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SHENANDOAH MOUNTAIN RESCUE GROUP

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Member, Mountain Rescue Association

A Group of the Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference, Inc.

A Section of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club

SMRG & ASRC 24-hour emergency phone: (804) 323-2300 (Commonwealth of Virginia Emergency Operations Center)

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APPALACHIAN SEARCH AND RESCUE CONFERENCE CAPABILITIES:

A guide for Sheriffs' and Police Departments

Introduction The Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference (ASRC) is composed of local chapters, called Groups. The Shenandoah Mountain Rescue Group is the ASRC's Group in the Washington, DC area. When the ASRC receives a call for assistance, ASRC members from the appropriate Groups respond, functioning under a unified ASRC command, in support of the requesting agency. Members of all ASRC Groups wear the same uniform and meet the same training standards, and a single call to the Virginia Office of Energy and Emergency Services (DEES) at 804-323-2300 will obtain a rapid and appropriate response from the appropriate ASRC Groups.

Although the ASRC has a demonstrated proficiency in mountain rescue, we also conduct and manage lost person searches, in the mountains or elsewhere; in fact, we conduct more searches than rescues. This guide outlines ASRC lost person search capabilities.

Determining if a person is lost The local law enforcement agency is well qualified to determine if a missing person is lost in the outdoors, rather than, for instance, being a runaway or the victim of foul play. The ASRC is usually called only after this responsible agency decides that there is a reasonable chance that the subject is truly lost in the outdoors.

Hasty Search Sometimes, as part of the initial investigation of a probable lost person situation, a **Point Last Seen** is determined: a car, a house, a trail junction, or some other time and place where reliable information last reports the search subject. The Point Last Seen and other high-probability areas, such as the subject's destination, or a trail the subject was known to be following, become the areas for the **Hasty Search**. If the Point Last Seen is near an ASRC Group (Washington, DC; Charlottesville, VA; or Roanoke, VA) you might ask the ASRC to do it for you; otherwise, it may be more efficient for it to be done by the local Sheriff's department, fire department, or rescue squad. As with a crime scene, the Point Last Seen is usually protected and treated as a potential source of clues. The responsible agency often takes measures to ensure that untrained searchers do not trample clues, whether at the Point Last Seen or elsewhere, in their efforts to find the subject.

Search Management The most difficult part of any search is managing it: planning strategy, keeping track of what is happening in the field, and handling the problems that inevitably occur. The nationally-recognized training for search coordinators is *Managing the Search Function*, given by the National Association for Search and Rescue and by the Coast Guard/Air Force National Search and Rescue School. The ASRC has many members with this certification and with considerable search management experience. If there is a lost person situation in your county, and you would like to talk with one of these **Search Advisors**, feel free to call, and we will assign one to assist you. The ASRC can also provide a complete **Overhead Team**, consisting of several experienced members, that can handle most of the technical details of a large lost person search operation for you. If the search area is a long drive from the nearest ASRC Group, air transportation can usually be arranged (through the Virginia DEES or the USAF Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service) at no cost to the requesting agency.

Team Leaders In addition to an Overhead Team, the ASRC can provide advisors (or leaders) for teams of volunteers and local agency personnel. Our Field Team Leaders have training in team leadership, lost person search, mountain rescue, and land navigation; they are generally Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT's) or better; and we provide a VHF-FM radio and medical kit for each Field Team Leader.

Search Tactics Experience indicates that it is seldom (if ever) appropriate to saturate the area with masses of untrained foot searchers. Although this might satisfy the public's desire to help, it tends to destroy essential clues, results in searcher injuries, and may increase the number of lost people. For moderate terrain, air-scenting search dogs have proved orders of magnitude more successful, and small, well-disciplined clue- and track-conscious teams are quite effective for the rougher areas. For certain high-probability areas, a skillful alternation of search dogs and small, highly trained search teams may prove the best. Reports from the past few years indicate that many of the people found alive in rugged Virginia areas have been found by coordinated efforts of ASRC-trained searchers and air-scenting dogs. The ASRC has very close relationships with air-scenting dog groups that can respond with us, and, in addition to its management staff and Field Team Leaders, we can provide effective and reliable search teams for unusually rugged terrain, or when search operations must be conducted at night or in rain or snow.

Safety is a major ASRC concern; no searcher under ASRC control, on a mission or a training session, has ever suffered anything more severe than poison ivy or a bee sting. ASRC and search dog services are provided at no cost, and we always operate under the command of the local agency.

Rescue Since all ASRC-certified members are trained in emergency medicine and mountain rescue as well as search, members involved in a search may be rapidly transformed into a rescue team. The ASRC has a regional and national reputation for methodical and safe conduct of difficult rescues, and is the only Mountain Rescue Association Certified organization east of the Rocky Mountains. Most ASRC members are EMT's, many with advanced life support training (and a few with MD's), and we always work very closely with EMT's from the local rescue squads.

This guide is concerned primarily with lost person situations, but backwoods situations may occur where the victim's location is already known (e.g. when a hunter walks out to a road to report an injured hunting partner); the ASRC's rescue capabilities are always available for such rescue operations. It will take time for an ASRC team to arrive at the site, but in the interest of aiding the victim, we are quite willing to respond to a potentially difficult rescue, even though the rescue may occasionally be concluded before our team arrives. The ASRC also offers seminars for agencies interested in learning the ASRC's search and rescue techniques.

Conclusion The ASRC offers a variety of services for a public safety agency faced with a lost person situation, whether in the mountains or not. By obtaining assistance from the ASRC and a search dog group, the situation can be tackled in a professional manner that is relatively inexpensive and has a very high success rate. The ASRC has excellent working relationships with county, state, and federal agencies, including informal cooperative agreements, and we are always glad to meet with local officials to discuss preplanning for search and rescue incidents. Any agency (in Virginia or any other state) that needs assistance with a lost person situation should call the Virginia Office of Energy and Emergency Services (804-323-2300) and request ASRC and dog team assistance. As a final note, one of the purposes of the ASRC is to offer information and training whenever it can; please contact us if your agency would like training in any aspect of lost person search or wilderness rescue.

(Prepared by the Shenandoah Mountain Rescue Group, ASRC)