

## Discussion Topic, ASRC Winter Retreat: Cave Rescue

**Background:** Cave Rescues, whether or not they start as searches, are generally initiated by local fire/rescue/EMS. After the initial effort, most of the work is done by cavers with various levels of experience and training. Most responding caver resources would be officially classified as emergent or spontaneous volunteers. How these caver resources are requested and mobilized varies from state to state and even in various areas within each state. Very few fire/rescue/EMS agencies in the Mid-Atlantic area have members with any cave rescue training or experience.

**Areas of Operation/Geographical Area of Interest:** Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, Delaware. These states comprise FEMA Region 3. The ASRC has member groups in all of these states except Delaware; there is also an ASRC group in Ohio. The Eastern Region, National Cave Rescue Commission includes all of these states plus North Carolina

**Cave Rescue Organizations:** There are no Cave Rescue Teams in the ASRC area of operation that are officially recognized by any State Emergency Management Agency or State SAR Council. The National Cave Rescue Commission is the organization within the National Speleological Society responsible for training and resource coordination. The Eastern Region, NCRC carries out these responsibilities in their area of operation. The only stand-alone Cave Rescue Team in the region is the Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad, Cave Rescue Group in Blacksburg, VA, however they are not recognized as a State Resource by the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. BVRS, CRG does have mutual aid agreements with surrounding jurisdictions. There are also two ASRC groups that have limited cave rescue capabilities and are able to provide an initial response while other cave rescue resources are mobilized; these are AMRG and MARG both of whom have members that are on the ER, NCRC Staff. Cave rescue benefits from AMRG and MARG's recognition as "cave rescue groups" in that they are called early and can accelerate the mobilization of cavers to a rescue. They also provide an excellent interface between the AHJ and cavers as well as coordination when a cave SAR event is happening in simultaneously with a surface SAR event.

**Cave Rescue Training and Standards:** There are no states in our area that have Cave Rescue Standards. The National Cave Rescue Commission has a training syllabus that can be equated to standards for three levels of training plus Instructor Qualification. Beginning with the 2019 National Weeklong Seminar the NCRC will issue individual certifications. The NFPA also has a Cave Rescue Technician standard, NFPA 1006; it is taught once a year by the Huntsville Cave Rescue Unit and is sanctioned by the Alabama Fire College. FEMA Resource Typing also identifies three types of resources Cave SAR Team, Cave SAR Team Leader, and Cave SAR Technician. The Eastern Region, NCRC Staff has seven National Instructors and approximately twenty members who have trained at National Level 1 or above.

**ER, NCRC and the ASRC:** The ER, NCRC has divided its states into one or more Sub-Regions, each with a Sub-Region Coordinator (SRC) who is responsible for maintaining contact with each caving group in their SR as well as with the various rescue groups and emergency managers in areas where there are known caves. The SRC's for two Sub-Regions of WV are ASRC Search Managers and the SRC for eastern MD is an

ASRC member. MSAR and SMRG have members on the ER, NCRC Staff but they have few caves in their Areas of Operation (AO). The ER, NCRC Resource Coordination Section Chief is an ASRC SM. The ER, NCRC has two Medical Advisors who are both ASRC Officers/Committee Chair.

**BY State:**

**PA:** AMRG, PSARC, three Sub-Regions; AMRG has a designated cave rescue liaison (John Rogowski, AMRG Group Training Officer and ASRC Conference Training Officer) who works with the western PA SRC

**MD:** MSAR, two Sub-Regions, Victoria Airey (MSAR) is SRC for eastern MD

**WV:** MARG, four Sub-Regions, Doug Moore (MARG) is SRC for northwestern WV, Bru Randall (MARG) is SRC for Grant, Pendleton, & Randolph Counties.

**VA:** SMRG, BRMRG, seven Sub-Regions; VDEM is aware of ER, NCRC and in the past has acted as an informal dispatch; this is no longer the case. My understanding is that if VDEM receives a request for cave rescue assistance/resources, they will contact the ER, NCRC Regional Coordinator, however this is a rather informal arrangement since VDEM does not recognize any cave rescue resources.

**DE:** no ASRC Group, no SRC, no significant caves

**Points for discussion:**

1. If your group is called for a cave rescue or cave SAR incident, do you know how to obtain caver resources?
2. In your AO, would there be an issue in calling cavers to help on a cave rescue who were not part of a recognized SAR team and/or who were from out-of-state?
3. Does your group have caves in its AO and if so, do you have a cave rescue liaison who works with your SRC to coordinate resources and training?
3. If your state has a SAR Council, would it be appropriate to have an ER, NCRC representative on the Council to coordinate resources and training or would your group's cave rescue liaison do this?

**References, ER, NCRC:**

1. State Resource Maps
2. Capabilities Briefing Sheet
3. Suggested Guidelines for 911 Centers
4. Suggested Procedures for SRCs

## Eastern Region, National Cave Rescue Commission

### Capabilities Briefing Sheet

The Eastern Region, National Cave Rescue Commission (ER, NCRC) is a region of the National Cave Rescue Commission (NCRC). The NCRC is a volunteer group developed to coordinate cave rescue resources throughout the United States. It is also a volunteer organization within the National Speleological Society. The NCRC is not a cave rescue team; it is a communications network through which to locate the actual rescue workers and equipment. Most NCRC cavers do perform rescues, but not as part of the NCRC; rather they respond as members of their local rescue squads, civil defense units, and cave rescue groups or as individual volunteers. The NCRC is also responsible for organizing cave rescue training for both cavers and emergency responders.

NCRC has divided the United States into Regions each with a Regional Coordinator. The Eastern Region is comprised of FEMA Region 3 (PA, MD, DEL, VA, WV, and DC) plus North Carolina. The Regional Coordinator is assisted by an Assistant Regional Coordinator and a Resource Coordination Section Chief. Most of the states in the Eastern Region are divided into Sub-Regions, each with a Sub-Region Coordinator (SRC) who is responsible for maintaining contact with both the caving groups in her/his Sub-Region and with the emergency response communities in areas of the Sub-Region that have known caves in them. The SRC's maintain lists of contacts from each caving group in their Sub-Region so that they may mobilize resources in the event of a cave rescue. The SRC's also maintain a list of rescue equipment in their Sub-Region and in some cases maintain a rescue cache of specialized equipment.

For the most part, cave rescues in the ER, NCRC are performed by Emergent Volunteer Cavers responding as described below.

#### **What the Eastern Region, National Cave Rescue Commission (ER, NCRC) can do for you:**

1. Callout large numbers of experienced cavers. Perhaps the most important element in a cave search or rescue is the experienced caver who has the ability to safely and expeditiously traverse the cave, find the lost or injured caver, and help to safely move them out of the cave.
2. Provide a number of experienced cavers who also have specialized training to act as a Cave Rescue Mission Coordinators, rigging specialists for caves that require vertical rope rescue,

wilderness emergency medical specialists, and underground communications specialists, as well as a few other unusual skills.

3. Provide Incident Management, if requested. When we have a callout, we will send an ad hoc Incident Coordination Task Force (ICTF) to the scene as requested by the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ), usually through a 911 Center. The ICTF Leader will report to the Incident Commander on scene and offer assistance. In general we will be acting as Emergent Volunteers. If requested by the IC/AHJ, we will provide incident management and resource coordination for cave related matters including sending Task Forces, as appropriate, into the cave and coordinate requesting additional resources through our communications network. A number of our volunteers are also wilderness search managers and can facilitate cooperation with above ground searchers, if necessary.

4. We may also bring with us equipment that is peculiar to cave and wilderness rescue such as field phones and wire, hypothermia protection, and litters such as the SKED.

5. We will arrange to obtain maps of the cave, if they exist, and if possible make direct contact with the cavers involved in the exploration and mapping of the cave.

6. Our Wilderness Emergency Medical Specialists will interface with local EMS to insure that appropriate care is administered.

#### **What you can do to help us help you:**

1. Call us early. If you think you may have someone lost/missing or injured in a cave, contact us. We will put responders on alert so that they may start to get their gear together, plan a travel route, and perhaps call off work.

2. When your 911 Center receives a call, have them collect the information listed on the Suggested Guidelines for 911 Centers.

3. Identify a staging area near the cave with plenty of parking and have it well marked so that strangers can find it. Having a representative at the staging area with communications to the Incident Command Post would be very helpful.

4. Establish entrance control and keep a written record of who goes into and out of the cave. Ideally no one would go in who is not part of the organized response.

5. Provide logistics support at the scene as needed, for example portable toilets, lighting if night operation, shelters such as EZ-Ups or large tents, food and water if extended operations are needed, and warming stations if needed.

**Suggested Guidelines**  
**For 911 Centers receiving a report of a Cave Related Incident that needs assistance**

Collect the following information from caller:

Name of caller:

Call back phone number:

Location of Caller:

Location of Incident/Name of Cave

Names and ages of people involved:

Description of Incident (Location in cave, type/extent injuries, significant obstacles):

Follow local protocols and dispatch LE/Fire/EMS as appropriate

For Cave Rescue Resources Contact the Eastern Region, National Cave Rescue Commission

Regional Coordinator, Tony Smith, (H) 540-828-4091, (C) 540-280-0755

Assistant Coordinator, Carl Amundson, (C) 540-336-0957

Resource Coordination Section Chief, Bru Randall, (C) 412-760-5054, (Secondary) 304-257-5022

Provide the collected information as well as name of the responding agency that the Cave Rescue Resources should report to at the cave or staging area and if possible, contact information, either cell phone or radio frequency to use.

Responding Agency:

Contact information (phone number and/or radio frequencies):

Location of Staging Area, Cave, or Rendezvous Point:

Advise Agency at scene the name of the responding Cave Rescue Incident Coordination Task Force Leader (CRICTFL)

CRICTFL:

Contact information of CRICTFL:

**NOTE: EVERY EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE NOT TO IDENTIFY THE CAVE INVOLVED DURING RADIO COMMUNICATIONS. TRY AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE TO USE TELEPHONE/CELL PHONE WHEN DISCUSSING SPECIFICS AND CAVE NAME**

**Suggested Procedures for Sub-Region Coordinators  
Upon receiving call from 911 Center or other AHJ**

Collect the following information:

Name of 911 Center and call back number:

Name of Dispatcher:

Name of person who called 911:

That person's call back phone number:

Their location:

Location of Incident/Name of Cave

Names of people involved:

Description of Incident (Location in cave, type/extent injuries, significant obstacles, etc.):

Name of Public Safety Agency (LE/Fire/EMS) responding to scene:

Name of PSA on scene commander:

Contact information, phone number and/or radio frequencies:

Location of Staging Area, Cave, or Rendezvous Point:

Evaluate the information Provided. Based on your experience Determine a Course of Action; refer to the Level of Urgency Chart for guidance. Possible actions might include:

1. Request local authorities have Law Enforcement (LE) verify overdue cavers vehicle parked at cave.
2. Immediate callout of local cavers and respond to cave.
3. Put local cave rescue resources on alert and respond to cave to meet with LE and evaluate level of further response.
4. There are endless possibilities. It is up to the individual SRC to know the caves and resources in their area and how to interact with them. This is part of the process called Pre-Planning. For further assistance contact the Regional Coordinator, Assistant RC, or the Resource Coordination Section Chief.

Once initial course of action is determined and initiated, contact the Regional Coordinator, Assistant RC, or the Resource Coordination Section Chief. Provide the above information, advise what the current course of action is, and what, if any, support is needed.

Your initial course of action will depend on the circumstances. What is the Level of Urgency? Is this a known rescue or a possible overdue caving trip, your location, where the cave is, are there any cave rescue resources closer to the scene, likelihood that a response is needed, time of day, weather, distance to be traveled. Sometimes it will be better to put cavers on alert and then wait until more information is available from the scene, in other cases, it will make more sense to dispatch/deploy an **Incident Coordination Task Force (ICTF)** (several individuals who can work with local resources to assess the situation) and send an **Initial Response Task Force (IRTF)** to the cave; upon arrival at the cave, the IRTF may be re-designated as a **Search Task Force**.

Suggested composition of Incident Coordination Task Force (ICTF) (surface) and Initial Response Task Force (IRTF) (underground) *Note: these configurations are for initial alerting and dispatch; composition and deployment method may change once on scene.*

#### **Incident Coordination Task Force:**

Task Force Leader-SRC or other experienced cave rescuer, liaison with local authorities, establish Entrance Control (may be local resource), begin investigation/collection of information, help local authorities determine if IRTF should be sent into cave and request additional resources, insure communications available with Regional Coordinator

Communications Specialist- set-up field phones (entrance and one to go with IRTF into cave), work with local resources to establish lines of communication to outside resources (Regional Coordinator and others), insure Entrance Control or someone else is monitoring field phone once IRTF sent into cave

#### **Initial Response Task Force:**

Task Force Leader- Experienced cave rescuer knowledgeable in both cave search and rescue functions. This will be a search until subjects are located and then become a rescue.

Task Force members- two experienced cavers, may include a member of the reporting party

Communications Component- two experienced cavers at least one of whom is knowledgeable in the deployment of field phones/wire underground. Once the situation is evaluated, they may form a separate Communications Task Force and deploy on their own.

Medical Specialist-preferably a Wilderness EMT (or above) with caving experience, but may be a caver with first-aid experience or a fit, non-caver, from the local EMS community who is capable of traveling underground; this will totally depend on the circumstances and good judgement of the ICTF and IRTF leaders in collaboration with the AHJ; consult with Regional Coordinator/Asst RC/RCSC if you have questions.

Reorganization on scene- it is expected that in most cases the IRTF will arrive on scene after the Incident Coordination Task Force Leader. At this time the ICTFL may decide, based on the situation, to 1) re-designate the IRTF as Search Task Force and 2) re-designate the Communications Component as a separate Communications Task Force.

Additional Resources that we have access to:

Generally the Regional Coordinator or his staff would be requesting these resources at the request of the on scene commander.

Blacksburg Cave Rescue Team  
Black Diamond SAR  
Allegheny Mountain Rescue Group  
Mountaineer Area Rescue Group

Surface Support Agencies that might be able to provide Management and Logistics Support

Appalachian Search Rescue Conference