Dispatch Training Manual
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Dispatching Theory

The dispatcher serves as a conduit between the search and the rest of the world. Safe, efficient and effective searches depend upon the dispatch function running smoothly. When dispatch runs well, no one notices. The search community is kept well apprised of the development of the search and Base receives all of the available resources that it needs. When the dispatch function runs poorly, Base is aware of its shortcomings and the ASRC is poorly represented.

The most valuable training for successful dispatch is experience. Good dispatchers are aware of the wealth of details, conventions and expectations of Search and Rescue. This document works to help orient the new dispatcher to the BRMRG dispatch area and dispatch expectations, but it cannot substitute for apprenticeship and experience.

Dispatching Goals

1) At all times, maintain searcher safety.
The most important job of the dispatcher is to ensure effective communication throughout the search. In doing so the dispatcher helps to maintain the safety of searches en route, on scene, and homeward bound.

2) Keep track of searchers en route to the scene, on scene, and en route home.
It is critical that the dispatcher keep the Availabilities Board accurate and neat at all times. The availabilities board allows the dispatcher to keep track of people in the field, and know the resources that will be available to base.

3) Keep complete and accurate documentation, including Dispatch Log, Daily Incident Reports, Incident Summary and End of Search Checklist
Documentation is important in getting a sense of the history of a search, recording important information in case of a white-board mishap, and, of course, for legal reasons. Most documents can be found in the Dispatch Binder.

4) Determine the availabilities of BRMRG members.
Dispatch is responsible for trying to get base the personnel resources it needs to run an effective search. Dispatchers should try to get availabilities through pages, email, and personal phone calls.

5) Determine the availabilities of other ASRC groups.
The BRMRG dispatcher also serves as the conference dispatcher for the ASRC. Therefore the dispatcher is also responsible for getting availabilities from other groups and recording those availabilities on the Board. The dispatcher also needs to keep track of teams en route, on scene and homeward bound from other groups.

6) Determine the equipment, personnel, and other needs of Base and work to meet those needs.
Dispatchers need to understand what resources Base needs, and if the dispatcher doesn't know, they need to call and find out. Meeting those needs means getting appropriate personnel and sending them with the appropriate resources, as well as performing or delegating any other errands Base needs run.

7) Ensure that there are dispatchers and Dispatch Supervisors signed up for future shifts.
Dispatchers need to ensure that someone is available to replace them, and they should also try to fill future shifts. All dispatchers must also have a designated dispatch supervisor. Ideally, each shift is at least 3 hours, and longer shifts produce better dispatching continuity.

Specific Dispatching Skills

Before Becoming a Dispatcher Officer
Everyone needs a certain level of training before becoming a dispatcher.

- CQ or ADC permission
The CQ Workshop includes important basic information about vocabulary, search procedures, and callout procedures that all dispatchers need to know.

- Locker Orientation

All dispatchers need to be thoroughly familiar with the equipment in the locker and the various sign out procedures.

- Dispatch Training and one shift of apprenticeship

Before dispatching alone, all dispatchers must demonstrate a thorough understanding of the skills and knowledge in the training standards, and spend at least one full shift (at least 3 hours) working with a trained dispatcher. After dispatching one shift alone, passing the Dispatch Officer Test, and receiving ADC approval, the Dispatch Trainee will be promoted to DO.

Virginia Search and Rescue Background

- Virginia Department of Emergency Management

The Virginia Department of Emergency Services (DEM) is the agency responsible for running Virginia's inland SAR as well as alerting resources of requests from other states. Two of their most important resources are the State SAR Coordinator (Winnie Pennington in 1998) and the various SAR Duty Officers (SARDO). Under some circumstances DEM or Base may send their communications through the dispatcher instead of dealing directly, so the dispatcher should be aware of whom DEM is.

- Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference

The Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference is comprised of nine groups:

    Allegheny Mountain Rescue Group (AMRG)- Pennsylvania
    Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group (BRMRG)- Charlottesville
    Mountain Area Rescue Group (MARG)- West Virginia
    Maryland Search and Rescue (MSAR)- Maryland
    Potomac Valley Rescue Group (PVRG)- College Park
    Piedmont Search and Rescue (PSAR)- Richmond (part of TSAR 9/97)
    Shennandoah Mountain Rescue Group (SMRG)- Northern VA/DC/MD
    Southwestern Virginia Mountain Rescue Group (SWVaMRG)- Blacksburg
    Tidewater Search and Rescue (TSAR) – Tidewater

Dispatchers must get availabilities for all groups in the ASRC. This includes *activating* AMRG and MARG by calling MEDSTAT and the Preston 911 Center respectively. (This information along with contact information for all groups is in the Dispatch Binder and on the desktop.)

- Other State SAR Resources

In the Dispatch Binder there is an orange booklet called the Search and Rescue Resource Guide that is an overview of all the other resources available in the state.

Opening or Taking Over Dispatch

- Receive Situation Report

When taking over dispatch, certain critical pieces of information must be transmitted. New dispatchers need to be sure they learn everything below before taking over dispatch. If the dispatcher is opening dispatch they need to get as much of this information as possible from the AO, and then gather everything else.

- Incident Summary

Includes search location, time the search started, level of callout, **resources on scene**, Incident Commander, and Responsible Agent. Recorded on the Mission Board.

- Basic Subject Profile

Includes basic information about the subject, the Point Last Seen, the time last seen, and other information about the search. Recorded on the Mission Board.

- Groups Alerted

Be sure that all groups have been alerted to the search. Most groups are on the ASRC pager net, but AMRG and MARG need to be activated by phone.

When talking to a GDO, give them the following information:

    Mission #, IC name, Callout status, Weather, and Directions
    Ask them for immediate avails and avails for the next 48 hours.

- Directions to scene

Clear, simple, and efficient directions to Base recorded on the Mission Board. (Directions should be updated since preliminary directions are often unclear.)
- Base Phone #

Recorded on the Mission Board.
- Pertinent Communications from Base

All important requests, information, restrictions, etc. from base.
- Personnel and Equipment Needs of Base

Everything that Base needs in terms of people and equipment, as well as anything they don't want.
- Synopsis of Availability Board

When taking over dispatch, the new dispatcher should be able to read everything the old dispatcher has written and have a sense of who is available and who is in the field from both BRMRG and the ASRC.
- Synopsis of GDO Board

The new dispatcher should also know which GDO's have been contacted and their numbers, and which GDO's should be contacted.
- Next and Future dispatch shifts

New dispatchers should know who, if anyone, is going to replace them and when. Dispatchers should be scheduled 2-3 shifts in advance.
- Name and number of Dispatch Supervisor

It is critical that dispatchers know how to get in touch with their DS in case problems arise.

Working Knowledge of Computer
- Turning computer on

Ideally the computer never gets turned off. If it needs to be turned on the button is to the right of the disk drive. The monitor can be turned on using the button at the bottom right of the screen. You will need to log in to the computer. The user name is brmrg; the password is pork.
- Accessing Dispatch Log through Program Manager

To start a dispatch log:
1) Double click the Dispatch Log icon on the desktop
2) Select "Save As…" from the File menu and replace the **YY-MMM-DD** (for example, 00-JUN-06 for June 6, 2000). Save this file to My Documents.
3) Fill in template and start log
- Recording Incoming and Outgoing calls and Pages

Dispatchers need to record **concise but accurate** synopses of all outgoing and incoming calls. They should record who called or who was called and the important points of the conversation. Last names should be typed in capital letters for easy reference. Pages should also be recorded in the log; copy text from Notesender and paste directly into log after timestamp.
- Using Time Stamps and other Short Cuts

To save time, the dispatch log has certain Hot Keys:

ALT-I = Time Stamp (incoming call)	ALT-B = - BASE -	ALT-S = - SMRG GDO -
ALT-O = Time Stamp (outgoing call)	ALT-U = - UVA MEDCOMM -	ALT-T = - TSAR GDO -
ALT-P = Time Stamp (page)	ALT-A = - AMRG GDO -	ALT-M = - MSAR GDO -
ALT-N = Not Available	ALT-C = - PSAR GDO -	ALT-V = - PVRG GDO -
ALT-D = - VADEM -	ALT-R = - MARG GDO -	ALT-W = - SWVaMRG GDO -

- Sending a Page using Metrocall NoteSender

Double click Metrocall's NoteSender in the program manager. (Do not register software.) Type your message, click on the appropriate net, and then click send. Metrocall's NoteSender uses BRMRG's second phone line to send the page. The line must be clear for the program to work.
- Sending a page using email.

Send an email to =4349727840@page.metrocall.net for the ASRC net and to =4349235440@page.metrocall.net for the BRMRG net.
- Sending an email

Open the Hotmail account on the computer at www.hotmail.com. The user name is asrcdispatch and password is brmrgpork. Send an email asrc@list.pitt.edu to notify the ASRC of search information, including subject information, location, directions, and weather.

When emailing members of brmrg-search@virginia.edu, a personal email account may be used.

- Backup Power Supply

In the event of power failure, there is a backup power supply that runs the computer for about five minutes. Immediately save the Dispatch Log to disk and start printing it out.

Working Knowledge of Phones

- Locker Phone Numbers

The locker has two phone numbers: 434-924-3472 and 434-924-3473. When someone calls the 3472 number and it is busy, it is automatically rolled over to 3473. BRMRG's 800 number, 1-800-800-ASRC (2772), is used for missions only and rings at the 3472 number. Do not give the 800 number out to non-BRMRG members.

- Taking an Incoming call

To answer the phone, pick up the phone that's ringing. Line 1 should ring in the phone on the left and Line 2 should ring on the right, but these can be switched. During a search the phone should be answered, "ASRC Dispatch, this is John." Be Professional!!

- Using both phone lines

Just politely ask one caller to hold for another. Don't try to do two at once; people understand your job is to communicate. Don't use the hold button; just put the receiver down.

- Placing Outgoing call

Be sure to use only one line for placing outgoing calls so one line remains free for incoming calls.

- On Grounds

Dial the five digit phone number.

- Local

Dial 9, then dial the seven digit number.

- Long Distance using FAC code

Dial 8-7968660. Wait for tone, then dial 1- Area Code- seven digit number.

- Send pages by phone

For the ASRC net, dial 972-7840, wait for the tone, enter your page, press #, and hang up. For specific pages, see Pager Usage Guide.

- In an emergency dial 9-911

Working Knowledge of Fax Machine

- Sending Faxes

Load document in the top of the Fax machine. Dial fax number and press Start.

- Making Copies

Load document in the top of the Fax machine. Press Start/Copy, enter the number of copies, and press Start/Copy

Working Knowledge of Answering Machine and Voice Mail

- Checking Answering Machine

Push the large blue button on the machine. Record all messages on the machine, distribute them to the necessary people, and delete the messages by pressing rewind.

- Resetting Answering Machine Message

Hold down the ANNC/SKIP button, wait for the beeps, record your message, and release the ANNC button.

Working Knowledge of Pagers

- Pager Use (including using pagers, and sending pages)

To effectively dispatch, one needs to be able to read, understand, and send pages. To that end the BRMRG Pager Use guide is included below:

Working Knowledge of Pager Codes

0XX- Sending a Personal Page (see pager use)

000- Disregarding improper pages (use when you have sent an incorrect page.)
09X- Sending a Group Page (see pager use)
100- Significance of 100 page, significance of 100 page during a search (100 pages imply that someone is calling us out for a search. During a search, this may mean a second search could be forthcoming.)
101- Significance of 101 page (This means that an AO is handling the 100 page)
102- Significance of the 102 page (Used by an AO to get an IC for a search)
103- Using the 103 page to get an ACA (Certain conditions, including multiple searches, and disagreements among IS staff mandate calling an Area Command Authority (one of 3 designated IC's). If the dispatcher is asked to find the ACA they should use the 103 page.)
105- Significance of the 105 page (Use the 105 page whenever dispatch's phone number changes.)
106- Using the 106 page to contact a DS (Use the 106 page to find someone to be the dispatch supervisor. If you want your DS to call, send a personal page.)
111-333- Significance of these 6 pages, Using the 3XX pages to get appropriate availabilities (See Pager Use)
441-3- Significance of these 3 pages (See Pager Use)
444- Using the 444 to bring back teams en route (If the subject is found or search is suspended while teams are en route, use the 444 to recall them.)
445- Using the 445 to communicate the suspension of a search (If a search is suspended for any reason, use this page.)
551- Using the 551 to contact Base (If you need someone from Base to call, use this page.)
552- Significance of the 552 (If the dispatcher receives this page, they should call the appropriate number.)
553- Using the 553 to contact teams en route (This page is used to get phone calls from teams en route. It is often used when directions change.)
554- Using the 554 to contact GDO's (often to get availabilities) (The 554 page gets GDO's to call dispatch. This page is useful for getting more availabilities around the ASRC.)
600- Using the 600 to contact the BOD (see pager use)
650- Significance of the 650 (This page is often sent in conjunction with the 102 page. Anyone who is available to help open dispatch and get teams en route should report to the locker. If a dispatcher needs someone to take over, this page should be used.)
7XX- Sending a personal page (See pager use)
888- Using the 888 to close dispatch (When the entire End of Search Checklist has been completed, use this page to officially close dispatch
999- Significance of the 999 (see pager use)

Working Knowledge of the Availability Board
- Taking Availabilities

Taking availabilities is critical in getting people to go to searches and giving Base a sense of what resources will be available to them. As Conference Dispatch, the dispatcher must take availabilities for BRMRG as for the ASRC.

For BRMRG: There are three main methods of getting availabilities from BRMRG members: paging, email and phone calls.

1. Paging is probably the fastest and most effective means. Simply send the appropriate 33X page and BRMRG members should call you almost immediately.

2. Email is useful during searches with a full callout to get as many members as possible to respond. Send email to brmrg-search@virginia.edu

3. Roster call-down -- Personal phone calls can be time consuming but are often the only means of contacting members without pagers. Calling down the roster found printed out on the desk is an effective means of contacting everyone. Feel free to write on this copy. Messages should be left on answering machine or with roommates if the person is out of the house. Say that there is currently a search going on in _____ and ask them to call Dispatch immediately with availabilities. Leave the number. If the dispatch copy is written on, it is a legal document: make sure it is added to the search file!

For the ASRC:
1. Send out 554 page for GDO to call Dispatch.

2. Call Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary numbers for groups who haven't responded. (Contact information for individual groups is in the Dispatch Binder and on the desk top.)
3. Call down the group roster starting with officers.

- Recording availabilities

All availabilities need to be recorded on the Availability Board. After finding out someone's availability, take their name from the Call Deck (or write it on the board) and record the date and time they are available to leave and the date and time they need to return. Searches lasting several days are not uncommon and so availabilities should be taken for the upcoming few days (at least 48 hours). Take note of whether or not they have transportation (and how many can fit in their car), what level of training they have, and their ETA to the search from when they leave. Make sure to remind all teams that they must call in before they get En Route to the search. For ASRC teams, it is not important to keep track of names (GDO's should do that), but the dispatcher still must record number of people, training level, times available, and ETA to the search.

Also if people are unavailable to go search, the dispatcher should see if they are available to take over future dispatching shifts.

If people are totally unavailable they should be recorded on the board as such.

- Recording persons and teams En Route

When teams leave for a search, their names should be moved from Available to En Route. BRMRG teams en route to a search should check in with dispatch about every hour, especially on long trips. GDO's should alert the dispatcher to ASRC teams that get En Route. Try to maintain consistent contact with all GDOs, ask them to call you when their teams get to base in case they forget they have to. Assume they don't know their responsibilities but that they think they do, i.e. use people skills here to get information you need.

- Recording persons and teams On Scene

When teams arrive at Base, their names should be moved from En Route to On Scene. BRMRG teams should call in when they arrive at base, but will frequently forget. When staff from base calls, ask them who has arrived. GDO's should keep the dispatcher apprised of their teams' status. Teams that have not checked in long after their ETA should be contacted.

- Recording persons and teams Homeward Bound

Teams that leave Base should have their names moved from On Scene to Homeward Bound. BRMRG teams should call in before heading back. **This can be an extremely dangerous time for teams driving home**. Drivers can be dangerously fatigued after a long search, and as such can fall asleep while driving. Dispatchers must be vigilant about maintaining hourly contact with BRMRG teams Homeward Bound and should encourage tired drivers to stop and rest. When they call in talk to them and try to judge that they are safe to drive. This is VERY important because they may be trying to rush home. ASRC teams should maintain contact with their GDO who should keep you apprised of their status. Teams that return home should be put back in the call deck, or if available later should be recorded as such.

Working Knowledge of GDO board

- Recording phone numbers of GDO's

The names and phone numbers of current GDO's should be written on the GDO board for all ASRC groups that are responding. Record the time each GDO was last contacted in the column labeled LAST CONTACT so that you can keep track of how often. *Don't try to remember*.

Working Knowledge of Paper Work

- Computer Dispatch Log

To accurately keep a Dispatch Log on the computer, fill in the initial template at the top, and then record all calls and pages as outlined above in Section 3.

- Manual Dispatch Log

In case of computer or power failure, dispatch logs should be kept manually. They can be found in the back of the Dispatch Binder.

- Daily Incident Report

At 000 on every day of a multiple day search, these forms should be filled out. They can be found in the back of the Dispatch Binder. If a dispatcher cannot find any of the information requested, he or she should call the DS.

- Incident Summary

The Closing Dispatcher of a search needs to fill out this summary, found in the back of the Dispatch Binder. Again if a dispatcher cannot find any of the information, he or she should call the DS.

- End of Search Checklist

This document is found in the back of the Dispatch Binder. More on Closing Dispatch is in Section 13

Knowing When to Contact the Dispatch Supervisor

Do not hesitate to call the DS. They are there to help new dispatchers.

- If unfamiliar problem arises
- If a second search begins
- If the Press calls
- Anytime you feel uncomfortable about the situation in dispatch

Bathroom or Other Short Emergency Protocol

- Take both phones off hook

If a dispatcher needs to go to the bathroom, or on some other extremely short emergency, he should take both phones of the hook. Don't waste time, your job is important.

Closing Dispatch

NOTE: Closing Dispatch can be complicated. Dispatchers are strongly encouraged to request help if they have never closed before.

- Using the End of Search Checklist

The End of Search Checklist is a useful guide in Closing Dispatch at the end of a search.

- Recording find

As soon as the find is made, the process of ending the search begins. Record the requested information on the Checklist.

- Notifying ASRC groups and transferring responsibility

Groups should be notified of a find as soon as possible by a 44X page. In the past, it was possible to transfer responsibility for other ASRC teams to GDOs. However, ASRC Dispatch must remain open until every ASRC team has returned home. If all BRMRG members are home, but there is still another ASRC team en route home, it is possible to transfer ASRC Dispatch to that group, or to a cell phone. Call your DS before doing this.

- Tracking returning personnel

Track all teams Homeward Bound and record the time of the last team leaving Base. Again keep in mind that this can be an **extremely dangerous** time for tired drivers. Dispatchers should keep in close contact with their teams.

- Checking in Equipment

Dispatchers should work closely with returning teams to ensure that all equipment returns in good condition. If any equipment is unaccounted for, dispatchers should notify the relevant officer (OPS for supplies, Equipment for gear, and Commo for radios) as well as the BOD for major items (lost radios, expensive gear, etc).

- Completing Incident Summary

To write the requested search summary, use the Incident Summary form.

- Notifying DEM.

Call DEM to notify them that ASRC Dispatched is closed before you send out the 888 page.

- Changing the answering machine

Change the answering machine to read as follows:

> "You have reached the office of the Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group, a member of the Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference. The search in _____ has ended status ____ (or "has been suspended", if appropriate.) If you have a search and rescue emergency, please call the Virginia Department of Emergency Management at 804-674-2400. That number again, 804-674-2400. Otherwise please leave your name, number and a brief message. Thank you."

- Closing Dispatch

When everything is done, set off an 888, print out the log twice, place one in the ASRC ADC box and one in the ADC box, turn off the lights, put all the paperwork in the ADC box, and go home.