

SEARCH AND RESCUE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

THEORIES OF SEARCH MANAGEMENT

In all publications, articles, and case histories written about searching for lost or missing persons, there are some basic management concepts that appear to remain consistent on successful searches. Early confinement of the subjects movements, coordination and rapid deployment of trained and/or skilled searchers, lost subject behavior patterns, quick development of an incident action plan, on-going interviews or investigation, and the exchange and sharing of information to all decision-makers, and sharing vital searching data with all the searchers.

Essentially, the basic principles and theories of search management are divided into organization, management, leadership, strategy, tactics, and clue awareness. These fundamentals, when used effectively and efficiently, will normally render successful searches. It is impossible to explain all the complexities of search management in this short document and SAR management courses are conducted for this purpose. However, there are several key actions and decisions that must be made by SAR management personnel. In the majority of searches, these actions have proven to be highly successful in locating the lost or missing subject.

COMMON PROBLEMS OF LOST OR MISSING PERSON SEARCHES

- 1. Ambiguity of Authority**
- 2. Lack of Leadership**
- 3. Lack of Pre-Incident Preparation**
- 4. Lack of SAR Plan**
- 5. Lack of Communications**
- 6. Inefficient Use of Resources**
- 7. Lack of Trained Personnel**
- 8. Lack of Appropriate Equipment**
- 9. Lack of Coordination**

PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALL SAR RESPONDERS

- 1. YOU ARE WORKING FOR THE VICTIM(S)**
- 2. ORGANIZE EARLY - STAY AHEAD OF THE POWER CURVE**
- 3. THINK FUNCTIONS - NOT PEOPLE**
- 4. THINK SAFETY - IDENTIFY ALL HAZARDS IN THE AREA**
- 5. SUCCESS ALWAYS OCCURS IN PRIVATE, FAILURE IN PUBLIC**
- 6. MANAGE ALL RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY**

- 7. GATHER ALL INFORMATION AVAILABLE AND KEEP RECORDS OF ALL ACTIONS TAKEN**
- 8. MAKE ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION AN ONGOING PROCESS**
- 9. PLAN, PREPARE, AND PERFORM**
- 10. THE MORE SEVERE THE ENVIRONMENT AND SEARCH URGENCY THE MORE CRITICAL IT IS THAT THINGS WORK**

All individuals and organizations that are responsible for or are involved in searching for lost or missing persons should function as a single, task-oriented, modular unit exercising systematic adaptability. The Incident Command System is the recognized method for the organization of responding agencies. In reality, all actions should be taken to ensure that the subject is found while still alive. Therefore, it is imperative that all searchers understand that they are "working" for the lost person.

The search management process can be divided into three key areas: Pre-Incident, Incident, and Post-Incident. Each area has specific critical elements:

I. PRE-INCIDENT:

A. INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

- Identify All Agency Responders
- Define Lines of Authority
- Develop Comprehensive Communications
- Define Areas of Responsibilities and Tasks

B. LOGISTICAL SUPPORT

- Identify Resources
- Define and Write Specific Procedures (Especially The Handling of Deceased Persons)
- Establish Minimum Training for Local Personnel
- Test Communications Systems
- Secure County, Road, and Topographical Maps
- Identify Points of Contact
- Establish Personnel Requirements (Food, Lodging, Safety Equipment, Clothing, Sanitary Facilities, Special Needs:
- Identify Equipment (Radios, Copier, Maps, ICS Forms)
- Cost Coverage (Equipment Replacement, Repairs)

C. FACILITY DISPOSITION

- Establish Command Post or Base Camp
- Establish Family Area (Designate Liaison)
- Establish Media Area (Designate Liaison)

- Establish Staging Area (Designate Liaison)

II. INCIDENT:

A. RAPID RESPONSE (S.T.O.P.= Stop, Think, Observe, and Plan)

- Determine Search Urgency
- Establish Confinement of Area
- Determine Last Known Position or Place Last Seen
- Begin Interviewing Relatives and Witnesses
- Prepare Lost Person Questionnaire
- Prepare Lost Person Profile
- Review Weather Forecasts and Terrain
- Notify and Call-Out Hasty Search Teams
- Check High Probability Areas
- Segment Search Areas
- Brief and Debrief All Searchers
- Develop Medical Plan for Victim Rescue
- Develop Recovery Plan (Coroner for Deceased Victim)
- Clue and Evidence Recognition if Foul Play Involved

B. AREA MANAGEMENT

- Establish Command Post
- Secure Area/ Access Control
- Implement Facility Plan
- Identify/Inventory Resources

C. INCIDENT ACTION PLAN (IAP) DEVELOPMENT

- Develop and Implement Workable Search Areas
- Place Highly Trained or Skilled Resources Into High Probability Areas
- Develop Contingency Plan for Next Shift
- Identify Hazards in the Area
- Long-Term Planning and Suspension of Mission
- Ongoing Information Evaluation

D. STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

- Record Keeping Workers Compensation Enrollment Forms Maps and Charts ICS Forms Searcher/Organization Identification
- Family Briefings

- Media Briefings
- Briefing/Debriefing of Searchers
- Ongoing Search Strategies and Tactics

III. POST-INCIDENT:

A. FINAL BRIEFING

- Recognize All Agencies and Organizations
- Should Be Written

B. DEMOBILIZATION

- Personnel
- Equipment
- Clean-UP of Command Post and All Areas
- Critical Incident Stress Debriefing?

C. EVALUATION

- Plan Analysis
- Standard Operating Procedures
- Coordination of Resources
- Direction and Control
- Communications
- Training of Personnel
- Notification and Call-Out Procedures

D. REPORTING

- Written After-Action
- State SAR Report Form

SEARCH MISSION CHECKLIST

I. PRE-INCIDENT:

[] Coordination meeting with heads of all agencies; develop response plans and standard operating procedures.

[] Inventory resources, prepare call-out list, check periodically.

[] Designate facilities

- ☐ Identify training needs for all emergency service personnel
- ☐ Exercise SAR plan periodically.

II. INCIDENT:

- ☐ Determine Last Known Position (LKP) or Place Last Seen (PLS)
- ☐ Complete Lost Person Questionnaire
- ☐ Complete Lost Subject Profile
- ☐ Deploy Search Hasty Teams into high probability areas
- ☐ Establish Command Post Location
- ☐ Segment Search Areas
- ☐ Establish staging, family, and media areas
- ☐ Secure access to search area and command post
- ☐ Identify and coordinate resources
- ☐ Formulate Incident Action Plan (strategies and tactics)
- ☐ Implement standard operating procedures checklist
- ☐ Notify specialized resources
- ☐ Brief and debrief accordingly
- ☐ Notify state DES
- ☐ Mission suspension parameters

III. POST-INCIDENT:

- ☐ Final debriefing
- ☐ Demobilization

☐ **Area Clean-up**

☐ **Evaluation; plans and standard operating procedures analysis**

☐ **Reports**

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES CHECKLIST AS NEEDED

(MINIMUM SHOULD BE DEFINED IN ADVANCE)

☐ **FAMILY UPDATES**

☐ **MEDIA UPDATES HOURLY:**

☐ **RECORDS UPDATE**

☐ **CLUE DETECTION AND LOCATION**

☐ **RESOURCE DEPLOYMENT**

☐ **COMMUNICATION CAPABILITIES**

☐ **SEARCHER REPORTS**

☐ **AREA SEGMENTATION**

DAILY:

☐ **WEATHER AND TERRAIN ANALYSIS**

☐ **SEARCHER FATIGUE**

☐ **INCIDENT ACTION PLAN EVALUATION**

☐ **RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION AND MANAGEMENT**

☐ **BRIEFING AND DEBRIEFING**

☐ **SAFETY PRECAUTIONS**

☐ **INCIDENT ACTION PLAN FOR NEXT SHIFT SAR RESOURCES**

HASTY TEAMS: An initial response team of well trained, self-sufficient and highly mobile searchers whose primary responsibility is to check out those high probability areas most likely to produce the missing subject first. Skills of a hasty team include tracking and clue awareness, interviewing witnesses, familiarity with the terrain, self-sufficiency in the outdoors, advanced land navigation capability, and emergency medical care capability. They require no supervision. SAR DOGS: It is proven that trained search dogs can cover an equal amount of terrain in half the time it takes a grid team to cover.

SAR dogs are trained to detect human scent either by tracking, trailing, or air scenting methods. The rapid availability of SAR dogs is dependent upon timely notification. Normal response times vary, however, three to four hours is the normal amount of time needed before the dogs are actually deployed into the field. They have a high probability of success when deployed into areas where the subject may be lost. SAR dog teams are self-sufficient and normally do not need support from a local organization. However, these personnel are volunteer and lodging and food for the handler is appreciated. **[IF YOU THINK YOU MAY NEED SAR DOGS, CALL THEM IN EARLY DURING THE SEARCH. SHOULD YOU FIND THE SUBJECT BEFORE THEY GET THERE, THEY WON'T MIND TURNING AROUND AND GOING BACK HOME. IN SOME INSTANCES, THEY HAVE BEEN CONTACTED WHILE IN ROUTE AND HAVE BEEN ADVISED TO CANCEL THE MISSION.]**

HELICOPTERS: Helicopters have been utilized in many SAR missions for transporting SAR teams as well as looking for the lost subject. In spring and summer months, it is not a highly effective resource to use to look for the lost person as foliage obstructs their view, however, they can be used to fly over large open fields or to search along roads and rivers. Weather conditions may cause flight restrictions. A request to use National Guard helicopters must follow a defined process. No National Guard mission will be approved unless you follow appropriate chain-of-command procedures.

YOU ARE REQUIRED TO CONTACT YOUR STATE DES AREA COORDINATOR AND BRIEF HIM ON THE SEARCH IN ORDER TO REQUEST A NATIONAL GUARD HELICOPTER. THE STATE DES AREA COORDINATOR WILL THEN CONTACT FRANKFORT DES HEADQUARTERS TO DETERMINE THE FEASIBILITY, AVAILABILITY, AND APPROVAL FOR THE USE OF A NATIONAL GUARD HELICOPTER.

SAR OVERHEAD TEAMS: Many emergency service personnel have attained skills, knowledge, and training on lost and missing person searches. They may be available to assist local personnel with the management of the search. They are fully aware of the Incident Command System and will utilize the appropriate strategy and tactics for SAR decision-making. They do not expect to assume direction and control or command of the operation, but will work with the Incident Commander to assure that everything is being done according to SAR standards.

GRID TEAMS: The use of grid teams require large numbers of personnel. Effectiveness is dependent upon spacing distance between the searchers; the closer the spacing the higher the degree of effectiveness. However, efficiency drastically declines when large numbers of

searchers at close spacing are utilized. Therefore, it is not efficient to space searchers at close distances when compared to the total number of man-hours that must be expended. Spacing distances of grid search teams is dependent upon the number of searchers at the scene and the amount of search area to be covered. There are other resources that may be utilized during SAR missions, but costs, availability, response times of those resources may prohibit their utilization. The state SAR coordinator has information about these additional resources and can brief you on their availability and cost.

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SEARCHING

1. RESPOND QUICKLY, AT NIGHT, AND IN ALL TYPES OF WEATHER
2. CONFINE MOVEMENTS OF THE SUBJECT AND WITNESSES.
3. FIND AND PROTECT ANY CLUES.
4. DEVELOP AND INCIDENT ACTION PLAN
5. BACK UP YOUR OPERATIONS
6. USE HASTY TEAMS TO FLAG ROUTES THAT HAVE BEEN SEARCHED.
7. START AND CONTINUE AN INTENSIVE INVESTIGATION; GATHER AND ANALYZE CLUES OR INFORMATION.
8. DOCUMENT ALL YOUR ACTIONS.