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The purpose of this standard operating procedure is to provide **policy** and guidance when responding to emergency calls involving a water rescue incident while ensuring the safety and well-being of both rescuers and victims.

To establish a uniform approach for safe and successful operations at an incident requiring the use of water rescue equipment and procedures in compliance with NFPA 1006: Standard for Rescue Technician Professional Qualifications; NFPA 1670: Standard on Operations and Training for Technical Search and Rescue Incidents

**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 and under the authorization of the New Mexico State Police.

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 waters environment.

Personal Flotation Device: "PFD" Must be a 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:**

**All personnel that are 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.**

It is the responsibility of fire department personnel to ensure they have their current certifications sent to the Fire Operations Center to be placed in their personnel file.

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.

**NO TURN OUT or WILDLAND GEAR WILL BE WORN IN OR AROUND THE WATER AT ANY TIME.**

Command shall have an Advanced Life Support (ALS) Ambulance dispatched to the scene of any incident involving rescuers entering the water for a rescue. (This is the system – not sure it needs to be in the guidelines)...

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**Guidelines:**

This S.O.G. is not a substitute for swift water rescue training. It 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 Rescue or Recovery: if in doubt, err on side of rescue.

Make sure law enforcement including New Mexico State police is notified.

Use risk vs. benefit analysis to help determine all tactics and strategies.

1. SELF RESCUE
2. RESCUE OF FELLOW RESPONDERS
3. RESCUE OF VICTIM(S)

The team shall utilize 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.

The team should institute a Safety Officer at all water rescue incidents as number of personnel allows. This position is concerned directly with the water rescue and therefore may not necessarily replace any existing Safety Officer.

It shall be the policy of the Water Rescue Team to account for all members while working at emergency incidents. The team shall utilize the Personnel Accountability Guideline and conduct regular Personnel Accountability Reports at intervals not to exceed 30 minutes.

**Phase I: Pre-arrival.**

- A. Notify county staff and swiftwater team.
- B. Call for downstream resources to staff locations where victims may be spotted and make sure victims are not past those downstream points.

**Phase II: Arrive on scene. Insure the ICS system is being utilized. Size up.**

- A. Secure responsible party or witness.  
Command should secure a witness as soon as possible after arriving on scene to obtain as much information as possible i.e. clothing description, number of persons involved, point last scene etc.
- B. Assess the need for additional resources.  
Command should immediately begin assessing the need for additional resources. If additional resources are necessary, Command should make the request early and cancel if determined they are not necessary.
- C. A repeated tactical channel may be requested if the search/rescue/recovery exceeds the capability of a line-of-sight tactical channel.
- D. Assess the hazards.

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**Phase III: Pre-Rescue Operations**

- A: Determine strategy and tactics
- B: Assign personnel:
  - Typical positions:
    - Incident Command
    - Safety
    - Operations
    - Upstream spotters
    - Downstream rescuers/backup
    - Rescuers
    - Riggers

**Phase IV: Rescue Operations**

Rescue operations should be conducted from low risk to high risk order. Rescues should be conducted with the least amount of risk to the rescuer necessary to rescue the victim.

The order of water rescue from low risk to high risk is:

**TALK:** Talk the victim into self-rescue. If possible, the victim is in the water and can be talked into swimming to shore or assisting the rescuers with his/her own rescue.

**REACH:** If possible, the rescuer should extend his/her hand or some other object, such as a pike pole, to remove the victim from the water.

**THROW:** If the victim is too far out in the water to reach, rescuer(s) should attempt to throw the victim a throw bag or some piece of positive flotation.

**ROW:** Use of watercraft. There should be consideration for personal protective equipment (PPE) for victim(s).

**GO:** Putting rescue personnel in the water to reach the victim. This is a very high risk operation. The rescuers should take PPE of at least a PFD to the victim.

**HELO:** Use of helicopters is for search, hazard identification, accessing victims on islands and inaccessible areas, movement of victims and emergency personnel. No short or long line operations are available locally in San Juan County. The pilot will have the final say on how the helicopter will be used.

**COMMUNICATIONS**

Whistle blasts will indicate the following:

- 1 Blast = Attention (look at me)
- 2 Blast = Upstream
- 3 Blast = Downstream
- 4 Blast (Multiple / erratic) = Help

Hand Signals will indicate the following:

- Hand to top of your head = I'm OK
- Point upstream = Look upstream
- Point downstream = Look downstream
- Wave hand (s) overhead = Help

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## SEARCHES

In any case, where the victim(s) have not been immediately located, the IC should:

1. Perform a size-up; Determine number, age, description, condition and last seen location of victims and their vehicles.
2. Isolate the river and deny entry to untrained and/or unequipped personnel and civilians. Do not allow additional victims to be created.
3. Request additional resources early. This may include additional teams or departments for search teams, search dogs, helicopters, Dive team, chaplain (to assist victim's family), etc.
4. Request units to downstream river access points or bridges where floating victims might be found and/or rescued. Consider lead time, response time, and the speed of the current to determine how many points and how far downstream to cover.
5. Perform a Hasty Team downstream search, but keep rescuer safety as a priority and don't over commit your resources
6. Prepare ICS 200 and brief incoming resources. Keep track of actions taken and times if possible.

## ASSESSING THE VICTIM

Once the rescuer(s) have reached the victim, they should do an immediate assessment of the victim; a quick assessment of the ABC's and the exact method of entrapment. If the victim is conscious, the rescuer should determine if the victim can assist in his/her own rescue. If the victim is unconscious, the rescue must be quick. If the victim can assist in his/her own rescue, the rescuers should proceed with the rescue action plan. The victim should be brought to shore as soon as possible.

## TREATMENT

As soon as the victim is brought to safety, an assessment should be done by ALS EMS personnel. Treatment shall be administered as per local protocol. If necessary, the victim shall be transported to the appropriate facility.

## Phase V: Termination

Command should begin termination as soon as possible after the victim has been removed from the water. This shall include securing all the equipment used for the rescue and personnel accountability. This may also include witnesses, photo's, victim's personal affects or equipment used in the rescue. Command should also consider activating the C.I.S.D. for extraordinary or extended operations.

## PREPARE FOR TERMINATION

- A. Personnel accountability.
- B. Equipment accountability. If there has been a fatality, Extrication branch may consider leaving equipment in place for investigative purposes.
- C. Re-stock vehicles.
- D. Consider debriefing.
- E. Secure the scene. Return to service.