

VIRGINIA SEARCH AND RESCUE COUNCIL

OPERATIONAL PREPLAN

Second Edition

March 1986

1.0 GENERAL

The Virginia Search and Rescue Council is a confederation of representatives of agencies and organizations actively involved in search and rescue services throughout the Commonwealth. The purposes of this document are to simplify the alerting procedures of the organizations and to provide for certain standards of incident management. This preplan is intended more as a reference than as a training guide. For further information on any topic addressed in this plan, the reader is referred to training materials available through each organization.

2.0 RESPONSIBILITY

Most members of the council represent organizations that provide volunteer search and rescue services in Virginia and elsewhere. These groups typically will not become involved in an incident without the approval of the local responsible agent.

As responsible agents of Shenandoah National Park, rangers may request any resources they need for an incident under their management. Their requests for multiple resources can be simplified by routing them through the Department of Emergency Services.

3.0 NATURE OF RESPONSES

Search and Rescue Council agencies may be called upon to respond to any one of several types of incidents:

- Wilderness and rural searches make up the bulk of the groups' operations, whatever the cause of the incident.
- Rescues/recoveries often are the end result of searches, or may be unrelated to a search problem.
- Aircraft crashes in wilderness areas are the objects of a search of a much larger area, and may also result in a rescue or recovery. Downed aircraft searches present many unusual problems and require additional specialized resources.

- Searches along and in rivers and other bodies of water are becoming increasingly common.
- Lost person searches may be conducted in urban areas.
- Responses may be made to natural disasters in or out of the Commonwealth or country.

The types of resources called on to respond to an incident will depend primarily on the type of incident, but also on its location, the season, and resource availability.

4.0 CALLOUT

The initial callout and alerting of Council agencies is primarily the responsibility of the Virginia Department of Emergency Services and is initiated at the request or with the concurrence of local government. The selection of which resources to call out, as noted above, depends on many variables and an explanation of this process is beyond the scope of this document. For this reason, a Department of Emergency Services representative familiar with search and rescue problems and their management should always be involved in this decision. Problems in making this decision should be minimized, however, by the mutual aid system outlined below.

4.1 Once the first notice of a SAR incident has been received by the Department of Emergency Services and an assessment made of the types of resources required, the urgency of the incident should be evaluated (see the NASAR field guide, Search is an Emergency) and should influence the type and number of responding resources, where they respond from, and perhaps their method of travel.

4.2 Two postures of readiness should be recognized by each organization for the purposes of uniform terminology:

1. Incident Advisory--An incident is in progress. Involvement of the alerted team is possible.
2. Callout--Agency resources are requested.

4.3 The final decision as to what resources are dispatched should involve input from the local responsible agent, a DES representative, and members of any council agency whose field of expertise is relevant to the problem (the DES representative should contact this person).

5.0 MUTUAL AID

The concept of mutual aid and alerting, along with the presence of a single dispatch number should assure that the best resources for any given problem are applied.

5.1 ANY TIME any SAR Council agency is alerted or called out by

an agency other than the Department of Emergency Services, the SAR group should inform the Department's watch officer (even if they are responding out of the Commonwealth). DES will usually call the requesting agency to offer further assistance.

5.2 ANY TIME the watch officer receives this information, he will give an Incident Advisory to the appropriate Search and Rescue Council agencies (even if the incident is out of the Commonwealth).

5.3 If any SAR Council agency anticipates the need for Civil Air Patrol aircraft, manpower, or communications support, they should ask the Department of Emergency Services to notify the Civil Air Patrol of the anticipated need as soon as possible. If the Civil Air Patrol takes on a mission in which they anticipate the involvement of other SAR Council organizations, the organizations should be placed on Incident Advisory status. The Civil Air Patrol should notify, via DES, any local jurisdiction into which they dispatch ground teams.

5.4 It should be remembered that teamwork is the key to any response. It is best to dispatch at least a few resources from each organization to provide the best chance possible for the lost or injured person.

5.5 Shenandoah National Park will request all resources through the Department of Emergency Services for any missions in the park, and will notify DES of any mission it responds to outside the park. Any organization anticipating the need for overhead team members may notify SNP directly or through DES and request specific functional positions or entire overhead teams. The Park's response may be limited by distance and available staff, but the Park does have MSF-trained IC's and Plans, Operations, Finance, and Logistics Chiefs, available for response outside the park.

6.0 INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

SAR Council agencies should use the Incident Command System to manage incidents in which they are involved. Representatives of all involved agencies should agree with overhead team assignments.

6.1 Each task assigned to the field should be documented. SAR Council Task Assignment Forms, ICS forms, and maps should be used as appropriate.

6.2 Further requests for resources on any incident should be initiated by the incident commander as soon as the need is realized and will be routed through the Department of Emergency Services.

6.3 All communications should be co-ordinated by the incident communications unit. All radio communications should be in plain English, clear text. Names of personnel or tactical callsigns should be used to identify radio communications.

6.4 The only codes used should be to report a subject find. After a reported find, radio operators should protect the network and all further communications should be explicitly clear.

1. "Status 1"--Subject found alive and well. No evacuation assistance necessary.
2. "Status 2"--Subject found injured. Rescue assistance needed.
3. "Status 3"--Subject found deceased. Recovery assistance needed.

6.5 DES should be updated of incident status at least once every 24 hours.

7.0 INCIDENT SUSPENSION

7.1 Suspension of a mission shall be defined, for the purposes of this preplan, as the withdrawal from active participation in the incident of all SAR Council resources.

7.2 Suspension and demobilization of an incident should be well planned and orderly. Every effort must be made to see that all searchers are safely out of the field.

7.3 An unsuccessful incident should not be suspended without the agreement of the responsible agent and the incident commander. They should solicit the input of other agency liasons involved in the operation when making this decision. When the incident is suspended, the incident commander should advise the responsible agent on passive lost person search techniques that may be indefinitely continued.

7.4 The incident commander should inform the Department of Emergency Services when all teams have left the incident site. The dispatch officers of each organization should inform the Department when all of their teams are safely home.

7.5 The incident commander should submit to the Department of Emergency Services a narrative incident report and a copy of the NASAR mission report.

8.0 PREPAREDNESS

8.1 To effectively and safely execute this preplan, a given amount of preparedness is necessary.

8.2 Any field personnel will be expected to carry with them safety and survival gear as their organization's training and operational standards dictate.

8.3 The integrity of the alert process is VITAL. Organizations will ensure that the alert procedures they have filed in writing with the Department of Emergency Services are current. DES should ensure that their current rosters and a copy of this preplan are available to any Department personnel that might be responsible for taking reports of SAR incidents.

8.4 This document should periodically be re-evaluated and updated to ensure a rapid, safe, efficient, and effective response to all SAR incidents.