



This Preferred Operating Guideline has been established to provide basic operating guidelines for personnel. These guidelines are not all inclusive and may need to be deviated from as conditions dictate. This POG does not create rights, or duties, that are enforceable in court.

SCOPE

This procedure establishes a standard structure and guidelines for all fire department personnel operating at incidents involving water rescue operations. The procedure outlines responsibilities for first-responders, Technical Rescue Team (TRT) units, command officers, and other fire district personnel responding to such incidents. All other fire district procedures shall apply to water rescue operations where applicable.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to establish guidelines for the response of fire district personnel and equipment to water rescue incidents. Because water rescue operations present a significant danger to fire district personnel, the safe and effective management of these operations require special considerations. This procedure identifies some of the critical issues which must be included in managing these incidents.

TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Due to the inherent dangers associated with these operations, the fire district shall use a risk management approach to all water rescue operations. Operational activities shall be continuously re-assessed throughout the incident. A phased approach to water rescue operations, which include Arrival, Pre-rescue operations, Rescue operations, and Termination, should be used to safely and effectively mitigate these high-risk/low-frequency events. The safety of rescue personnel is a high priority during all phases of the incident. Tactical considerations include:

1. Scene safety
2. Locate incident, establish command
3. Conduct size up
4. Search and rescue operations
5. Provide logistical support for search and rescue operations
6. Rapid transport of survivors/victims to medical care as required
7. Scene security

Incident Response

Responses for water related emergencies will be classified by the type of emergency or incident based upon information received by the dispatcher.

1. Body of Water: boater/person in need of aid with occupants accounted for
 - a. Two closest boats (1 for rescue / 1 for safety)
 - b. One rescue pumper
 - c. Duty Officer
2. Water rescue / Jumper / Body Recovery / Medical Emergency
 - a. Three closest boats (2 for rescue / 1 for safety)
 - b. One rescue
 - c. Dive team advisory notification
 - d. Closest ambulance
 - e. Duty Officer

3. Drowning with rescue / car in water with entrapment
 - a. Three closest boats (2 for rescue / 1 for safety)
 - b. Two rescues
 - c. Dive team dispatched
 - d. Closest ambulance
 - e. Duty Officer
4. USAR water Rescue Package
 - a. Agency response for incident
 - b. Three boats (2 inflatable / 1 ridged)
 - c. Closest USAR Water Assets
 - d. Rescue Duty Officer
 - e. Dive team advisory notification
 - f. One LSV
 - g. Metro Air

In relationship to minimum training levels and staffing, it's suggested that a boat be staffed with a minimum of one swiftwater rescue technician and one boat operator technician. If the primary incident type is for a medical emergency, one medical person may be added at the discretion of the boat operator.

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 district 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 POG 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 and Missouri State Highway Patrol Marine Division 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 20 minutes.

Phase I Arrival.

I. ESTABLISH COMMAND

1. First arriving company officer shall assume *Command*, begin an immediate size-up of the situation, and establish scene safety guidelines.
2. First arriving rescue unit should be assigned *Rescue Division*. The officer assigned as Rescue Division should remain with his crew. Rescue Divisions responsibilities include:
 - Assuming technical rescue operations control.
 - Identifying hazards and critical factors.
 - Developing a rescue plan and back-up plan.
 - Communicating with and directing resources assigned to Rescue Division.
 - Informing Command of conditions, actions, and needs during all phases of the rescue operation.

3. Designate a *Safety Officer*. Considerations for Safety Officer include:
 - A certified incident safety officer.
 - A Special Operations qualified officer.
 - Any experienced Technical Rescue Team officer assigned to the incident.
4. Following the transfer of Command to a Command Officer, a *Technical Advisor* should be assigned to join the Command Team at their location to assist in managing personnel and resources engaged in the technical aspects of the incident. The Technical Advisor is responsible for ensuring that the rescue plan developed by Rescue Division and communicated to Command is a sound plan in terms of the safety and welfare of both victim(s) and rescuers. Considerations for the Technical Advisor include:
 - A certified incident safety officer.
 - A Special Operations qualified officer.
 - Any experienced Technical Rescue Team officer assigned to the incident.
5. The Technical Advisor position within the Command Team should be filled prior to the implementation of any rescue plan proposed by Rescue Sector.
6. Transition to unified command for multi-jurisdictional and/or multi-agency incidents.

II. Size-Up

1. Secure a witness to assist in gathering information to determine exactly what happened and the location of any victim(s). If no witnesses are present, Command may have to look for clues on the scene to determine what happened.
2. Assess the immediate and potential hazards to the rescuers.
3. Isolate immediate hazard area, secure the scene, and deny entry for all non-rescue personnel.
4. Assess on-scene capabilities and determine the need for additional resources.

Phase II Pre-rescue Operations

It must be determined if this will be a RESCUE operation or a RECOVERY operation based on the survivability profile of the victim(s) which include factors such as the location and condition of the victim(s), and elapsed time since the accident occurred.

1. MAKE THE GENERAL AREA SAFE
 - A. Establish a hazard zone perimeter.
 - B. Keep all non-essential rescue personnel out of the hazard zone.
 - C. Remove all non-essential civilian personnel at least 150 feet away from the hazard zone.
 - D. Monitor and maintain scene safety during the operation.
2. MAKE THE RESCUE AREA SAFE

All personnel operating at or near the water shall be in proper US Coast Guard (USCG) approved personal protective equipment (PPE) which will include at a minimum: personal flotation device (PFD), approved water rescue helmet, and approved footwear.

3. Identify hazards that are present which include but are not limited to:
 - The volume of water.
 - The velocity of the water.
 - Debris in the water.
 - Hydraulics.
 - Depth of the water.
 - Changes to water level – rising/falling.
 - Water temperature.
 - Assign personnel upstream.
 - Rescue personnel shall be assigned upstream to advise Rescue Sector of any upstream hazards that may affect the rescue operation.
- A. Assign personnel downstream.
- B. Rescue personnel shall be assigned downstream with throw bags to capture rescue personnel or victim(s) that may be washed downstream.
- C. Assemble all necessary personnel, equipment, and patient packaging equipment that will be required for the rescue operation.
- D. Monitor and maintain safety in the rescue are during the operation.

Phase III Rescue Operations

Technical rescue operations shall be conducted under the direction of Rescue Sector by trained Technical Rescue Technicians.

1. RESCUE DIVISION

Rescue Sector responsibilities shall include the following:

- Ensure that all personnel operating in Rescue Division are accounted for and wearing appropriate PPE.
- Develop a rescue plan and a back-up plan.
- Ensure the plan and back-up plan, which include emergency procedures, are communicated to all personnel operating on the incident.
- Monitor the operation for the safety of personnel.

2. THE RESCUE PLAN

Rescue operations should be conducted with as little risk to the rescuers as necessary to affect the rescue. Low-risk operations may not always be possible but should be considered first. The order of rescue from low-risk to high-risk are:

- A. TALK – if water is calm or slow moving, try to talk the victim into self-rescue if possible.
- B. REACH – extend an arm, pike pole, rescue hook, or any other such object to reach the victim and pull from the water.
- C. THROW – attempt to throw the victim(s) a throw-bag rescue line or some other type of approved safety flotation device and “pendulum-belay” or “haul” the victim(s) to the bank.

- D. ROW - If it is determined that a boat-based operation shall be utilized, Rescue Sector shall assign a company on the opposite bank to assist in establishing an anchor for an approved rope system.
- E. GO - If it is not possible to row to the victim, Rescue Division should consider putting a rescuer or rescuers in the water to reach the victim. This is a very high risk operation and shall be conducted exclusively by trained TRT personnel. Before entering the water, rescue personnel shall be briefed on the plan, the back-up plan, and emergency procedures. Rescue personnel shall never be attached to a life line without the benefit of a quick-release mechanism approved for water rescue. Rescue personnel shall never do a “breath-hold” surface dive in an attempt to locate a victim beneath the surface of the water.
- F. HELO - Helicopter operations are considered high-risk and shall be decided upon through consultation with Rescue Division, Safety, Command, and the Technical Advisor. Before considering the use of a helicopter for rescue operations, Command must determine if a rescue-qualified pilot is available for the rescue operation. If so, the Pilot-In-Command (PIC) will have the final say on *if* and *how* the helicopter will be used in the rescue operation.
3. ASSESS THE VICTIM
When the rescuers reach the victim, a primary survey shall be completed. If the victim is conscious, rescuers should determine if the victim can assist in the rescue. If the victim is unconscious, the rescue must be completed as quickly as possible.
4. TREATMENT
- Initiate C-spine precautions as soon as possible.
 - Conduct a secondary survey and correct any life threatening conditions.
 - Provide for ALS level treatment and transportation to a hospital as indicated.
5. EMERGENCY and MAYDAY SITUATIONS
- A. If a member falls into the water by accident, or if a member needs assistance, they will signal audibly, and then activate their strobe light.
- B. If the member is equipped with a radio, they will transmit a mayday.
- C. After the radio transmission, the member needing assistance will deliver repeatedly a series of four short blasts on his/her whistle signifying that they need assistance or have an emergency.
- D. The member needing assistance will activate the strobe light attached to his/her PFD for a visual indicator of who needs assistance.
- E. Upon receipt of a Mayday radio transmission, or upon hearing the whistle signal, the IC will activate the Water Safety Team.
- F. The Water Safety Team Officer will communicate with the IC and take appropriate actions.
- G. All personnel on the scene will switch operations to a different channel, leaving the member needing assistance, the Water Safety Team, and the IC on the original operations channel.
- H. If the Water Safety Team is activated, the IC must replace them with another standby Water Safety Team or cease all other operations until the Mayday is mitigated, and the Water Safety Team is restaged.
- I. The evacuation signal for the rescue site will follow existing fire department procedures for evacuating structures at structure fires. Signaling should be done over radios, with whistles, and with vehicle sirens.

Phase IV Termination

1. Ensure personnel accountability.
2. Consider decontamination of victim(s) and rescuer(s).
3. Recover all tools and equipment used in the rescue/recovery. In cases of a fatality, consider leaving everything in place until the investigative process has been completed.
4. Consider a Post Incident Critique (may be more appropriate later).
5. Return to service after returning all equipment to apparatus.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. COMMAND STRUCTURE
 - A. The first arriving unit shall assume *Command* of the incident. This unit shall remain in Command until Command is transferred to improve the quality of the Command organization. A Command Team shall be assembled to include, at a minimum, a chief officer and a Technical Advisor. Transition to unified command for multi-jurisdictional and/or multi-agency incidents.
 - B. Considerations for the *Technical Advisor* include:
 - Special operations certification or qualifications.
 - Incident safety officer certification or qualifications.
 - Any experienced Technical Rescue Team officer assigned to the incident.
 - C. The first arriving Technical Rescue Teams unit that is staffed with a Technical Rescue Team officer should be assigned *Rescue Sector*. Rescue teams, Upstream, Downstream, and any other such functional team operating near the water shall be under the direction of Rescue Sector. Rescue Sector shall communicate directly with Technical Rescue Team units assigned to the various functions within Rescue Sector and shall keep Command informed during all phases of the rescue operation.
 - D. Considerations for *Safety Officer* include:
 - Incident safety officer certification or qualifications.
 - A special operations qualified officer.
 - Any experienced Technical Rescue Team officer assigned to the incident.
 - E. *Treatment Sector* should be assigned to any ALS company assigned to the incident.
2. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
 - A. Consider the effects of inclement weather and water conditions on the hazard profile, the victim(s), and the rescuers, with particular attention to the effects of hypothermia.
 - B. Monitor and record the time that rescue crews spend on the water.
 - C. Ensure that all personnel remain hydrated.
 - D. Water rescue incidents attract the news media; consider assigning a P.I.O.