

MODEL SEARCH AND RESCUE PLAN

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Introduction

This Model Search and Rescue Plan is designed to be used either as a guide in preparing a specific plan for your jurisdiction, or it can be copied verbatim and the items in () filled in as appropriate. This style of SAR plan has been widely adopted in some areas of the country.

Ideally, it should be incorporated as part of a jurisdiction's larger Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). The jurisdiction's governing body should formally adopt the SAR Plan. An alternate method would be to incorporate the plan into the responsible agency's standard operating procedures (SOP).

The best written plans are of no value if they are not used. All participating agencies and organizations should be briefed and provided a copy. The SAR Plan can be used both as an operational document and as a guidance document.

Disclaimer: The Model Search and Rescue Plan is not in any way intended to be a training document, nor is it to be substituted for professional, state-of-the-art search and rescue training. SAR is serious business. It is not for the poorly trained or the well meaning.

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**SEARCH AND RESCUE PLAN
FOR
(NAME OF JURISDICTION) (STATE)**

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PURPOSE

To establish responsibility, authority, and operational and administrative procedures for Search and Rescue (SAR) activities within the boundaries of (jurisdiction).

OBJECTIVES

To describe guidelines for search and rescue incidents that will:

- Give the appropriate high priority to the protection of human life.
- Locate, provide necessary care, including emergency medical care, and evacuate persons in distress:
 - using the most effective methods,
 - with the least elapsed time,
 - in the safest and most economical way,
 - and with the least impact on the resources and on the normal, day to day operations of the (jurisdiction).

AUTHORITY

(Person or agency with responsibility) has the authority and the responsibility for search and rescue within (areas) where (agency) has jurisdiction.

Search and rescue operations in (jurisdiction) are conducted pursuant to (site state-county-city code section that establishes legal responsibility for search and rescue)

All search and rescue incidents are potentially law enforcement incidents and therefore require immediate law enforcement intervention.

EMERGENT AUTHORITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

There may be specific incidents where agencies and organizations outside of (jurisdiction) have a responsibility to prosecute SAR events that may cross jurisdictional lines and include (jurisdiction). Examples are:

- Military aircraft incidents
- Missions for missing or overdue aircraft, or for an activated Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT), or Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB)
- EMS helicopter operations, et al.
- Search incidents along the borders of (jurisdiction), including various rivers.

PRIORITY OF RESOURCES

When it involves a threat to human life, a search or rescue mission will have priority over every other activity, except other, more serious life threatening emergencies. Upon request, every department of (jurisdiction) will provide all equipment, supplies, human resources, and facilities necessary to meet the above stated objectives.

PREPAREDNESS

(Person or agency) assumes full responsibility for the identification, evaluation, and utilization of SAR resources in (jurisdiction). (Person or agency) will be actively involved in the training and proficiency maintenance of these resources and will develop and maintain alerting and communication procedures that will insure timely notification of and reliable communications with all resources that may be involved in a SAR event.

SEARCH AND RESCUE PLAN

1.0 FIRST NOTICE

- 1.1 Upon notification of a potential search and rescue (SAR) incident, the (jurisdiction) dispatcher will:
 - 1.1a - Initiate a complaint
 - 1.1b - Assign field units to investigate
 - 1.1c - Notify the Supervisor
 - 1.1d - Notify the following at direction of Officer In-Charge (O.I.C.)
(List any personnel or resources)
 - 1.1e - Obtain current weather information, including ground winds, temperature, precipitation and the forecast

- 1.2 The supervisor will determine relative urgency of the incident, per Section A.2.0, and make the following notifications as deemed necessary:
 - (List personnel)

- 1.3. O.I.C. – The O.I.C. will be (name) or his or her designee.

2.0 RELATIVE URGENCY

- 2.1 The following guide will help determine the relative urgency of the situation. The lower the priority factor, the more urgent the situation.

If any single category is rated 1, the search would require an emergency response.

Subject Profile

Priority Factor

Number of Subjects

- One (alone) 1-2
- More than one (unless separation is suspected)..... 2-3

Age

- Very young 1
- Very old 1
- Other 2-4

Subject Profile

Priority Factor

Time

- Reliable, punctual (being late is out of character) 1
- Usually reliable, on time 2
- Reliability, punctuality questionable..... 3
- Completely unreliable 4

Circumstances

- At risk for any reason 1
- Adequate information, low risk 2
- Questionable information 3
- High probability not in the area..... 4

Subject Experience Profile

- Not experienced, does not know the area 1
- Not experienced, knows the area 2
- Experienced, does not know the area 3
- Experienced, knows the area 4

Medical Condition

- Know or suspected illness or injury 1
- Healthy 3
- Known fatality 4

Physical Condition

- Unfit 1
- Fit 2
- Very fit 3

Clothing

- Inadequate 1
- Adequate..... 2
- Very good 3

Weather

- Existing hazardous weather 1
- Predicted hazardous weather (8 hours or less) 1-2
- Predicted hazardous weather (more than 8 hours) 2-3
- No hazardous weather predicted 3

Subject Profile

Priority Factor

Terrain and Hazards

- Known hazardous terrain or other hazards 1
- Few or no hazards.....2-3

Equipment Profile

- Inadequate for the environment 1
- Questionable for the environment 1-2
- Adequate for the environment 3

NOTE: Elapsed time from when the subject was missing, along with the political sensitivity of the circumstances, will have the effect of increasing the relative urgency.

3.0 QUICK RESPONSE

3.1 If the O.I.C. determines that an actual search operation will be necessary, the following resources should be put on advisory status.

- Second shift overhead team
- (Other resources)

3.2 Immediate response resources, if available:

- First shift overhead team
- Communications equipment
- Local air scent or tracking/trailing dog
- Visual trackers (Mantrackers)
- Locally identified SAR team or SAR team members
- Helicopter, if appropriate for situation and weather
- Rescue squad for standby at base

3.3 Initial actions at the scene:

- Identify and secure the point last seen (PLS)
- Identify scent article and secure
- Initiate the investigation and the collection of pertinent data. Initiate the lost person report form.
- Establish incident command post

3.4 Escalation procedures should be implemented as soon as possible.

- Prepare Incident Action Plan for second shift

- Identify needed search resources and issue advisories
- Implement plans to expand the command post activities
- Identify and advise necessary support services

4.0 STRATEGY

- 4.0 Consider every incident to potentially involve criminal activity. Initiate the investigation and secure the area accordingly.
- 4.1 If the incident is a known rescue, determine what resources will be needed to carry out the mission.
- 4.2 Establish the probable boundaries of the search area. Factors to take into consideration include:
 - Statistical data
 - History of the area
 - Clues
 - Subject profile
 - Intuition and experience
 - Natural routes of travel
 - Analysis of time/distance traveled
 - Terrain idiosyncrasies, natural barriers to travel

5.0 TACTICS

- 5.1 Initial actions should have three objectives:
 - Confine the subject(s) travel, prevent enlargement of the search area.
 - Effectively use the resources that are immediately available.
 - Find the subject or any possible clues.
- 5.2 Confinement and attraction methods
 - Road or trail blocks
 - Camp-ins
 - Lookouts (survey searches)
 - Track traps
 - Road or trail patrols (trail running)
 - String lines
 - Noise
 - Smoke
 - Lights
- 5.3 Generally, available, trained personnel will be dispatched immediately, as hasty teams, to the areas of highest probability to attempt to locate the

subject or any clues. Efforts of this type should include:

- Following known or suspected routes (route search)
- Trail running (hasty search)
- Sign cutting (route and perimeter)
- Locale search of areas of high attraction
- Locale search of especially hazardous areas
- Hasty search along roads
- Hasty search along drainages, streams, river banks and other high probability terrain features
- Search of and from ridge tops
- The easily forgotten obvious places: restrooms, tents, vehicles, intended destination, etc.

5.4 Clue finding and/or clue/subjecting finding resources should be used as early in the search effort as they can be requested and moved into the search area. These resources included:

- Visual trackers (Mantrackers)
- Tracking/trailing dogs
- Trained, clue conscious hasty teams
- Air scent search dogs
- Air search, preferably by helicopter
- Electronic direction finding (DF) equipment to locate an activated ELT or EPIRB

5.5 Although clues such as footprints, discarded items, scent articles etc., may not lead directly to the subject, their most profound effect can be to eliminate portions of the search area. Every person involved in the search, especially in the early phases, must be constantly reminded to be “clue conscious.”

6.0 INVESTIGATION

6.1 A trained person, preferably a law enforcement officer, must be appointed to conduct a thorough investigation. The effectiveness of a search operation will be diminished because of a lack of adequate and/or accurate information.

6.2 As the mission continues, the remaining, pertinent information on the missing person report form should be obtained. The form can serve as a checklist to avoid missing any possibly significant information. One form should be completed for each subject.

6.3 An effort to locate the subject somewhere other than the search area must be made in the event the subject isn't lost but just isn't where he should be. The following places/persons should be contacted as they are

identified and then re-contacted periodically.

- Subject's destination: Did he arrive there after search began?
- Friends, co-workers, relatives, companions or intended companions
- Local hospitals, rescue squads, clinics, doctor's office
- Known places subject frequents: Workplace, ever after hours, bars, school, playgrounds, etc.
- Adjacent jurisdiction's law enforcement agencies
- Subject's bank
- Local bus station, taxi services, airports
- Residents in and around the search area

6.4 Other considerations

- Possibility of a criminal act
- Check vehicle, home, etc. for clues
- Preserve clues and physical evidence

7.0 PREFERENCE FOR RESOURCES

7.1 The order of preference for tactics and resources used in a search is suggested as follows:

7.1.1 Trained hasty search resources

- Confinement and attractions
- Tracking/trailing dogs
- Visual trackers (Mantrackers)
- Trained, clue conscious hasty teams
- Air scent search dogs
- Air search
- Direction finding (DF) teams, if an ELT is involved

NOTE: The above resources can be used concurrently, as available.

7.1.2 Untrained hasty teams

7.1.3 Grid (line) searchers

7.2 Every reasonable effort should be made to locate the subject using those methods listed in 7.1.1 **before** using those listed in 7.1.2 and 7.1.3. **EVEN THOUGH LARGE NUMBERS OF SEARCHERS MIGHT BE IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE**, the use of grid or line search techniques must be regarded as a last resort. Efficiency, economy, and control of the mission can be expected to substantially diminish when these techniques are utilized. Large numbers of searchers, even when reasonably trained, virtually obliterate clues. As a result, the effectiveness of those resources

that have the highest and quickest probability of detection (POD) is considerably reduced or even eliminated.

- 7.3 Personnel from organizations, other than those known to be specifically SAR trained, should be determined to be reasonably fit and equipped before they are allowed in other than support roles.

8.0 CALL OUT PROCEDURES

- 8.1 Written callout procedures for personnel and other resources should be established, reviewed regularly, and posted in the Communications Center.
- 8.2 A protocol for authorization of overtime pay for paid personnel who are subject to no-notice callout should be a part of the callout procedures.

9.0 ORGANIZATION

- 9.1 A predetermined management system, such as the Incident Command System should be used on all SAR missions. In the very early stages some functions may be unnecessary and one or a two people may carry out several, or even all of them. As the mission becomes more complex, the need to designate specific functions increases. The more complex the mission, the greater the need for individuals with specialized training to carry out each function.
- 9.2 A qualified person should be appointed to see to the needs of relatives or close friends on scene, and to keep them informed of the progress of the mission. A local chaplain might be a good choice.

9.2a - Law enforcement agency chaplain

9.2b - Personal Minister

9.2c - Local Ministers

10.0 BASE CAMP

- 10.1 As soon as practical, the following items should be considered for establishing a formal base camp:

- Registration/ check in area
- Vehicle/equipment staging area
- Operational area for mission staff
- External power source for mobile equipment
- Toilet facilities
- Food service
- Traffic control and parking

- Heliports (and transportation for aircrews if located away from mission base)
- Fuel for vehicles
- Fuel for aircraft
- Sleeping area for search personnel
- Base security and access control
- Area to sequester relatives and friends
- Press briefing area/media center
- Lighting
- Trash dumpsters

10.2 A base camp preplan/survey should be conducted for any area that has a significant history of search activity. These preplans and suggested base camp layouts should be included as an appendix.

11.0 RESCUE AND EVACUATION

11.1 A rescue/evac plan should be established for each incident detailing the response once the subject has been located.

11.2 Immediately after locating the subject(s), necessary emergency medical care will be provided and all information necessary to plan the evacuation will be given to the Incident Commander.

11.3 If the subject's location is not on a trail or other easily accessible area, the best route into the location should be marked with flagging tape. This will provide for a quicker response by medical teams, and/or other personnel and will help to determine evacuation requirements.

11.4 The rescue and evacuation will be carried out by the fastest, most effective method, but taking into consideration:

- The condition of the subject
- Safety of the subject and rescuers
- Equipment and human resources available
- Terrain
- Weather
- Natural resource protection

11.5 Obviously, the safety of all personnel is of paramount importance.

11.6 If there is major or multi-system trauma involved, a helicopter evacuation to the nearest Level I Trauma Center should be considered. A contingency plan for ground evacuation must be prepared in case the helicopter evacuation cannot be completed due to mechanical problems, deteriorating weather, etc.

11.7 For safety reasons, helicopter operations must be managed by experienced personnel using accepted techniques and proper equipment.

11.8 Heliports will be prepared per local protocols

12.0 INCIDENT SITE PROCEDURES

12.1 The possibility of criminal activity must always be kept in mind. The law enforcement investigator should be called to the scene before anything is disturbed. If emergency medical care is required, the on-scene commander should be sure that all actions are documented. A list of all personnel on-scene should be obtained.

12.2 The scene will be secured per (jurisdiction) guidelines and entry denied to all unauthorized personnel.

12.3 Bodies will not be moved until permission to do so has been received from the designated coroner via the Incident Commander.

12.4 Every reasonable attempt should be made to photograph the scene before anything is moved.

12.5 If fatalities are the result of an aircraft incident, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) will investigate along with the (jurisdiction)

12.6 The urgency for evacuating fatalities is very low. Resource protection and the safety of the rescuers will not be compromised to remove bodies. If the removal of a body must be delayed, at least two people will stay at the scene until evacuation is complete.

12.7 Whenever possible, sensitive information should not be passed by radio. The use of discreet codes is encouraged.

13.0 AIRCRAFT CRASH SITES

13.1 The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), along with (agency), has responsibility for all non-military aircraft crashes. Permission must be obtained from the NTSB before any part of the wreckage or any bodies are disturbed or removed, except in those cases where such disturbance is necessary to treat or evacuate the injured. If anything is disturbed, for any reason, it must be accurately documented and reported to the NTSB.

13.2 Military aircraft crashes will be secured and not disturbed in any way, except to treat and evacuate the injured, until military authorities give

approval. The possibility of live ordinance, along with several explosive activated devices, makes military crash sites extremely hazardous. Only rescue personnel experience in these matters should be allowed to approach.

- 13.3 The crash site should be roped off in its entirety, including all scattered debris. Entry into this area should be denied except for absolutely essential personnel. No smoking should be allowed within 100 feet of the perimeter.
- 13.4 The urgency for evacuating fatalities is very low. Resource protection and the safety of the rescuers will not be compromised to remove bodies. If the removal of a body must be delayed, at least two person will stay at the scene until the evacuation is complete.
- 13.5 Bodies will not be moved until permission to do so has been received from the designated coroner via the Incident Commander.
- 13.6 Every reasonable attempt should be made to photograph the scene before anything is disturbed.
- 13.7 A press staging area should be set up some distance from the site and press teams should be “guided” to and from the site. The press will not be allowed into the crash site unless authorized by the Incident Commander.
- 13.8 Where possible, sensitive information should not be passed by radio. The use of discreet codes is encouraged.
- 13.9 Every attempt will be made to insure that the owner or insurance company completely removes the wreckage. If it cannot be removed, it will be prominently marked, such as with spray paint, to insure it is not mistaken in the future for a “fresh” crash. The exact location, expressed in latitude and longitude, will be given to the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC) for their master crash locator files.

14.0 RESTRICTED AIRSPACE

- 14.1 Whenever significant use of aircraft is involved, and non-mission air traffic becomes a problem, a restricted airspace declaration may be obtained from the FAA
 - 2000 feet AGL and up to a 5 nautical mile radius can usually be obtained from the FAA. They will sometimes grant 5000 feet AGL and 5 miles.
 - If 10,000 feet AGL and/or a 10 mile radius is required, it must be understood that this will affect commercial traffic as well as other air traffic in the area; therefore, restrictions should be requested only for the

exact length of time needed and only when absolutely necessary.

- 14.2 Every effort should be made to identify aircraft violating the restricted airspace and violators should be reported to the FAA.

15.0 CLOSING A MISSION/DEMOBILIZATION

- 15.1 A mission that is terminated unsuccessfully will be referred to as "Suspended." Only searches where the subject has been located will be "Closed."
- 15.2 Of the O.I.C. feels the Probability of Detection (POD) for the designated search area is adequate, or there are no further leads, or if the O.I.C. feels after consulting with his staff that continuing the search is not possible due to lack of resources or safety constraints, then he may suspend the mission pending receipt of further information or a change in suspending criteria.
- 15.3 The O.I.C. will inform the relatives of his decision and must be ready to justify his actions. He should tell them that the search will be resumed when the justifying criteria changes, and that a limited search effort will continue. This might include:
- Occasional over-flights
 - Posting signs in the area
 - Asking the public and media to report any new clues
 - Using the area for subsequent training exercises
- 15.4 All resources should be cleared through each operational section, as needed, before final clearance to depart mission base is given.
- 15.5 The O.I.C. will insure that all departing resources are capable of traveling safely. Distance and fatigue should be carefully considered.
- 15.6 Arrangements should be made to feed and, if needed, house search resources overnight before releasing them.
- 15.7 The O.I.C. will ensure that each resource dispatch point is notified of the teams' intention and/or ETA.
- 15.8 A medical unit should remain at the incident command post until all resources have departed.
- 15.9 The O.I.C. will notify all other agencies and resources of the decision to suspend and will provide a closing debriefing as requested.

15.10 The overhead team will inventory, clean and restock all mission equipment and supplies.

16.0 DOCUMENTATION AND REPORTING

16.1 The O.I.C. will assemble the case file and include all forms, notes, maps, reports and any other pertinent paperwork. A copy of the closing report should be provided to all participating agencies and organizations.

16.2 SAR case files become a primary source of information in the event questions arise about the mission and therefore should be retained as any other documenting evidence.

17.0 CRITIQUE

17.1 The O.I.C. should set the time and place for a critique of the mission and will notify all participating agencies.

17.2 The critique should be held as soon as feasible after the incident.

17.3 A detailed, honest review of the incident should include:

- How and why the incident occurred
- How it could have been prevented
- What was done
- What worked well and what went wrong
- Review/modification of the preplan

17.4 Keep the emphasis on solving problems rather than finding fault.

APPENDICES

1. RESOURCE LISTINGS
2. CALLOUT PROCEDURES AND TELEPHONE LISTS
3. MISSION KIT AND EQUIPMENT LISTS
4. HELICOPTER SAFETY RULES