum of five (5) Rescue members, as defined below, and a sufficient number of support members to handle search and rescue operations in unit's primary area of operation. Normally, the unit will be expected to have an active membership of twenty-five members.
- e. The unit must agree to ratify and support the Constitution and Bylaws of the Mountain Rescue Association.

3. Requirements for Associate Membership

- a. The unit must meet requirements "a" through "c" and "e" under Regular Membership.
- b. Be actively engaged in search and rescue training and operations and (where appropriate) regional activities. Participate in joint operations with Regular MRA teams.
- c. Demonstrate an interest in, and capacity for, furthering the aims of the Region in which they operate or: be applicants for full membership and have not completed all the field testing for full certification.

(4. Requirements for Ex-Officio Membership - Certified)

(5. Requirements for Ex-Officio Membership - Non-Certified)

6. Requirements for Individual Members of MRA Units and Organizations

A. Regular and Certified Ex-Officio Units

1. RESCUE: Be an experienced mountaineer able to lead Class 4, thoroughly familiar with stretcher evacuation procedures on high angle rock and snow, able to organize and effect a rescue with only climbers untrained in rescue techniques to assist. Hold a current ARC Standard First Aid and Personal Safety card (Advanced First Aid and Emergency Care plus Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation, or better, is strongly recommended). Maintain active participation in search and rescue operations and training activities.
2. SUPPORT: Assist in search and rescue operations and maintain active participation in unit activities. Field support personnel must hold a current ARC Standard First Aid and Personal Safety card.

B. Associate and Non-Certified Ex-Officio Units: Be competent, responsible search and rescue personnel and maintain active participation in operations and training activities. Field personnel must hold current ARC Standard cards.

NOTES:

Field personnel must be familiar with map and compass and wilderness navigation and be able to function in the field at night.

Field personnel must be in excellent physical condition and be adequately equipped and trained to be self-sustaining in the field in whatever weather permits.

Field personnel must be knowledgeable of appropriate search techniques such as: hasty search, visual tracking and sign cutting, confinement and line search, and use of dogs.

C. PROCEDURE FOR BECOMING A MEMBER OF MRA

1. Certification Procedure: Regular and Ex-Officio Members

Each unit applying for Regular or Certified Ex-Officio membership must be sponsored by a member unit or Region of the Mountain Rescue Association familiar with the mountaineering and search and rescue proficiency of the applicant unit. The sponsoring unit or Region shall conduct such test of the applicant unit's proficiency as are necessary to assure the applicant unit is technically competent to handle mountain search and rescue problems anywhere in its own area of operation. Upon successful demonstration of rescue capabilities on high-angle rock, ice and snow, and wilderness search, the sponsoring unit or Region shall recommend acceptance of the applicant unit. Upon approval by the Board of Directors, the applicant unit shall be authorized use of the MRA Rescue and Support insignia.

NOTE: Member units and organizations are expected to participate actively in MRA and Region affairs, meetings, seminars, workshops, and conferences.

Field personnel must be trained in proper safety precautions for working with helicopters.

Rescue personnel must be thoroughly familiar with knots, belays, rappelling, roped climbing, route finding, anchor placements, brake systems for lowering, mechanical advantage systems for raising, stretcher rigging, snow travel, and use of ice axe and crampons.

So what does this mean? To start out with, the MRA has forgiven us for living in an area without permanent snow and ice, so that portion of the test does not exist. The standard procedure is for the testers (at least three of the ASRC Rescue-Certified members) to descend upon the applicant team, wherever the applicants choose, and test them within the following four areas. Generally, the test takes at least a full day. Sometimes the test requires two days, depending on the team, testing thoroughness, and terrain.

1. Generalized search problem involving: team and resource management as it performs a multiple-task search, member competence in the field (day and night competence).
2. Semi-technical raising (hauling) and lowering of a stretcher with patient over rugged (but not vertical) terrain.
3. Technical (full vertical) raising (hauling) and lowering of a stretcher with patient and attendant.
4. High-line (Tyrolean) traverse of stretcher and patient across stream or other barrier.

In an ideal world, each Rescue-certified member should be tested with a "only climbers untrained in rescue techniques to assist." However, this becomes cumbersome if you have 15 or 20 members to test. The practical alternative is to spread the leadership positions around as much as possible among the tasks tested so that each member is allowed to "shine" as a technical/search team leader.

I hope this answers some of your questions. We understand that you are located in the Philadelphia area. We do have several active members in the Baltimore-northern Maryland area who are MRA members and who could work with you as your MRA testers. If you still would like to pursue MRA team membership, we would like more information about the types of searches to which you respond, your mission level in the last year, and the total number of members you can field for your search missions. Please contact me or write to me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

