SAMPLE WATER RESCUE SOP 2

This is a sample water rescue SOP. Use this as a template to create an SOP that meets local needs. Rev: August 8, 2017.

**Scope**

The purpose of this standard operating procedure is to provide procedures and guidance when responding to emergency calls involving a water rescue incident while ensuring the safety and well-being of both rescuers and victims.

**Purpose**

To establish a uniform approach for safe and successful operations at an incident requiring the use of water rescue equipment and procedures in compliance with NFPA 1006: *Standard for Rescue Technician Professional Qualifications*, and NFPA 1670: *Standard on Operations and Training for Technical Search and Rescue Incidents.*

# Definitions

Rescue: Refers to the acts involved in removing a live person from a place of danger to a place of safety.

Water Rescue: Refers to the rescue of live victims from water in which the current, depth, floating or submerged hazards, contamination, or other risks exist for rescuers or victims.

Recovery: Refers to the retrieval of a deceased person. Recovery in water should be coordinated with the local police or sheriff’s department having jurisdiction at the site of the incident.

Cold Water: Any significant sized body of water, whether in mid-summer or winter.

Cold Zone: > 10 feet from water’s edge.

Warm Zone: 10 feet from the water’s edge or bank.

Hot Zone: The water environment, i.e. in, or on, the water.

Personal Flotation Device: “PFD” Must be a US Coast Guard approved Type III or Type V life safety vest.

River Designation: Based on the Rescuer looking downstream.

* River Left will be on the rescuers left side
* River Right will be on the rescuers right side

# Safety

1. All members of the Water Rescue Team must be certified at the Water Rescue Operations, Technician, and/or Instructor level, and continue to meet all training guidelines.
2. Fire department personnel are responsible to ensure that they have their current certifications sent to the fire department to be placed in their personnel file.
3. Anyone operating within the Warm Zone must be trained at the Operations Level or higher and have the proper personal protective equipment according to his/her level of training.
4. No structural turnout gear, or wildland firefighting gear, shall be worn in or near the water at any time.
5. Any person operating in the hot zone shall have and use a personal flotation device.
6. Command shall have an Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulance dispatched to the scene of any incident involving rescuers entering the water for a rescue.

# Guidelines

This SOP is not a substitute for swift water rescue training, but is intended to provide general guidelines for swift water rescue response and to emphasize safety issues related to these calls.

Priorities for safety include:

* Determine if the incident is a rescue operation or recovery operation. If in doubt, err on side of rescue.
* Make sure law enforcement is notified.
* Use risk versus benefit analysis to help determine all tactics and strategies.

Operational rescue priorities are:

1. Self-rescue
2. Security of fellow team members and responders
3. Victims

The team shall use the Incident Command System while functioning during all water rescue operations. It is understood that the command structure shall fit under the Operational branch of the existing Incident Command System at any water rescue incident. Unified command should be established for multi-jurisdictional and multi-agency response.

The team should have a certified incident safety officer at all water rescue incidents as number of personnel allows.

The Water Rescue Team commander shall account for all members while working at emergency incidents. The team shall conduct regular Personnel Accountability Reports (PAR) at intervals not to exceed 15 minutes.

# Phase I: Pre-arrival

1. Notify the water rescue team.
2. Make sure local law enforcement is notified.
3. For incidents on rivers, streams, and public lakes notify the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency.
4. Call for downstream resources to staff locations where victims may be spotted and make sure victims are not past those downstream points.
5. Water rescue operations can require more resources than may be on-duty or immediately available. Consider calling for additional resources early in the incident, especially if long travel times are involved.

# Phase II: Arrive on scene

# Establish command and Insure the ICS system is used. Complete initial size up.

1. Secure responsible party or witness. Command should secure a witness as soon as possible after arriving on scene to obtain as much information as possible, i.e. clothing description, number of persons involved, point last seen, etc.
2. Assess the need for additional resources. Command should immediately begin assessing the need for additional resources. If additional resources are necessary, Command should make the request early and cancel if determined they are not necessary.
3. A repeated tactical channel may be requested if the search/rescue/recovery exceeds the capability of a line-of-sight tactical channel.
4. Assess the hazards.

# Phase III: Pre-Rescue Operations

1. Determine strategy and tactics
2. Assign personnel to the following positions as needed:

* Incident Command
* Safety
* Operations
* Upstream spotters
* Downstream rescuers/backup
* Rescuers
* Riggers

# Phase IV: Rescue Operations

1. Rescue operations should be conducted from low risk to high risk order. Rescues should be conducted with the least amount of risk to the rescuer necessary to rescue the victim. The order of water rescue from low risk to high risk is:
2. TALK: Talk the victim into self-rescue. If possible, the victim is in the water and can be talked into swimming to shore or assisting the rescuers with his/her own rescue.
3. REACH: If possible, the rescuer should extend his/her hand or some other object, such as a pike pole, to remove the victim from the water.
4. THROW: If the victim is too far out in the water to reach, rescuer(s) should attempt to throw the victim a throw bag, life ring, or some piece of positive flotation equipment.
5. ROW: Use of watercraft. There should be consideration for personal protective equipment (PPE) and personal flotation device (PFD) for victim(s).
6. GO: Putting rescue personnel in the water to reach the victim. This is a very high risk operation. The rescuers should take PPE of at least a personal flotation device (PFD) to the victim.
7. HELO: Use of helicopters is for search, hazard identification, accessing victims on islands and inaccessible areas, movement of victims and emergency personnel. The pilot will have the final say on how the helicopter will be used.
8. COMMUNICATIONS

Because it may be difficult to hear a voice over a distance, all personnel in or on the water shall have a whistle with them and will use the following signals.

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| Whistle blasts will indicate the following: | | Hand Signals will indicate the following: | |
| 1 Blast = | Attention (look at me) | Hand to top of your head = | I’m OK |
| 2 Blast = | Upstream | Point upstream = | Look upstream |
| 3 Blast = | Downstream | Point downstream = | Look downstream |
| 4 Blast (Multiple/ erratic) = | Help | Wave hand (s) overhead = | Help |

1. SEARCHES

Where the victim(s) have not been immediately located, the IC should:

1. Perform a size-up: Determine number, age, description, condition and last seen location of victim(s) and their vehicle(s).
2. Isolate the water body and deny entry to untrained and/or unequipped personnel and civilians. Do not allow additional victims to be created.
3. Request additional resources early. This may include additional teams or departments for search teams, search dogs, helicopters, dive team, chaplain (to assist victim’s family), etc.
4. Request units to downstream river access points or bridges where floating victims might be found and/or rescued. Consider lead time, response time, and the speed of the current to determine how many points and how far downstream to cover.
5. Perform a Hasty Team downstream search, but keep rescuer safety as a priority and don’t over commit your resources
6. Prepare ICS 200 and brief incoming resources. Keep track of actions taken and times if possible.
7. Monitor and record the times crews are in or on the water. The incident commander should monitor the weather and other conditions and regulate the time personnel spend in or on the water to ensure the safety of all personnel. Rotate crews as needed to allow for rehab.
8. ASSESSING THE VICTIM

Once the rescuer(s) have reached the victim(s), they should do an immediate assessment of the victim(s), a quick assessment of the ABC's, and the exact method of entrapment. If the victim is conscious, the rescuer should determine if the victim can assist in his/her own rescue. If the victim is unconscious, the rescue must be quick. If the victim can assist in his/her own rescue, the rescuers should proceed with the rescue action plan. The victim should be brought to shore as soon as possible.

1. TREATMENT

As soon as the victim(s) is/are brought to safety, an assessment should be done by advanced life support EMS personnel. Treatment shall be administered as per local protocol. If necessary, the victim shall be transported to the appropriate facility.

# Phase V: Termination

Command should begin termination as soon as possible after the victim has been removed from the water. This shall include securing all the equipment used for the rescue and personnel accountability. This may also include witnesses, photo's, victim's personal affects or equipment used in the rescue. Command should also consider activating the CISD team for extraordinary or extended operations.

Prepare for Termination:

1. Personnel accountability.
2. Equipment accountability. If there has been a fatality, consider leaving equipment in place for investigative purposes if requested to do so by law enforcement.
3. Re-stock vehicles.
4. Consider debriefing.
5. Consider need for CISD for response personnel
6. Secure the scene.
7. Demobilize and return all units to service.