

# Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service

## Swift Water Rescue Team Operational Response Guidelines

November 11, 2017

### SECTION 1. PURPOSE:

To provide operational guidelines for SWRT personnel on incidents to which they may be dispatched.

### SECTION 2. APPLICABILITY:

All SWRT personnel

### SECTION 3. DEFINITIONS:

- a. **Emergency Response Search**: Searches dispatched by ECC for reports of someone lost or fallen in the water.
- b. **Hot Zone**: The water is considered the hot zone.
- c. **Lower Potomac River**: The length of the Potomac River stretching from the DC line northward to Riley's Lock
- d. **Routine Response Search (RRS)**: Searches for a victim previously searched for and not found. These searches have no expectation of recovering a live person.
- e. **Upper Potomac River**: The length of the Potomac River stretching from Riley's Lock northward to the Montgomery/Frederick County line.
- f. **Warm Zone**: The shoreline area within 10 feet of the water's edge. The size of this area may be increased by a variety of conditions such as steep or slippery slopes near the water's edge.
- g. **Water Rescue PPE**: As defined by NFPA 1670, includes a water rescue helmet, appropriate type gloves, a type V personal flotation device with a whistle, a cutting tool and strobe device attached. Also included are appropriate thermal and contamination protection as deemed necessary.

**Fire suppression PPE is unacceptable attire for any  
personnel operating inside the Warm Zone**

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**SECTION 4. Operational Guidelines:**

**a. Road Flooding:**

1. The first arriving SWRT personnel will report to command and offer technical assistance. This will include ensuring:
  - A. The formation of an Incident Action Plan for the safe resolution of the incident
    - i. Any plan must include the recognition of the potential dangers, as well as the establishment of a “2-Out” team
    - ii. In the event of an immediate threat to victim safety, crews may proceed prior to the establishment of the “2-Out” team, but it must be put in place as soon as possible
  - B. If direct communication with the victims is not possible, and it has not already been attempted, efforts should be made to contact victims via cell phone
  - C. All public road access to the water has been completely blocked
  - D. The water level has been marked and is being monitored
    - i. If the water is receding serious consideration should be given to waiting until water level is low enough for a safer removal of the victim
  - E. Only personnel with Water Rescue PPE are in the Warm Zone
  - F. Only technician-level swift water trained personnel are in the Hot Zone
    - i. If the flood waters are not moving, operational personnel may enter the water to enact the rescue
    - ii. Operational personnel must be wearing the proper Water Rescue PPE
    - iii. Operational personnel must also have a tool suitable for “sounding” the roadway if applicable
  - G. A team of rescuers is placed downstream as a safety
  - H. A team of rescuers is placed upstream as spotters

At the conclusion of the incident, if conditions safely permit, SWRT personnel will ensure that any vehicles in the water have been marked as searched and its body type and color has been relayed to ECC.

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**b. Potomac River:**

1. Enroute, the Swift Water Officer (SWO), or the designated Swift Water Shift Leader (SWSL) will:
  - A. Formulate an initial Incident Action Plan based on dispatch information
  - B. Direct responding units to locations/activities based on this initial Action Plan
  - C. Attempt to contact calling party directly via cell phone if possible
2. The first unit on scene will:
  - A. Establish command
  - B. Announce if conditions or new information will necessitate a deviation from the established Incident Action Plan
  - C. Ensure that accountability is established.
  - D. Complete victim ID & victim location sheets with any and all information available (ECC, calling party, witnesses).
3. The first boat on scene at the launch site will:
  - A. Verbalize the implementation of the Incident Action Plan
  - B. Not depart the launch site until a second boat is arriving on scene
    - i. At no time will there be less than 2 boats launched for any incident on the lower Potomac River. Boats will strive to remain in visual contact with each other during operations on the water. This will allow them to provide assistance to each other should the need arise.
  - C. As boats leave the shoreline, each boat will announce its route of travel and number of personnel on board.

**An exception to 4.b.3 may be made if a known life hazard exists, i.e.; priority one patient, multiple persons in the water. This is reflective of the Incident Response Policy, Appendix I, Rapid Intervention of Maydays which allows for the immediate entry for a known rescue.**

4. The first boat to reach the victim will:
  - A. Announce arrival at victim, confirm location and inform other units of rescue plan
  - B. Request additional resources, if needed
  - C. Advise when rescue is complete
    - i. Patient/victim has been loaded in the boat and returning

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- (a) All victims must be placed in a properly secured PFD with helmet
- ii. Patient/victim has been hoisted by the helicopter and is off the river
- 5. Incident is not considered terminated until all boats are off the water

**c. Billy Goat Trail:**

1. Enroute, the Swift Water Officer (SWO), or the designated Swift Water Shift Leader (SWSL) will:
  - A. Formulate an initial Incident Action Plan based on dispatch information
  - B. Direct responding units to locations/activities based on this initial Action Plan
  - C. Attempt to contact calling party directly via cell phone, if possible
2. The first unit on scene will:
  - A. Establish command
  - B. Announce if conditions or new information will necessitate a deviation from the established Incident Action Plan
  - C. Ensure that accountability is established.
  - D. Complete victim ID & victim location sheets with any and all information available (ECC, calling party, witnesses).
3. For incidents involving an unknown location on the "A" loop under optimum conditions the following assignments will take place.
  - A. Two boats will launch from Anglers.
  - B. Two ground personnel will enter the Billy Goat Trail from the south end, designation Billy Goat South.
  - C. If there are adequate personnel two ground personnel will enter the Billy Goat Trail from the north end, designation Billy Goat North.
  - D. If there are adequate personnel, a ground crew with four personnel will access the Billy Goat Trail from the Emergency Access Trail (Spitzbergen Trail). Once at the Billy Goat Trail, two personnel will go north; designation Billy Goat center right and two personnel will go south, designation Billy Goat center left.

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4. The first personnel to reach the victim will:
    - A. Announce arrival at victim, confirm location and inform other units of rescue plan
    - B. Request additional resources, if needed
    - C. Advise when rescue is complete
      - i. Patient/victim has been loaded in the boat and returning
        - (a) All victims must be placed in a properly secured PFD with helmet
      - ii. Patient/victim has been hoisted by the helicopter and is off the river
  5. Incident is not considered terminated until all boats are off the water and personnel hiking the Billy Goat Trail have returned to the tow path.
- d. **Ice Rescue:**
1. The first arriving SWRT personnel will report to command and offer technical assistance. This will include ensuring:
    - A. Only personnel with appropriate attire are in the Warm Zone
    - B. Only properly equipped personnel are in the Hot Zone
      - i. The use of tag lines for all personnel on the ice is preferred
      - ii. All efforts must be made to limit the number of personnel on the ice
    - C. Spotters are positioned with intersecting lines of sight to the victim so as to maintain a point of reference should the victim submerge.
  2. The Senior SWRT personnel on scene will report to command and offer technical assistance relating to forming an Incident Action Plan for resolution of the incident.
- e. **Underwater Incidents:**
1. The first arriving SWRT personnel will report to command and offer technical assistance. This will include ensuring:
    - A. Only Fire Rescue personnel with appropriate attire are in the Warm Zone
    - B. Only technician-level personnel are in the Hot Zone
    - C. All witnesses are identified, separated and interviewed
    - D. Spotters are positioned with intersecting lines of sight to any Fire Department boat on the water so as to maintain a point of reference should the boat locate the suspected victim location
    - E. A Last Seen Point is identified

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F. If possible, a Pelican float or similar device will be deployed to mark the in-water location of the victim

**f. Night Operations:**

1. Illuminated light sticks will be utilized at any time operations are conducted after sunset
2. Light sticks will be placed on the boats such that at least two are visible from any direction the boat may be viewed.
  - A. Boat light sticks will be the same color as the designation of the boat upon which they are placed.
  - B. There will be a Red light attached to the port bow and a Green light attached to the starboard bow per Coast Guard regulation
  - C. A white light will be attached to the highest point of the boat at the stern
3. Personnel operating in a boat will wear two light sticks attached to the shoulders of their PFD during any operations after sunset.
  - A. A colored light corresponding to the color of the boat in which they are operating
  - B. A white light to be illuminated in case of emergency
4. Except as noted above, white light sticks will be utilized on land only. Their uses may include marking boat launch sites, marking trails or general illumination.
5. Strobe lights will be utilized only as an emergency PASS type device. This may also include its activation by rescuers to indicate that a rescuer needs assistance with a victim.

**g. Safety / Accountability:**

1. Any Swift Water Unit responding with less than the minimum staffing of 1 SWBO and 1 SWBC will advise ECC and/ or Command.
  - A. If required staffing is being made up from personnel responding separately, unit may still respond as a Swift Water asset.
  - B. If personnel will not be available to meet minimum staffing requirements, unit may still respond but will **NOT** count towards dispatch recommendations.
2. When initiating operations on scene, each Swift Water Unit will report its number of personnel, destination or assignment and group color, if at night.

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3. The initial on scene boat will not depart the launch site until a second boat is arriving on scene.
    - A. **An exception may be made if a known life hazard exists, i.e. priority one patient or multiple persons in the water. This is reflective of the Incident Response Policy, Appendix I, Rapid Intervention of Maydays, which allows for the immediate entry for a known rescue**
  4. Heat exhaustion and dehydration should be anticipated if:
    - A. Personnel are utilizing dry suits and the air + water temperature is over 150 degrees.
    - B. Personnel are operating in their dry suits out of the water for extended times in temperatures above 65 degrees.
  5. Dry suits must be worn for all water activities any time the water + air temperature is below 120.
  6. Dry suits will be considered as part of the minimum PPE for all personnel entering floodwaters.
- h. **Searches:**
1. **Emergency Response Search**
    - A. Personnel will follow all applicable guidelines for emergency response.
  2. **Routine Response Search (RRS)**
    - A. All searches will take into account the safety and welfare of personnel. As such the SWO (SWSL) will consult with the appropriate Battalion Chief who will consult with the DOC on the appropriateness of and resources required to conduct a RRS. Considerations will be weather, water level and other apparatus activity.
    - B. A RRS will be conducted in the 24 hour period immediately following the initial search.
      - i. A subsequent RRS will be conducted if water levels change plus or minus by one foot or more.

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i. **Decontamination:**

1. On any incident involving floodwaters there will be a gross decontamination area set up at water's edge.
2. Gross decontamination will be considered to be rinsing with a fog hose stream
3. Further decontamination needs will be determined as needed

j. **Required reports:**

On any incident resulting in a response, even if units are placed in service prior to arrival, it is the responsibility of the SWO (SWSL) to ensure that the appropriate MCFRS report(s) is/are completed as well as the SWRT Incident Response Report Form. This form can be found on the team website. These reports must be completed no later than 6 days after the incident.

