

Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference

March 27th 2004

Secretary's Report

Changing Times

The ASRC was founded in 1974 and in that time it has been involved in countless missions 'that others might live'. When one thinks of the Conference and its groups there is a vision of teams crawling up mountainsides under layers of laurel, makeshift bases which are a hive of activity as teams go out or return, long journeys to a scene, endless do-nuts and the tiredness that are all part and parcel of the ASRC.

But there has to be an administrative side as well. The documents that were introduced in 1974 have stood the test of time and even in the new documents that you will be voting on at the General Meeting you will see the skeleton of the original format.

However there have been many revisions and arguably, with the impact of September 11th on us all, there are new needs.

Therefore the BOD instructed the Secretary to look at all the documents and to make recommendations for major re-writes.

The timetable is as follows:

November 2003	A working party to address the Articles of Incorporation.
December 2003	A working party to address the Operations Manual
January 10 2004	Presentation of New Articles to BOD
January/February 2004	Working Party to address the By-laws
March 27 2004	Presentation of new By-Laws to BOD
March 27 th 2004	Presentation of new Articles and By-Laws to Membership
April 2004	Submission of documents to Comm. of VA for registration
May 2004	Working Party to address Administration Manual
May 2004	Working Party to address Training Standards Manual
May 2004	Working Party to address Medical Protocols etc
December 2004	Formal Presentation of documents to BOD for approval

On 27th March the General Membership will be asked to approve new Articles and By-Laws. There are briefing notes with each document but the major issues that have been addressed are :

The electronic age. The use of emails and web sites to speed up decision making.

The liability issue. The tightening of membership criteria for groups to be in the ASRC. This has been countered, hopefully by a lessening of the powers of interference by the ASRC in day to day group affairs once a group is an ASRC member.

Wider issues. The BOD feels that the very nature of the ASRC in being a disciplined, trained body with communication, management and medical skills may mean that it could be called upon to support, voluntarily or involuntarily, the civil powers in a time of a major threat to law and order. Therefore the decision has been made to recognize this in giving a wider definition to the ASRC. It must be stressed, however, that it is not the BOD's intention, while the decision is theirs, to make the ASRC anything other than a Wilderness Search and Rescue Organisation.

Other changes have been introduced during the year.

Insurance

After many, many, many months of negotiation, the ASRC has taken up two insurance policies with VFIS. One policy provides a low level of medical care compensation for all members of the ASRC, be they on a task or a training mission. The second provides liability insurance for ALL officers of the Conference, both at BOD and at Group level. The BOD felt that this was essential in this day and age. The two policies are mutually inclusive (we could not have one without the other). Each group will have a copy of the policies.

It was as a result of taking out these policies that the issue of Conference wide liability was examined. Because the ASRC sets the training standards, takes command at a full ASRC incident and has disciplinary procedures it was acknowledged that groups and members, at all times, are part of the ASRC. Training is an ASRC function, working with the local sheriff on a 'private' MOU is an ASRC function, supporting the local bike teams with medical support is, in liability terms, an ASRC function. Once yer in, yer right in!

Sexual Harassment and anti Discrimination Policy

In January 2004, the BOD adopted a policy to counter discrimination. A copy is attached. Members should note that it is now an offence not to report an incident if observed that involves the ASRC in any way. The policy will be included in the revised Administration Manual and posted on the ASRC web site.

Data Handling Policy

Both in its background administration and out in the field on a search, the ASRC may be handling information of a sensitive nature. People will be hurt if such information is handled badly. In January 2004, the BOD adopted a policy for handling data. This will be included in the revised Administration Manual and posted on the ASRC web site.

Criminal History Background Checks

During 2003 it became mandatory for all members of ALS organizations licensed in Virginia to have its members subjected to a Criminal History Background Check through the Virginia State Police. Jason Dalton and Steve Weiss worked closely with the State Police and arranged for all members to be able to receive such checks gratis and easily through a web portal.

In January 2004, the BOD reviewed this process and acknowledged that such checks, though still required by law, fulfilled little use for members in WV, MD or PA. Therefore the BOD resolved that all members must obtain checks through their state of residence as well as VA. It is acknowledged that this will cost members in those states money: perhaps arrangements can be made with the authorities to mirror the arrangements made in VA. Nevertheless, all members are to have obtained checks by July 1st 2004.

New procedures for obtaining such checks are being drawn up and will be posted on the web site as soon as possible. Responsibility will transfer to the Conference Secretary.

Peter Pennington

Secretary