

# Virginia Search And Rescue Council

## Standard Operating Procedures

Adopted: 5 November 1988

### 1.0 Purpose:

These Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are designed to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the Virginia SAR Council (Council) Agencies when they participate in SAR incidents in the Commonwealth of Virginia. These SOPs will help minimize risks to SAR personnel while optimizing the cost-effective care given to the subjects of SAR incidents.

### 2.0 Application:

These SOPs address the alerting, dispatching, and responding of Field Operation Resources (FORs) to emergency SAR incidents along with the operational procedures used prior to, during, and after an incident. Figure 1 shows the functional flow chart for FOR usage.

### 3.0 Situations:

3.1 Primary Functions: The Council recognizes <sup>Four</sup> ~~three~~ types of emergency SAR incidents where Council Agencies often provide primary, expert capabilities (via FORs) to help resolve emergency incidents. These are:

- Land SAR incidents,
- Cave SAR incidents,
- Missing Aircraft SAR incidents, and
- Water SAR incidents.

3.2 Secondary Functions: The Council recognizes that its member agencies also provide support services for other types of emergency incidents, including Disaster incidents.

### 4.0 Responsibility For Activation:

4.1 Department of Emergency Services: The Virginia Department of Emergency Services (VDES) Search and Rescue Duty Officer (SARDO) may request and activate Council FORs for incidents in accordance with VDES's and each agency's operational requirements, and in accordance with existing statutes, agreements, and policies.

4.2 Local Jurisdiction Requests: Council FORs may respond to direct requests for assistance from a local Responsible Agent (RA). The RA is defined as an authorized official from the appropriate state or local jurisdiction. If possible, requests from a local RA should be routed through the SARDO in order to (1) provide the SARDO information concerning the nature of the incident, (2) allow the FORs to respond as State Resources, and (3) allow the SARDO to track the status of the SAR resources presently available in the Commonwealth. If the request is not routed through the SARDO and the Council Agency does respond to the RA's request, then the Council Agency should inform the SARDO about the incident.

4.3 Responding Without Direct Requests: Council FORs will not participate in any incidents without a request from a RA. Council agencies that know of an

incident may offer their services by contacting the RA either directly or through the SARDO, but responses are not allowed unless the RA approves.

#### **5.0 Initial Incident Aid Request:**

5.1 RA Request: When a RA initially requests aid, the following data should be collected and evaluated:

- (1) The incident description and urgency, (low, medium, high)
- (2) The RA's specific needs
- (3) Specific directions to the incident
- (4) The RA's title and name
- (5) A contact number for future communications.

5.2 Initial Council Agency Response: The first responding agency, in conjunction with the SARDO, will appoint an Incident Commander (IC) to coordinate the activities of all initial responding FORs with the RA.

5.3 Initial Response Arrival: The first qualified FOR that arrives on the scene should evaluate the situation and contact the SARDO with its findings. The data shall include any necessary updates to the incident urgency, travel directions, contact points, and resource needs. These findings must also be passed to the IC when the IC first arrives at the scene. The IC may update the SARDO as needed.

#### **6.0 Mutual Aid:**

6.1 General Mutual Aid: A Council IC may request other Council FORs in an incident. This request may be a general or a specific request for FORs. Requests should be routed through the SARDO from the IC or his designee.

6.1.1 Requesting ICs and their agencies will assume no financial or legal liability for the responding FORs.

6.1.2 Requesting ICs are responsible for arranging staging areas and briefings for the responding FORs.

6.2 Shenandoah National Park: The SNP will notify the VDES Emergency Operations Center (EOC) of any incident where it is requesting other Council FORs. Council Agencies may request SNP FORs to respond outside the SNP. The SNP will inform the EOC whenever any of its personnel respond to an incident in the Commonwealth that lies outside the National Park Lands.

6.3 The SARDO: The SARDO will help coordinate the mutual aid requests by locating the necessary additional FORs while considering the incident's urgency, the Commonwealth's other SAR needs, the uncommitted FOR's status, the FOR's transportation difficulties, and other pertinent factors.

#### **7.0 Incident Operations:**

7.1 Incident Management. Incident Management is necessary to efficiently and effectively resolve SAR incidents. This management function requires a proper chain of command and clearly defined management procedures. Any management system used must include the functions of Command, Operations, Planning, Logistics, and Finance.

7.2 Chain of Command.

7.2.1 Each agency that responds FORs to an incident must appoint an on-scene Agency Representative (AR) to act as the liaison between the agency and the Incident Management. This function must be maintained throughout the duration of the agency's participation at the incident.

7.2.2 A Council IC shall be appointed to (1) act as the liaison for all the SAR Council FORs involved at an incident and (2) coordinate all Council FORs and other pertinent resources.

7.2.3 The Council IC is initially appointed by the first responding Council agency in conjunction with the SARDO. The IC is responsible for passing the IC function off to another qualified Council member as necessary. Whenever a new IC is appointed, the old IC is responsible for informing the SARDO of the change in command.

7.3 SOP Suspension. An IC may suspend the use of any part of the SOP (including the use of the ICS) provided the IC determines that the incident requires special procedures.

7.4 The individual responder's requirements: Any responding Council Agency member is responsible for: (1) arriving properly prepared for the terrain and weather, and (2) being self-sufficient for 24 hours in the field. The individual member must obey all the directives of the Council IC that are concerned with safety issues.

7.4.1 Air Transportation: In some incidents, FORs may be flown to the scene via VDES coordinated air transportation. Any requests for VDES coordinated air transportation must be made to the SARDO via the IC. Such requests are mainly evaluated on the basis of the incident urgency. Any FORs transported by VDES coordinated air assets are expected to remain on scene for at least 48 hours. Furthermore, such FORs are not guaranteed return transportation.

7.5 Safety:

7.5.1 When working near roads, especially near high-speed thoroughfares, SAR personnel should wear high visibility clothing. At night someone should be positioned near the road to flag down traffic. When possible, law enforcement officials should control traffic.

7.5.2 At all incidents the Council IC must assess the risks before deploying any FORs. These risks include, but are not limited to, the terrain, the weather, the mental and physical condition of the SAR personnel, and mental condition of the subject.

7.5.3 Whenever a reasonable chance exists that the subject may place the SAR personnel at a significant risk, the Council IC should obtain the advice of the RA, the SARDO, and the SCO (as appropriate), determine reasonable safety procedures. These procedures may include: suspending the incident, providing law enforcement escort with each field team, or withdrawing the volunteer resources.

7.6 In incidents where any Council FORs respond as State Resources, VDES will have an SCO assigned to the incident. Each agency's AR should report to the SCO when the agency's first FOR(s) arrive at the scene. The IC should

periodically coordinate with the SCO. If the SCO is needed but is not present, contact the SARDO for the necessary aid.

7.7 Multiple Incidents. If multiple separate incidents occur and not enough resources are available, the SARDO and the separate ICs will determine the best allocation of resources and determine if other resources are needed.

7.8 Documentation: Standard SAR Council forms, ICS forms, maps, CAP forms, and unit forms should be used to document all actions taken and information received. A complete incident log should be maintained by the Incident Staff.

7.9 Resources: In any extended incident the IC will establish a resource relief plan.

7.10 Reporting: The IC will report the incident status to the SARDO at least once per shift.

7.11 Dispatching: FORs in transit to incidents in progress are urged to call in to the EOC or the incident base for periodic incident status updates. Agency dispatchers should inform the on-scene incident staff whenever their personnel are leaving for the incident and whenever their personnel have returned to base.

7.12 Land SAR Incidents:

7.12.1 The Council shall use ICS as the standard management system when conducting Land SAR field operations.

7.12.2 Communications:

7.12.2.1 Standard Frequencies: The following are the standard Council operational radio frequencies designations:

- (1) 155.160 MHz
- (2) 155.205 MHz
- (3) 155.280 MHz
- (4) 155.340 MHz
- (5) 155.400 MHz

7.12.2.2 Codes: No operational codes will be used except (1) map coordinates, (2) patient status codes, and (3) secure net requests. Patient care should never be restricted in order to maintain operational code protocols. The status codes are:

- (1) STATUS 1 - The subject is alive and will be able to walk out on his/her own.
- (2) STATUS 2 - The subject is alive and will require aid in extraction.
- (3) STATUS 3 - The subject is dead.

The secure net request is:

SECURE THE NET - The user is about to transmit sensitive information and requests that the other system take care in releasing the sensitive information. This is useful when transmitting status 2 or status 3 data in order to protect the family or the scene.

7.13 Cave incidents:

7.13.1 The Council FORs shall use ICS as the standard management system when conducting Cave SAR field operations.

7.13.2 Cave SAR incidents are normally coordinated with the NCRC.

7.14 Missing Aircraft incidents:

7.14.1 Missing Aircraft or ELT incidents are normally coordinated by the the Virginia Wing of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP).

7.14.2 When the CAP is conducting Air Operations, all non-CAP Aircraft should be coordinated through the CAP Mission Coordinator.

7.14.3 If non-CAP aircraft are not coordinated through the CAP Mission Coordinator, CAP aircraft may be withdrawn from the incident.

7.15 Water SAR incidents:

7.15.1 Any incident in navigable waters is the jurisdiction of the United States Coast Guard.

7.16 Other types of incidents:

7.16.1 When possible, the Council shall use ICS as the standard management system when participating in other emergency incidents.

7.16.2 For disasters, see Title 44 of the Code of Virginia.

8.0 Incident Resolution:

8.1 Incident Closing

8.1.1 Successful Incidents: The patient(s) status and the time of the incident closing will be communicated to the SARDO within a reasonable time delay after successfully concluding the incident.

8.1.2 Unsuccessful Incidents: Suspension without a find will be made after consultation between the IC, the SCO, the SARDO, and the RA. The IC will advise the RA of other appropriate techniques (e.g. passive search techniques) useful for continued efforts.

8.2 Demobilization: The IC will call the Virginia EOC when all teams have left the site. Agency dispatch officers will call the EOC when all their FORs have safely returned to home quarters. The Council IC must account for all on-scene personnel that the IC directed.

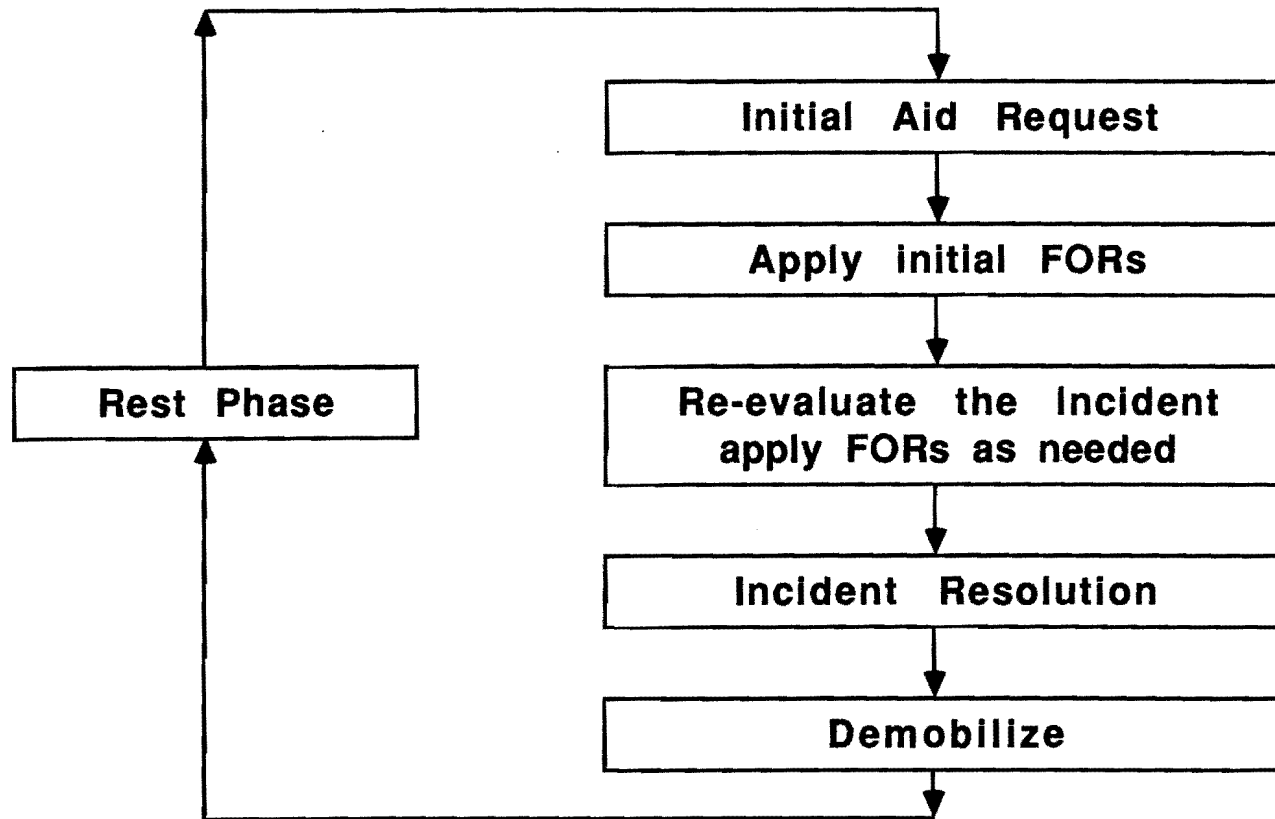
8.3 Documentation: The IC will submit a standard incident report to the Department of Emergency Services no later than seven days after suspending an incident.

9 SOP Review: These SOPs should be reviewed periodically and updated as needed.

10           **Glossary:** The following terms were used in this document:

- AR           Agency Liason--the leader of all FORs from a single SAR Council Agency.
- EOC          Emergency Operations Center--the VDES communications and coordination center located in Richmond.
- FOR          Field Operational Resouces--Those resources that each agency sends to an incident that are primarily intended to operate in the field. This excludes the SCO.
- ICS          The Incident Command System--A management system used for emergency incidents that includes the functions of: command, operations, planning, logistics, and finance.
- IC           Incident Commander--The individual who is in charge of all Council agency field operational resources on the scene.
- RA           Responsible Agent--The legal authority that is reponsible for the SAR incident
- SAR          Search and Rescue
- SARDO       The VDES SAR Duty Officier
- SCO          The State Coordinating Officer--The person who represents VDES at the incident scene, usually a First Sergeant from the Virginia State Police. The SCO's function is to help coordinate State and local Resources and to serve as the liason between the state and local governments.
- SNP          Shenandoah National Park
- SOP          Standard Operating Proceedure--Standards used by SAR Council agencies when conducting field operations in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- VDES         The Virginia Department of Emergency Services--the State agency working for the Governor charged with coordinating emergency operations in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

**Incident Functional Flow Chart:**



**Figure 1**