DISPATCH TRAINING HANDBOOK
Updated: 10-11-2006 ECR

DISPATCHING THEORY

The dispatcher serves as a conduit between the search and the rest of the world. Safe, efficient and effective searches depend on the dispatch function running smoothly. When dispatch runs well, nobody notices; the search community remains well apprised of the development of the search, and Base all the resources and information it needs. When the dispatch function runs poorly, Base is well aware of and suffers from its shortcomings and the ASRC is poorly represented.

Experience is invaluable for a successful dispatcher. It takes hours of experience to dispatch efficiently and effectively. Dispatchers must be aware of the plethora of details, conventions and expectations of Search and Rescue. The objective of this document is to provide a reference for the beginning dispatcher, and to orient him or her to the BRMRG dispatch area and the expectations of ASRC dispatch. This document cannot substitute for apprenticeship and experience. As experience is gained, the many details in this handbook will become second nature to the dispatcher who will quickly learn the more subtle details of dispatching that cannot be covered here.

DISPATCHING GOALS

- **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 searchers en route, on scene, and homeward bound.
- **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 the available resources.
- **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 information for the dispatcher and future dispatchers, and for legal reasons. Most documents can be found in the Dispatch Binder or on the desktop.
- **Determine the availabilities of BRMRG members.** Dispatch is responsible for trying to send all the resources to Base that it needs to run an effective search. Dispatchers use pages, emails and phone calls to get availabilities.
- **Determine the availabilities of all other ASRC groups.** The BRMRG dispatcher also serves as the conference dispatcher for the ASRC. Therefore the dispatcher is responsible for getting availabilities from other groups, and keeping track of teams from these groups.
- **Determine the equipment, personnel and other needs of Base and meet those needs.** Dispatchers must know what resources Base needs. To meet those needs, the dispatcher must send appropriate resources with appropriate personnel, and perform or delegate any other duties that Base might need. The dispatcher

also needs to be aware of what Base doesn't want, and ensure that it doesn't have to deal with an excess of personnel or unnecessary equipment.

- **Ensure that dispatch will remain open with Dispatch Supervisors available.** This means ensuring that dispatchers are signed up for future shifts. Ideally, a shift is no shorter than 3 hours; the longer the shift, the greater the quality of dispatching. There must always be a Dispatch Supervisor available to help if necessary.
- **Keep the ASRC web page updated about the search.** The web page keeps all ASRC groups informed about the specifics of the search.

BEFORE BECOMING A DISPATCH OFFICER

Everyone needs a level of training before becoming a DO.

- A trainee must be CQ certified or have ADC permission. The CQ workshop includes important basic information about vocabulary, search and callout procedures that all dispatchers need to know.
- All dispatchers must go through Locker Orientation to become completely familiar with the equipment and its location in the locker as well as the procedures of signing it in and out.
- Before dispatching alone, trainees must exhibit a functional knowledge and understanding of the skills and information in the training standards; they also must spend at least one full (3 hour) shift shadowing and helping a DO.
- After dispatching a full shift alone, passing the Dispatch Officer Test, and receiving ADC approval, the trainee will be promoted to DO.

VIRGINIA SAR RESOURCES

- **Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM)** located in the Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC) 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 and the various SAR Duty Officers, (SARDO). Under some circumstances DEM or Base may send their communications through the dispatcher instead of dealing directly, furthermore, it is in the ASRC's contract to notify DEM when dispatch opens and closes, so the dispatcher must be aware of DEM.
- **Appalachian Searh and Rescue Conference (ASRC)** : a conglomerate of 9 groups:
  o Allegheny Mountain Rescue Group (AMRG) – Pennsylvania
  o Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group (BRMRG) - Charlottesville
  o Mountain Area Rescue Group (MARG) – West Virginia :
  o Maryland Search and Rescue (MSAR) – Maryland
  o Potomac Valley Rescue Group (PVRG) – College park
  o Piedmont Search and Rescue (PSAR) – Richmond
  o Shenandoah Mountain Rescue Group (SMRG) – Northern VA/DC/MD
  o Southwestern Virginia Mountain Rescue Group (SWVaMRG) – Blacksburg
  o Tidewater Search and Rescue (TSAR) - Tidewater

- **Other state SAR resources** are identified in the Dispatch Binder in an orange booklet called the Search and Rescue Resource Guide.

DISPATCHING PROCEDURE

Opening or Taking Over Dispatch

- Begin Dispatch Log: see below.
- Receive situation report: When taking over dispatch, certain critical pieces of information must be transmitted. New dispatchers must learn everything listed here before taking over dispatch. When opening dispatch, the DO must get as much of this information as possible from the AO, then gather everything else.
  - Incident Summary: search location, time started, level of callout, resources on scene, Incident Commander (IC), Responsible Agent (RA). Record on Mission Board.
  - Basic Subject Profile: gender, age, clothing, race, specific physical attributes, Point Last Seen, Time Last Seen, etc. Record on Mission Board and in Log.
  - Direction to Scene- these should be clear and concise and should be updated, Base phone #. Record on Mission Board and in Log.
  - Pertinent Communications from Base including requests, information, restrictions, resources needed: personnel and equipment, and any resources they don't want. Record.
- Groups Alerted: be sure that all groups have been alerted to the search. The GDO board will help with this, if any groups haven't been notified, it is the current dispatcher's responsibility to notify them. Most are on the ASRC pagernet, but AMRG and MARG need to be activated by phone: call MEDSTAT and the Preston 911 Center respectively. The usual GDO from MARG has added himself to the ASRC pagernet recently, so it is likely that they may not need to be activated by phone. However, the dispatcher should be sure that MARG has been activated. When talking to a GDO, give them the following information: Mission #, IC name, Callout Status, Weather, and Directions. Ask for immediate personnel and equipment avails and future avails for 48 hours. Record the names and phone numbers of GDO's and the time of last communication on GDO board and in Log.
- Availabilities: Record on Availability Board and in Log from GDO's the availabilities of personnel, who is en route, and who is in the field. When taking over dispatch, the new dispatcher should be able to read everything the old dispatcher has written and have a sense of avails and who is currently in the field from both BRMRG and the ASRC.
- Future Dispatchers and Dispatch Supervisor: New dispatchers should know who will be replacing them and when. Dispatchers should be scheduled 2-3 shifts in advance if possible. It is critical that dispatchers know how to get in touch with their DS if necessary – this person's number should be recorded on the Mission Board.

Dispatch Log

All the previously discussed information will be recorded in the Dispatch Log as well. The Dispatch Log will also keep track of all communications within the search and the ASRC.

- Turn on computer if it's not already on (if the dispatcher can't figure out how to do this, then he or she probably shouldn't be dispatching). Log in using BRMRG, the password is brmrg. If you are using the old computer the password is pork.
- Double click on the dispatch Log Template icon on the desktop.
- Select 'save as' from File menu and save as YYYY-MM-DD_County_State. E.g. 2006-10-07_Allegany_Co._MD. Save this file in the appropriate month and year folders under Dispatch Logs on the desktop.
- Fill in template and begin log.
  - o Record all the information that was described above and other information requested in the log template. It is best to record this information first in the log and then on the mission board. If the dispatcher is not opening dispatch, this information should already be filled in. Just before the end of the log is a Mission Response Snapshot table- this functions like the availability board and all ASRC personnel involved in the search should be recorded here appropriately.
  - o Record all Incoming and outgoing calls, Pages and Emails. Record from left to right: time of event, type, who receives it or who it is from, and a concise but accurate synopsis of the information conveyed. For pages and emails, simply copy and paste the message into the Log.
  - o Use time stamps and short cut keys (these only work on the old computer, not the laptop); a list of these is on the wall behind the computer. For type of event, use: IT = incoming call, OT = outgoing call, P = page, E = email.
- At the end of the dispatch log can be found a table titled "Search Snapshot" , this item can function similarly to the availabilities board in keeping track of who is where. Use it.

Other Paperwork/logistics

- If the computer isn't working, you'll have to keep the dispatch log on paper- logs can be found in the back of the dispatch binder.
- Daily Incident Report : should be filled out at 000 every day of a multi-day search, can be found in back of dispatch binder.
- Incident Summary: this is now a part of the dispatch log template on the computer- closing dispatcher should fill it out. Paper copies in binder.
- End of Search checklist: ditto.
- Availabilities Board:
  - o Take Availabilities and record on Board (and log): this is a critical part of recruiting people to go search and it gives Base a sense of the available resources. As a Conference Dispatcher, you are responsible for the avails of the entire ASRC. When you record avails, write the name (BRMRG only) and training level of the person and the date and time they are available to leave and return. Note their transportation situation so you can work on

arranging rides (you probably won't need to do this for anyone other than BRMRGrs). Also record ETA to search and to home when they leave. Keep track of people who are available to dispatch as well.

- For BRMRG: take avails in this order:
    - Paging. Probably the quickest and effective means (soon the pages you send out will go as text messages to cell phones). Send the appropriate callout page and you should be getting calls in no time.
    - Email. This is useful because you can send out longer and more convincing messages begging people to come dispatch or search. Send to brmrg-search@virginia.edu
    - Roster Call-down. If you just aren't getting the needed response after sending pages and emails, make a few personal phone calls. Just call down the roster (there are always tons of them lying around the locker, and there is one on the BRMRG web-page and the ASRC web-page). Leaving a message with the dispatch number and the location of the search is a good idea.
- For ASRC:
    - Send out a 554 page (so GDO's will call)
    - Call primary, secondary and tertiary numbers for groups that don't respond.
    - Call down group roster starting with officers.

o Record Persons and teams en route. When teams leave for the search, move their names from available to En Route. Have BRMRG teams en route check in every hour with dispatch (especially on long trips). Make sure GDO's call when their teams are en route. Record ETA's.

o Record persons and teams on scene. When teams or GDO's call that they have arrived at base, move the names to On Scene. If a team hasn't contacted dispatch long after its ETA has passed, contact it!

o Record persons and teams homeward bound. When a team leaves base, it or it's GDO should call you. Place names in Homeward Bound. When your teams leave, be sure you talk to the driver before they get on the road. **This can be an extremely dangerous time for teams!** These people are fatigued, probably haven't slept in a while, probably are hungry, etc. Encourage drivers to stop frequently if you think they are able to drive. If you don't think they will be able to drive safely, then try to talk them into resting before they go. (If you run into any problems here, call your DS). When a team gets home, they (or their GDO) should call you. Put their names back in the call deck or erase.

Telephone Use

- The locker has two phone numbers: 434-924-3472 and 434-924-3473. When the first line is busy, calls transfer to the other number. BRMRG's 800 number is 1-

800-800-ASRC (2772), and is used for missions only. This number rings at the 3472 number. Do not give the 800 number out to non-BRMRG members.

- To take an incoming call, pick up the phone that's ringing (that's the hard part) and say "ASRC Dispatch, this is [insert your name here]." Try to sound professional.
- If the second phone line rings, just ask one caller to hold for the other. Don't try to have two conversations at once and don't use the hold button- just put the receiver down.
- Outgoing calls
  o On Grounds: dial the five digit number
  o Local: dial 9, then the seven digit number
  o Long Distance: use FAC code- dial 8-7968660, wait for tone, then dial 1,area code, then the seven digit number
- In an emergency call your mom, or 9-911
- Answering Machine and Voice Mail
  o To check messages, push the green button
  o to record a new message, push down the white button that says ANNC/SKIP and hold down. When it beeps, continue to hold it down and begin speaking. When you are finished release the button and the machine will play back what you just recorded. If you don't like it, try again.

Fax Machines and Copiers

- To send a fax, load the document in the top of the fax machine, dial the fax number and press start.
- To make a copy, pick a copier or use the fax machine, load document, enter number of copies and press start/copy.
- If a copier is out of ink and there is a cartridge lying around and you know how to do it, replace the cartridge.

Sending Pages and Emails

- Go to http://mail.google.com/mail, sign in as **asrcdispatch**, the password is **thatothersmaylive**
- Click on Compose Mail in the upper left corner of the page.
- Type in mission@asrc.net and asrc-mission@asrc.net in the 'To' line. These activate all mobile devices (cell-phones and pagers) and send to all email addresses respectively.
- In the subject line type in the pager code – the dispatch phone number – pager code. E.g. 123-434-9243472-123.
- In the body, type your message.
- Click send. That's it.

Updating ASRC web page

- Go to www.asrc.net, sign in: if you don't have privileges sign in as brmrg the password is brmrg, click on the Alert and Dispatch tab.

- To post a new search, click on <u>Add New Mission</u>. This will probably already be done by either the ASRC AO or ADC. Fill out the requested information and click on Update Mission Info at either the top or bottom of the page.
- To update the mission info, e.g, weather, directions, callout-status, etc., click on Update Mission Info. and update the appropriate information. When you are done, click on Update Mission Info at either the top or bottom of the page.

Pager Codes

Code   meaning

0XX   personal page
000   disregard improper pages
100   notification of search
101   the AO is handling the 100 page
102   the AO is requesting an IC for search
103   used to contact an ACA (multiple searches or disagreements among IS staff mandate calling an Area Command Authority, one of 3 designated IC's)
104   request for any ASRC dispatcher, usually sent with 102 page. This page is used when BRMRG needs to transfer ASRC dispatch to a non BRMRG member.
105   change in dispatch phone number
106   used to contact a DS, to contact yours, use a personal page
111   a search is occurring, but ASRC response is unlikely
123   pager test
222   a search is occurring and ASRC response is likely within the next 12 hours
331   request for an overhead team consisting of an IC and 1-3 IS
332   request for limited callout – a specific type or number of ASRC resources
333   request for full callout – all ASRC resources
444   used to bring back teams en route if the search ends
445   search is suspended
551   used to contact Base (requests Base to call dispatch)
552   if a dispatcher receives this page, he should call the appropriate number
553   used to contact teams en-route, to get them to call dispatch
554   used to contact all GDO's, (requests GDO's to call ASRC dispatch)
600   used to contact BOD
650   sent to BRMRG members only, requests anyone who is available to help open dispatch and get teams in route to report to the locker, or requests someone to take over dispatch.
651   a dispatcher has answered the 650 or 104 page, should be followed by his or her PIN number
7XX   personal page
888   dispatch is closed (the very last page sent, after End of Search Checklist is completed this officially closes dispatch)
999   disaster

Other Important Information

- Anything you write on that is search related while you are dispatching is considered a legal document. You should add it to the search file.
- If you ever have any questions about dispatching, are confused about what you should do, if another search begins, if the press calls, you are uncomfortable about anything pertaining to dispatch, CALL YOUR DS.
- About GDO's: they don't always call you when they should. Be sure you ask them ahead of time when you know that you'll need to hear from them, e.g. when they give you avails, go ahead and ask for them to call when their teams leave and when they arrive at base.
- If you have to use the bathroom or step out for any other EXTREMELY SHORT emergency, take both phones off the hook. Be quick about it, don't waste time.

Closing Dispatch
- This can be complicated. If you've never closed before, ask for help or pass it on to someone else.
- Fill out the End of Search Checklist at the end of the log. This can help you be sure that you haven't forgotten anything that needs to be done before close. Record all requested information- if you don't know something, make phone calls.
- Make sure that all ASRC groups know that the search is ending. Send out the appropriate page. It is usually a good idea to send out a 554 right after asking GDO's to call confirming receipt of information.
- Track personnel. ASRC dispatch must remain open until every person that was at the search has returned home. It is possible to transfer dispatch to a cell phone and even sometimes to another ASRC group if its team(s) is the only one left. Keep in close contact with teams to ensure their safety.
- Check in Equipment. Be sure that your teams bring back all the equipment they checked out and that it is in good condition. If anything is unaccounted for, notify the relevant officer (OPS for supplies, Equipment for gear, and Commo for radios) and the BOD if anything major is lost.
- Complete the Incident Summary Form
- Call DEM to let them know that ASRC dispatch is closed
- Change the answering machine to: "You have reached the office of the Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group, a membger of the Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference. The search in _____ has ended status _____ (or "been suspended.") If you have a search and rescue emergency, please call the Virginia Department of Emergency Management at 804-674-2400. Otherwise please leave your name, number and a brief message. Thank you."
- Finally after all the above is done, send out an 888 page, print out the log twice, place one copy in the ASRC ADC box, and in the BRMRG ADC box along with all other paperwork, turn out the lights and leave.

Code #	Term	Definition	AO Requirements	Conference Dispatch Requirements	Group Dispatch Requirements
111	Notification	A search is occurring somewhere. The ASRC is not being asked to respond or only one group from the ASRC is being asked to respond. The likelihood of greater ASRC involvement is low.	The AO may set off a 111 page and inform the Group Dispatchers of the situation. No further action is required. The page may be delayed if deemed appropriate by the AO.	Is not required to open unless there is ASRC group involved that does not take responsibility for itself.	Needs to answer the 111 page. No furthe[r] action is required.
222	Alert	A search is occurring somewhere. The ASRC is being asked to respond or only one group from the ASRC is being asked to respond. The likelihood of greater ASRC involvement is high.	The AO may decide if availabilities for the next 12 hours procedure will be followed. * If availabilities are not required the 111 procedure will be followed. * If the AO decides availabilities are required the AO may set off a 106 for a DS to open conference dispatch. The AO should consider the need for staging. The AO must turn over all information to the DS and leave a way to be reached for questions.	* If availabilities are not required the 111 procedure will be followed. * If availabilities are requested, conference dispatch is required to open and contact all groups. Conference dispatch should remain open until a potential overhead team and group availabilities (for the AO selected groups) are obtained. The DS needs to leave a way to be reached for questions.	* If availabilities are not required the 111 procedure will be followed. * If availabilities are required, the grou[p] dispatch should obtain availabilities of IC[s] and FTLs and below. Follow any other request and/or instructions from conference dispatch.
331	Overhead Team	A request for an IC and 1-3 staff members to respond at any time.	1. The AO may set off a 102 for an IC. The AO is responsible for getting an IC or an ACA approved AR. 2. The AO should consider the need for staging, air transport, and which ASRC groups should respond. 3. The AO may set off a 106 for a DS to open conference dispatch. The AO must turn over all information to the DS and leave a way to be reached for questions.	Conference dispatch open, sets off a 331 page and contacts all groups. Conference dispatch should get availabilities from all groups, but only send people from the AO selected groups. Conference dispatch remains open until the end of the search. *The DS has the prerogative to meet the AO request in the most efficient and timely manner.* The DS needs to leave a way to be reached for questions.	The group dispatch should obtain availabilities of ICs and staff first, then FTLs and below. Carefully note if the group is being asked to send resources at this time and what type. Follow any other request and/or instructions from conference dispatch.
332	Limited Callout	A request for a specific type or number of ASRC resources to respond. Ranges from a larger version of an overhead team to almost a full callout.	1. The AO will set off a 102 for an IC. The AO is responsible for getting an IC or an ACA approved AR. 2. The AO should consider the need for staging, air transport, and which ASRC groups should respond. 3. The AO may set off a 106 for a DS to open conference dispatch. The AO must turn over all information to the DS and leave a way to be reached for questions.	Conference dispatch open, sets off a 332 page and contacts all groups. Conference dispatch should get availabilities from all groups, but only send people from the AO selected groups. Conference dispatch remains open until the end of the search. *The DS has the prerogative to meet the AO request in the most efficient and timely manner.* The DS needs to leave a way to be reached for questions.	The group dispatch should obtain availabilities of ICs and staff first, then FTLs and below. Carefully note if the group is being asked to send resources at this time and what type. Follow any other request and/or instructions from conference dispatch.
333	Full Callout	All conference resources are requested to respond at this time due to the urgent nature of the search.	1. The AO will set off a 102 for an IC. The AO is responsible for getting an IC or an ACA approved AR. 2. The AO should consider the need for staging and air transport. 3. The AO will set off a 106 for a DS to open conference dispatch. The AO must turn over all information to the DS and leave a way to be reached for questions.	Conference dispatch open, sets off a 333 page and contacts all groups. Conference dispatch should get availabilities from all groups for the next three days. Conference dispatch remains open until the end of the search. *The DS has the prerogative to meet the AO request in the most efficient and timely manner.* The DS needs to leave a way to be reached for questions.	The group dispatch should obtain availabilities of ICs and staff first, then FTLs and below. Follow any other request and/or instructions from conference dispatch.