



RUSSELLVILLE FIRE DEPARTMENT
POLICY MANUAL

Policy Number:
Section:
Original Date:
Revised Date:

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to give general guidelines to be used by rescue personnel conducting a water rescue. Rescue personnel must use judgment, experience, and training to adapt to the specific situation.

POLICY

Water Rescue incidents generally occur because victims either knowingly enter the water, or otherwise find themselves in the water and unable to remove themselves from the dangers associated with that body of water. There is always a possibility of more victims becoming stranded because of the good intentions of caring citizens, and/or untrained rescue personnel, trying to help.

Water Rescue operations present a significant danger to Fire Department personnel. The safe and effective management of these types of operations requires basic to very specialized considerations. This policy identifies some of the considerations that must be included in managing these types of incidents. It shall be the policy of the Russellville Fire Department to not allow RFD personnel to participate in water rescue activity without the use of proper safety equipment.

All Fire Department members shall have a working knowledge of the equipment used in a Water Rescue Operation, and practice the use of throw rope bags and personal flotation devices, as well as being familiar with donning of dry suits, and the use of stream crossing techniques.

All potential command officers shall be familiar with this policy, and shall have a Water Rescue Command Checklist available in each command vehicle, and shall use the checklist to ensure all tactical alternatives are considered.

Definition

Water Rescue - A water rescue shall be defined as any incident that involves the removal of victim(s) from any body of water other than a swimming pool. This shall include rivers, creeks, lakes, washes, storm drains, or any body of water, whether still or moving.

All potential water rescues will be dispatched as a *Water Rescue*. A Water Rescue inside the city limits shall include a Water Rescue Assignment. Command shall have the option of assigning more units to the incident as conditions dictate. Units shall be initially dispatched so units arrive at both sides of the stream if possible. If one side of the stream is inaccessible from the city limits, the closest neighboring department shall be assigned to assist and directed to approach from the opposite side.

Water Rescue Assignment

The On Duty Battalion Chief shall evaluate incidents dispatched that may have the potential of being a swift water rescue incident. Besides the BC, any company officer may call for a water rescue response in the event they find themselves in a situation requiring additional resources and expertise. The 1st alarm assignment for a water or ice rescue inside the city includes the following:

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- 2 Closest Fire Companies
- Ladder 1
- Rescue Boat 1
- Battalion 1

Responding with Rescue Boat 1:

It is the responsibility of Engine 2 to respond with Rescue Boat 1. If Engine 2 is unavailable, the On Duty Battalion Chief shall ensure that another company responds to Station 2 to respond with the boat. The "Rescue Boat 1" unit is made up of the rescue boat itself, trailer, and pull vehicle. The department will maintain this as a ready and intact resource at all times. When responding with the boat in tow, the Radio Traffic will be as follows: "Rescue Boat 1 Responding, On Scene, In Service", etc. regardless of what pull vehicle is towing the boat. Rescue Boat 1 should be driven to the scene by a member of Engine 2. The unit shall respond in tandem with Engine 2 in an emergency mode.

The standing orders for these first alarm companies are as follows:

- 1st-In Engine Company: Establish Investigation Group. Perform scene assessment, immediate control actions, and locate witnesses and maintenance personnel.
- 2nd-In Engine Company, Rescue Boat 1: Establish Rescue Group. Crews should be prepared to perform victim rescue/recovery functions. Be prepared to perform support/supply functions.
- Ladder 1: Report to Rescue Group. Be prepared to assist with rescue/establish downstream division.
- Battalion 1: Incident Command

Due to the potential danger of these types of incidents, it is imperative that the first arriving company officer assumes command until a ranking officer arrives, and begins following the Water Rescue Command Checklist immediately.

Safety Considerations

1. All personnel participating in a water rescue operation shall wear at a minimum a personal flotation device within 25 feet of water, work gloves, and a helmet - no structural firefighting gear, including fire helmet at any time.
2. Immediate assessment and resource allocation is critical to a successful operation.
3. In swift water operations, no rescuer shall be attached to a fixed line.
4. Crews must maintain strict continuity and PAR during water rescues.
5. The Hot Zone shall be the water, and 25 feet from any shoreline.
6. The Warm Zone shall be the area from 25 to 100 feet away from the shoreline.
7. The Cold Zone shall be the area outside 100 feet from any shoreline.
8. No one shall be allowed into the Hot Zone without donning a personal flotation device.

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Command Structure

Command shall establish the following during all water rescue operations.

- **Operations Section** - This section consists of one of the first arriving members who shall oversee the technical/tactical planning of the rescue operation.
- **Safety** - The Safety Officer (SO) shall oversee the entire operation to assure the safety of all RFD personnel on the scene. There shall be a SO on both sides of the stream to observe any rigging or personnel prior to entry in order to effect a rescue.
- **Staging Group**- The Staging Manager shall establish a Personnel Staging Area, and assign arriving personnel as ordered by Operations/Command.
- **Rescue Group** - Personnel assigned to this group are responsible for developing an action plan with Operations/Command. Once the action plan has been developed, rescue group will be responsible for executing the plan in the safest possible manner.
- **Resource Unit** - Command should assign one individual to be in charge of the Resource Unit, along with enough personnel to deliver needed resources throughout the scene. Resource Unit is responsible for securing and assigning any equipment needed for technical rescue operations and for getting all needed equipment to the sector areas for use. Resource Unit is responsible for retrieving and inventorying any equipment issued for the operation.
- **Upstream Division** - This division consists of personnel whose responsibility is to watch for and advise Command of any obstacles, debris and/or other hazards (i.e., top loads, suspended loads) that may be floating downstream and may hinder the rescue operation. All Upstream Division personnel shall have direct radio contact with Command/Operations/Safety.
- **Downstream Division** - This division consists of as many personnel as possible whose responsibility is to be prepared to rescue victims and rescuers that may be swept downstream. All personnel in this division shall wear a personal floatation device and have a throw rope bag in hand. There shall be downstream personnel on both sides of the stream if at all possible. Downstream rescuers shall use the throw bags for the victim to grab, and pendulum belay the victim to the shore. Downstream rescuers shall not anchor themselves to the shoreline.
- **River Right/Left Division** - Command should assign personnel to the opposite bank that the operation is being conducted from. Personnel assigned to this division will be responsible for rigging the opposite end of a rope rescue system being set up. The opposite bank shall have a duplicate SO and Rigging Group, as well as members of the Upstream and Downstream Division.
- **EMS/Triage Unit** - Personnel assigned to EMS/Triage Unit will be responsible for prioritizing victims and providing BLS/ALS treatment to victims removed from the water.

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Tactical Considerations

Phase I: Scene Arrival and Assessment

Upon arrival at a water rescue operation, first response personnel should undertake an initial assessment and initial strategy. These potential scenarios exist:

- The victim is not in immediate danger of drowning, but special skills will be required to remove the victim/s from the water.
- The victim is struggling to keep from going under water or has already submerged, but there is still a rescue/resuscitation hope.
- The victim reportedly has been carried downstream and intensive search efforts are required to locate victim/s for rescue
- The operation is a body recovery. If a body recovery is confirmed, slowing all incoming units to a non-emergency response is suggested.

A. Secure responsible party or witness

Command should locate witnesses as soon as possible after arriving on scene. This will help in identifying and locating victim/s, determining causes and problems, and establishing search/rescue/recovery operational action plans.

B. Assess the need for additional resources

Command should immediately begin assessing the need for additional resources.

C. Assess the hazards

A thorough assessment of all scene hazards must be completed as soon as possible. All personnel should be briefed on the hazards that are present. Hazards associated with water rescue operations include: volume, velocity, and temperature of water, floating debris, unusual drop-offs, hydraulic effects, and depth of water.

D. Decide on "Rescue" or "Recovery"

Based on the conditions present and the hazards to rescuers, Command will have to make the decision to operate in the rescue or recovery mode. If Command determines that the operation will be run in the rescue mode, rescue should begin as soon as resources are available.

E. Decide on an action plan

Command should establish an action plan as soon as possible. The step-by-step plan should be communicated to all personnel involved in the rescue.

Phase II: Pre-Rescue Operations

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- A. Establish Group/Division Responsibilities for Water Rescue
- B. Make the general area safe

Secure a perimeter around the hazard area and prohibit non emergency personnel from approaching in or around the water. Consideration should be given to the use of a helicopter for the task of aerial recon for victim search and hazard spotting.

- C. Make the rescue area safe

Personnel working in the rescue area (waters edge) shall have personal protective equipment (PPE), including personal flotation device (PFD), gloves, and a water rescue helmet, or appropriate SCUBA gear during dive rescue/recovery operations.

- D. Pre-Rescue/Recovery

The Rescue Group Supervisor shall be responsible for consulting with the Incident Commander to formulate a rescue plan and shall see that necessary equipment is gathered to operate according to the action plan. The Rescue Group Supervisor shall assign personnel to conduct the rescue, and support personnel to support the rescuers, during the actual rescue phase.

Phase III: Rescue Operations

All personnel shall be briefed on the rescue plan prior to its implementation. Rescue operations should be conducted from low-risk to high-risk. Rescues should be conducted with the least amount of risk to the rescuers necessary to rescue the victim. The order of water rescue from low risk to high risk will be:

1. Talk - If possible, talk the victim into swimming to shore or assisting the rescuers with his/her own rescue. If a victim is stranded in the middle of a flash flood, this will not be prudent.
2. 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.
3. 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 (i.e., PFD, rescue ring). Downstream personnel should be in position during the actual rescue operation. If the victim is able to grab the throw bag, the rescuer can pendulum belay or haul the victim to the nearest bank. Care should be taken to assure the victim will be belayed to a safe downstream position.
4. Row - If it is determined that a boat based operation shall be used to affect rescue, Command has the option of using the rescue boat. The company on the opposite bank will be made aware of the action plan.. The Rescue Group should consider personal protective equipment (PPE) for victim(s).
5. Go - If it is not possible to row (boat base operation) to the victim, it may become necessary to deploy a rescuer into the water to reach the victim. This is a very high risk operation. The decision to "Go" will be made exclusively by the Incident Commander. Only rescuers with the proper training and equipment should be allowed to enter the water. Prior to the rescuer actually proceeding into the water, he/she shall discuss the action plan, including specific tasks and objectives, hazards and alternate plans. The rescuer shall never be attached to a life line without the benefit of a quick release mechanism. The rescuer should take PPE of at least a PFD to the victim. Members shall not do a breath-hold surface dive in an attempt to locate a victim beneath the surface of the water.

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6. Helo - At times the use of a helicopter is the most reasonable method of reaching the victim. Helicopter operations over water are considered high risk operations. Command should consult with the Rescue Group Supervisor and the pilot to determine the risk/benefit of the use of a helicopter. The Incident Commander will have the final say on the use of a helicopter for water rescue operations. The pilot will have the final say on how the helicopter will be used.

Vehicle in the Water

Many problems associated with a vehicle in the water can be avoided if rescuers first carefully evaluate the situation and develop a definitive plan before attempting any rescue. Considerations include:

1. Risk/benefit
2. Rescue versus body recovery
3. Question witnesses
4. Where and in what condition are the victims?
5. Is the vehicle partially submerged?
6. Is the vehicle fully submerged? (The chance of an air pocket existing is very slim.)
7. What is the likely condition of the vehicle based on mechanism of impact?
8. What are the water conditions? (swift, cold, warm)

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, a rapid removal is warranted. The victim should be brought to shore as soon as possible.

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