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 Search and Rescue Conference (ASRC)**: a conglomerate of 9 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
  - Shenandoah Mountain Rescue Group (SMRG) – Northern VA/DC/MD
  - Southwestern Virginia Mountain Rescue Group (SWVaMRG) – Blacksburg
  - 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.
  o Incident Summary: search location, time started, level of callout, resources on scene, Incident Commander (IC), Responsible Agent (RA). Record on Mission Board.
  o Basic Subject Profile: gender, age, clothing, race, specific physical attributes, Point Last Seen, Time Last Seen, etc. Record on Mission Board and in Log.
  o Direction to Scene- these should be clear and concise and should be updated, Base phone #. Record on Mission Board and in Log.
  o 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 pager net, 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 pager net 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 BRMRRG 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_Alegany_Co_MD. Save this file in the appropriate month and year folders under Dispatch Logs on the desktop.
- Fill in template and begin log.
  - 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 there appropriately.
  - 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.
  - 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 availability 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:
  - 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 avail of the entire ASRC. When you record avail, 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.
    - Record Persons and teams on route. When teams leave for the search, move their names from available to En Route. Have BRMRG teams on route check in every hour with dispatch (especially on long trips). Make sure GDO’s call when their teams are on route. Record ETA’s.
    - 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!
    - 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
  - On Grounds: dial the five digit number
  - Local: dial 9, then the seven digit number
  - 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
  - To check messages, push the green button
  - 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](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](http://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 Add New Mission. 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**

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

**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 member 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference Requirement</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OV Requirements</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conferences Setup:**
The OV setup is to be executed by the OV team.

**OV Requirements:**
The OV requirements include the following:
- OV setup
- OV execution

**Conferences Details:**
The OV details are to be provided by the OV executive.

**Conferences Definition:**
The OV definition is to be provided by the OV manager.

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**Conferences Requirements:**
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**Group Dispatch Requirements:**
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