

# The ART of Field Reporting

V1.2 April 16, 2025

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# Introduction

Most situations we respond to on playa can be handled with our usual method of information tracking involving Operators logging radio traffic into the Incident Management System. Some situations benefit from first-hand accounts of what happened, and we document those accounts in Field Reports. If you haven't fallen asleep yet, please take a sip of your non-alcoholic beverage.

**2025 note:** "Field Report" is the new name for what was previously called an "Incident Report". You'll see that new term throughout this document.

## When Should We Author Field Reports?

There are several clear circumstances:

- Incidents with more information than could be relayed over the radio
  - Example: an ongoing camp dispute that required several hours of mediation
- Must report situations (except for simple medical calls)
  - Example: a lost child
- Interdepartmental situations
  - Example: DPW HEAT provides a cherry picker so that Rangers can get to a person on tall structure
- When requested by a member of Shift Command

There's also a gray area that requires a judgment call:

- Situations that may recur or may need followup
  - Example: Rangers mediate a sound dispute and the camp agrees to limit sound to certain hours and the Rangers believe that a followup visit to neighboring camps would be helpful

## Who Should Author Field Reports?

- Anyone at the scene can author a Field Report.
- When members of the Command team, such as Troubleshooters, Shift Leads, RSCIs, or OODs, are present at the scene, they should take responsibility for authoring the Field Report, or clearly delegate it.
- If everyone at the scene agrees on the observations and inferences of the situation, the group can select one person to author the Field Report for all; it's a good idea to do this with at least one other Ranger (such as your partner).

## How Do I Create and Author a Field Report?

During the incident, take notes as you would at any other scene. As soon as possible after the incident, turn those notes into a report. This ensures the details are still fresh in your memory.

There are two ways to do this in Black Rock City:

- Create a paper Field Report (shift leads and troubleshooters often carry blank forms, or you can just use a blank sheet from your notebook)
  - Do it in the field and hand it off to a member of Shift Command
  - Do it back at the ROC and hand it off to an Operator for upload

- Create an online Field Report
  - Do it back at the Ranger Operations Center on one of the computers in the kiosks
  - Do it anywhere you have online access to the Incident Management System, from your personal device

The best practice is for you and your partner to head back to the ROC and do it together on one of the computers, because you can ask questions of Shift Command or the Operators if you need help.

## How Do I Write an Effective Field Report?

### Remember Your Audience (It's Not About You)

Your primary audience is other Rangers that may need to resume handling the situation.

Your secondary audience is other Rangers that may need to report on what happened to other parts of the BMOrg or cooperating agencies (mostly law enforcement).

What you write may be considered a legal document or evidence in a court of law.

#### Activity: Overall Assessment

Look at the Field Reports in the Appendices. For each one, read it through the eyes of a Ranger starting a shift and figuring out what happened and what needs to happen next. Does the Field Report accomplish that goal?

## Methods

There's no one correct way, but there are several methods we suggest. Find the one that works for you and the situation.

### FLAME

You can always use FLAME. Just start with what you found out, what you heard, your analysis, the results of mediation, and wrap up with any closing thoughts you think are relevant. This method has the advantage of being easy to remember and easy to understand by any other member of the Black Rock Ranger department.

FLAME can work for any kind of incident.

### SOAP

SOAP is a method utilized widely in healthcare. It stands for:

- Subjective - what is the chief complaint and symptoms? In our context, this means the perspectives of the primary actors in the situation being Rangered.
- Objective - what facts can be observed and measured? In our context, this means the facts and objectively true observations (not suppositions or opinions) of the Rangers responding to the situation.
- Assessment - what's the diagnosis? In our context, this is the analysis of the responding Rangers.
- Plan - what's the immediate treatment and long-term care plan? In our context, this is any agreement made by participants, as well as any recommendations for followup by Rangers or other departments.

SOAP may work well for situations involving participant conflicts and complaints. It's a good way to detail the various perspectives at play, as well as the opinions of the responding Rangers.

## Chronological Narrative

In this method, the incident is reported as a logical progression of events over time. This is a very easy method to remember since it's just telling a story. The main drawback to this method is that it may take awhile to get to the most important points. Author a summary up front if it's a long report.

This method works well for long incidents in which there were developments along the way.

## A Bulleted List of Who Was Involved

You can write up a list of who was at the scene and what roles they played. If you do this, be sure to include any members of other departments or responding agencies, especially the names and callsigns / badge numbers for leads. The main benefit of this method is that it provides a list of people we can contact later if we need more information.

This method works well for simple situations, such as perimeters held for other departments responding.

Activity: Which method was used?

Read the Field Reports in the Appendices. Can you identify what method was used for each?

## What Information Should Be Included?

Important:

- Date and time of incident
- Location of incident
- Names of other Rangers involved
- Playa names and real-world names of people involved
  - Participants
  - Other Burning Man staff
  - Law enforcement officer names and vehicle numbers, if relevant
- Descriptions of assailants, if relevant
- License plate or mutant vehicle tag numbers, if relevant

Activity: Critique These Field Reports

Read the Field Reports in the Appendices. What useful details are missing?

## Other Stylistic Tips and Tricks

### Observation vs Inference

Clearly indicate what you observed and what you believe. Preface every statement with "I observed..." or "Bucket observed..." if you're speaking on behalf of your partner, as well as "We believe that..." when you're relaying your opinions and suppositions. If you're using the SOAP method, this is especially important during the Objective and Assessment portions.

## Position vs Interest

When you're differentiating between your observations and your inferences, this is a great opportunity to also differentiate between the stated positions and what you believe to be the underlying interests of the people involved. Remember to clearly state whether you heard something directly or whether you've concluded something.

## First Person, Second Person, Third Person

Even the simplest situations can be difficult to Explain when they involve many people. Try to refer to everyone in the third person, minimizing the use of any pronouns, when describing interactions between multiple people. For example:

"Ranger Bucket talked to Star Anise and Ranger Hubcap talked to Agave and then Star Anise walked away in the middle of their conversation with Ranger Bucket to talk to someone that Ranger Bucket assumed to be Star Anise's romantic partner because Star Anise hugged and kissed the person (whom we will call Star Anise SO going forward)."

It may look and sound strange, but the next person reading the Field Report is better served by clarity than perfect prose.

### Activity: Improve These Field Reports

Read the (fake) Field Reports in Appendices A, B, C, D, and E. For each one, identify two ways that the report could be improved. Now look at Appendix F. Is there anything that can be improved?

## Summary

The next time you read a Field Report, try to remember all of the good things about it, as well as the parts that are incomplete or confusing. The best Field Reports are written in a consistent style so the reader can make sense of it later, as well as detailed information that can be used by the next Rangers to deal with the situation.

## What If I Need Help?

Ask a Troubleshooter, RSCI, Shift Lead, Operator, or OOD to help you!

# Appendix A: Field Report #514: Green Dots to Station 9

## Summary:

Green dot call for agitated patient at medical Station 9

## Content:

*September 3rd 2018 00:47:48, Sabertooth:*

Date/Time: 09/02/2018 18:58

Rangers: Sabertooth and Orion's Belt

Location: Medical Station 9 (near Tokyo)

Rangers Sabertooth and Orion's Belt arrived at station 9 for a green dot call about an agitated participant.

Upon arrival we talked to nurse Sue (Susan T), who introduced us to a disoriented 29 years old female patient by the name of DD.

At the time of our arrival the patient (DD) appeared to be disoriented, but not violent or angry. The patient was accompanied by two friends by the names N, and A.

Ranger Orion's Belt was able to communicate with the participant, and concluded that she could benefit from a stay in Sanctuary.

Nurse Sue reported to Ranger Sabertooth that the patient had apparently taken LSD, and was scared and disoriented, she seemed to otherwise be OK medically.

We requested transportation to Sanctuary, and the patient was transported to Sanctuary along with her two friends by ESD vehicle number C13.

*September 3rd 2018 00:50:11, Sabertooth:*

During the time we waited for transport, one of the patient's friends (N) mentioned that the Patient may be also suffering from untreated schizophrenia, we could not get any confirmation of that fact.

## Appendix B: Field Report #402: Anonymous Assault

Summary:

Secondhand Report of Assault at 5:45 + K at Systemic Enlightenment, Female Participant Jumped by 3 Male Strangers

Content:

*September 1st 2018 14:24:41, Billygoat:*

Participant who wanted to remain anonymous provided a secondhand report of a female campmate at Systemic Enlightenment (5:45 + K) being jumped by 3 male participants late Thursday night after returning to camp. Exact time is unknown, but he believed the reported incident happened after the victim returned home from an evening out at an unidentified sound camp. Reporter told us the 3 males tried to make an advance on their campmate who refused the advance, which led to the assault. Reporter also said that another unidentified male participant saw the assault happening and jumped in to help the victim and apparently was successful. The reporter was only requesting information on resources available and where to go if the victim decided to ask for help, but did not want to get anyone involved until he spoke to the victim about the information we provided and had consent to do so. We provided the information requested and the reporter confirmed that he intended to pass the information along.

*September 1st 2018 14:26:33, Billygoat:*

(Thursday 30 August 2018)

## Appendix C: Field Report #322: Triggered by Trains

Summary:

IMS #1245: DMV volunteer asked to speak to Green Dot about unease about Man burn

Content:

*September 1st 2018 14:58:21, Patronus:*

Saturday 9/1/2018, 2:30pm

Participant (DMV volunteer) walked up to HQ window asking to speak to Green Dot Ranger

Name: P

Camp: Mix'n'match Camp, 9:15 & K (unplaced camp)

P reported feeling anxiety about tonight's Man burn. Through conversation he realized he was triggered by last night's burn of the Trains art project, where four people would not sit down and were yelled at by other participants. He had to leave the situation, as it reminded him of last year's Man Burn, and the trauma he felt after seeing the participant go into the fire.

We let P know he was not alone in his experience and that others were feeling the similar unease about tonight's burn. P made a plan to watch tonight's burn from a distance, with camp mates and any others he knows who prefer to watch the burn this way. He reported feeling better following the conversation and went on his way.

# Appendix D: Field Report #803: Black Marks

Summary:

LNT violations at FridgeDome

Content:

*September 1st 2018 15:50:34, Poodles:*

Rangers Poodles and Trekman were dispatched to 7:35 and Lima to assist Sand Harp, LNT, BLM, et al., with a LNT violations. The Camp has been dismissive of the LNT compliant personnel who have been by to inform them of their violations. The camp claims that they have done all actions requested / required of them at each step. First, cleaning up the toilets / showers and then later, completely closing them because the leak persisted. As the leaks still persist, the LNT team lead (Bedhead) and BLM environmental compliance have insisted that the camp begin to disassemble the offending areas (toilets & showers).

Action Items:

- 1.) Disassemble A-frame buildings housing the toilets.
- 2.) Many piles of dirt to bag up (black / grey water).
- 3.) Moop the entire camp, (esp. bike and public areas.)
- 4.) Shower trailer that is still leaking: The leaks here are deeper and will require more extensive scrapping of playa. They have been educated to fill in the divots. They are going to restore the playa to pristine and disconnect the showers.

*September 1st 2018 15:51:42, Poodles:*

They have 2.5 hours to make very significant progress on these actions items. A review will be conducted at 5:45 pm on (today) Sept 1st.

*September 1st 2018 15:53:09, Poodles:*

They have been informed that failure to comply will result in some or all of the camp being evicted.

*September 1st 2018 15:54:30, Poodles:*

Zen Face / Bedhead (?) said it was the worst LNT violations they've seen in several years.



# Appendix E: Field Report #166: Possible DV

## Summary:

Incident 1248, Possible DV walk up to Tokyo

## Content:

*September 1st 2018 16:16:05, Strawberry:*

IMS #1248. Strawberry & Sand Harp arrived Tokyo at 3:05. Met with Acrobatic (on shift vehicle maintenance) and Waffle Fries (off shift). Participant Mary Mary Quite Contrary (real name: Mary Jones) had long story about disagreement and altercation with a fellow camp mate, Puss in Boots (real name: Pamela Borgia). Waffle Fries will file additional information. Pamela and her RV have left the playa, Mary was green-dotted and advised about process for filing a police report, and was content to have the story logged in the IMS system.

LE arrives 3:18 (Officer Tony Miranda). After consult, LE cleared scene without interacting with Participant Mary.

Waffle Fries completes green dot handling of situation, Mary returns to camp to continue burn. Clear of scene 3:25.

# Appendix F: Field Report #93: Beer Breath

## Summary:

Intoxicated person driving a box truck while drinking on 3 and India

## Content:

*September 2nd 2018 00:56:52, Sabretooth:*

Incident Date: Saturday 09/01/2018 - 19:55:00

Rangers: Sabretooth and Cinnamon Roll

Location: 3 and India, next to camp Hempslide

While on bike mobile patrol, rangers Sabertooth and Cinnamon Roll noticed a speeding white Isuzu box truck, driving 10-15 Mph.

After flagging down the driver to educate him about speeding, we noticed the driver was holding a can of beer in his left hand.

We asked the driver to stop the truck at the side of the road (off "India"), he was not blocking the road.

Ranger Sabertooth asked the driver to turn the ignition off, and Ranger Cinnamon Roll recorded the license plate number of the vehicle.

The vehicle was a 15ft long Isuzu box truck, Connecticut license plate # ZFG-909

The driver reported to Sabertooth that he only had a couple of beers, and was on his way to exit the city to avoid the exodus wait.

Ranger Sabertooth was not impressed that the driver was fit to drive at this time, and the passenger (who exited the truck) was a tourist from Italy who spoke little English.

The driver said his name was JD, and he was transporting art from the Arch art project, however when asked to produce an artery document or permit, he only showed an early arrival pass without a name.

There were no permit stickers on the vehicle.

Ranger Sabertooth reported the incident to Khaki on Control1, and provided more details on Ranger Admin, at the same time Ranger Cinnamon Roll was talking to the driver.

The driver told Ranger Cinnamon Roll that he had a respiratory condition that required a cold beverage (in the form of cold beer) to sooth.

Khaki directed Ranger Sabertooth to have the driver park and wait at least an hour or until his sober before driving, additionally to educate the driver regarding drunk driving and speeding.

While educating the driver an LE vehicle passed by, and the driver expressed gratitude that he was stopped by Black Rock Rangers and not LE.

*For historical reference*, this doc was seemingly created as an expanded version of this introductory module;  
[How to Write a Good Field Report](#)