

ESCAMBIA COUNTY FIRE-RESCUE

Standard Operating Guidelines

4100.105

Missing/Lost Person(s)

Implemented: 11/18/2022

Revised:

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Jason Catrambone, Fire Chief

PURPOSE:

To provide guidelines for the safe and effective search and rescue/recovery of lost persons.

OBJECTIVE:

Establish procedures to follow for short-term and long-term search missions.

SCOPE:

All Personnel

PROCEDURE

All responses to the search scene will be non-emergency, unless advised otherwise by dispatch or an Officer. Upon arrival at the search scene, all personnel should stage at a designated staging area. An ECFR Officer will give the area to stage after he/she arrives on the scene or ECFR personnel will report to established staging area if requested by another agency already on-scene. The ranking Officer or appointed personnel will contact command for assignments. All other ECFR personnel will remain in the staging area until given an assignment. No members are to report to command, unless directed by ECFR OIC.

LAND SEARCH AND RESCUE/RECOVERY

Land search missions may require multiple ECFR resources depending on the caller information. For long-term search and rescue missions, the OIC should consider other resources to assist such as but not limited to EMS, ECSO, ESAR, KlaasKids, and CERT. Other resources such as drones should also be considered to assist in the search.

Search and rescue operations requiring a short-term commitment of resources (2 hours or less) may only require limited ECFR resources to complete. Incidents in which the lost person(s) is not sick or injured and easily located with limited resources such as the What3words application.

ECFR shall establish an incident commander and command post if the initial agency to respond. If ECFR has been requested by another agency, a representative shall be sent to that agency's command post.

Search Operations

Every search has the potential of ending up as a crime scene situation. That does not mean that a crime has been committed. ECFR personnel shall use caution and preserve evidence as much as possible when necessary.

Upon arrival at the scene the officer in charge should conduct the following initial activities:

- a. Activate the Incident Command System. The I.C.S. allows the officer in charge to communicate with other agencies, as it becomes necessary.



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- b.** Establish an Incident Command post and a staging area. A communications person should be designated to record all actions taken.
- c.** Establish an on-going interview and investigation process to gather information about the lost subject for use in planning and in briefing search and rescue teams.
- d.** The IC shall determine what resources will be utilized in assisting with the search such as but not limited to the following.
 - 1.** The U.S. National Grid
 - 2.** Local Disaster Maps
 - 3.** Map Books
 - 4.** Nautical Charts
 - 5.** What3words
- e.** Establish a stand-by medical team, which should be always available throughout the search and rescue operation. Escambia County Emergency Medical Services should be notified of the search and advised of contact and communication procedures for search operations.
- f.** Determine the maximum potential search area and establish confinement within that area by posting searches along the perimeter of that area.
- g.** Divide the search area into segments and determine the best probabilities of the subject being present in each area.
- h.** Establish a basic communications plan for search operations, to include frequencies and call signs to be used, contact times, and codes if needed.
- i.** Assemble hasty teams, brief them using available information and dispatch them to the area most likely to contain the subject. The team should consist of at least 2 persons.
- j.** Assemble man-tracking and/or tracking/trailing K-9 teams, brief them using the available information, and then start them from the point where the lost person was last seen.
- k.** Designate a staging officer and have him/her assemble search teams from available personnel in the staging area. If not, enough trained personnel are in the staging area, have the IC call for additional personnel.
- l.** After initial operations have been completed, the IC should designate a planning officer to begin planning for an orderly transition of shifts for all personnel, including the command post and ICS staff, medical teams and field searchers.
- m.** The IC should determine what additional resources may be needed and acquire those resources as needed. Search and Rescue resources should be notified as early as possible to allow them time to respond to the scene. The following resources are particularly important:
 - 1.** K-9 search teams
 - 2.** Drones
 - 3.** Four-wheel drive ATV's
 - 4.** Trained ground search teams
 - 5.** Search Management personnel



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- 6. Mounted search teams
- 7. Logistical support, including food, water, shelter, and equipment for search personnel. IC can assign this task to anyone.

n. Once the preceding actions have been initiated, the IC should assign search teams and other resources to search various segments of the search areas, as they are available to do so, in accordance with the prevailing conditions and the capabilities of the resources available.

o. The investigation and development of information about the lost subject should be an ongoing process, which is continued throughout the search. Information developed by the investigator (s) should be relayed to the field teams during briefings or by radio if needed.

p. All personnel must be briefed before being sent into the field and must be debriefed after returning from the field. All personnel should check in when joining the search operation and check out when leaving the search operation.

q. The IC should consider activating PEER Support and/or the chaplain for long term incidents.

SEARCH TEAM FORMATION AND OPERATIONS

Individual search teams should consist of a minimum of two people depending upon their function and existing condition. This should include a mixture of the following.

- a. Fire/rescue personnel trained in basic land search and rescue or an equivalent.
- b. A law enforcement officer, who may also handle crime scene and detect clues and perform other functions for the team.
- c. A team medic, a trained EMT-basic, if possible, but shall have a minimum of First Responder Level certification.
- d. One individual may hold two or more of these positions, so long as all appropriate skills are available to the team. Specialized teams, such as man-tracking teams or K-9 teams should include specialized personnel such as trackers or K-9 handlers. In areas where potential dangers to search personnel may exist, a law enforcement officer should provide protection for the teams.

Team equipment should include, at a minimum:

- a. A flashlight or other light source for each member.
- b. One (1) or more two-way radios with spare batteries.
- c. A first aid or medical kit capable of providing care for cuts, sprains, fractures and other BLS medical needs.
- d. Maps of the segment to be searched, if available two or more compasses and other navigational aid (GPS, etc.) if available.



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Team members should be briefed before going into the field. The briefing should include information about the missing subject, the area (s) to be searched the expected weather conditions, how communications will be conducted and any other items important to the search.

Teams which find clues or the subject while in the field, shall contact the command post in accordance with the search communication plan and inform the IC of the situation. The team shall be advised of what action to take. If the search indicates only clues those should be marked or flagged properly.

Each team member must be debriefed after they return from the field. They should give a full and complete report of the area they searched, what clues (if any) were found, what they think their probability of detection (POD) for the area was. All information from the debriefing should be forwarded to the planning officer for use in updating the search plan.

SAFETY

At no time shall field personnel work alone. A “buddy system” will always be used to ensure that no searcher is in the field without a backup.

At least one (1) radio will be assigned to each field search team however, two (2) are preferred if available to help ensure that communication does not fail due to radio failure.

All personnel in search teams shall carry two (2) flashlights when they might be out after dark.

Each search team will have at least one (1) first aid or medical kit, and a team medic (First Responder or EMT-Basic) will be assigned to each team.

Personnel should mark/flag and report all hazardous conditions or clues they find in their search area to the operations officer so he/she can relay the information to the IC and planning officer.

TERMINATING OR SUSPENDING THE SEARCH OPERATION

The search operation shall be terminated if the lost subject is found. The operation may be suspended, either for a period or indefinitely, if:

1. The IC determines that the search area has been thoroughly searched, and that the probability of finding the subject within the search area is too low to justify a continuation of the search.
2. Insufficient personnel and/or other resources are available to continue the search in a safe and efficient manner.
3. Hazardous conditions exist or are expected to occur which may endanger the searchers.



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4. Evidence is found which strongly suggest that the subject is not in the search area.

If the subject is voluntarily missing; this would make the search mission otherwise unnecessary or unfounded.

1. The IC should strongly consider consulting with the unified command before determining whether to suspend a search.
2. The IC should document the reason (s) for suspending or terminating a search.
3. After field operations have been completed, all personnel should be debriefed. All information obtained from this debriefing should be added to the search operation records.
4. The IC staff and the IC should complete a record of the search operation, using the appropriate reporting software.
5. Depending on the situation, Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD), PEER Support, or counseling services shall be offered to all personnel.

WATER SEARCH AND RESCUE/RECOVERY

Water search missions may require multiple ECFR resources depending on the caller information and circumstances. For long-term search and rescue missions, the OIC should consider other resources to assist such as but not limited to EMS, ECSO, ESAR, Coast Guard, FWC, and fire department watercraft. Other resources such as drones should also be considered to assist in the search.

Search and rescue operations requiring a short-term commitment of resources (2 hours or less) may only require limited ECFR resources to complete. Incidents in which the lost person(s) is not sick or injured, or it is not applicable or known, and easily located with limited resources such as the What3words application.

ECFR shall establish an incident commander and command post if the initial agency to respond. If ECFR has been requested by another agency, a representative shall be sent to that agencies command post.

Search Operations

Every search has the potential of ending up as a crime scene situation. That does not mean that a crime has been committed. ECFR personnel shall use caution and preserve evidence as much as possible when necessary.

Upon arrival at the scene the officer in charge should conduct the following initial activities:

- a. Activate the Incident Command System. The I.C.S. allows the officer in charge to communicate with other agencies, as it becomes necessary.



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- b.** Establish an Incident Command post and a staging area. A communications person should be designated to record all actions taken.
- c.** Establish an on-going interview and investigation process to gather information about the lost subject for use in planning and in briefing search and rescue teams.
- d.** The IC shall determine what resources will be utilized in assisting with the search such as but not limited to the following.
 - 1.** The U.S. National Grid
 - 2.** Cell Phone Pinging
 - 3.** Map Books
 - 4.** Nautical Charts
 - 5.** What3words
- e.** Establish a stand-by medical team, which should be always available throughout the search and rescue operation. Escambia County Emergency Medical Services should be notified of the search and advised of contact and communication procedures for search operations.
- f.** Determine the maximum potential search area and establish confinement within that area by posting searches along the perimeter of that area.
- g.** Divide the search area into segments and determine the best probabilities of the subject being present in each area.
- h.** Establish a basic communications plan for search operations, to include frequencies and call signs to be used, contact times, and codes if needed.
- i.** Assemble hasty teams, brief them using available information and dispatch them to the area most likely to contain the subject. The team should consist of at least 2 persons or meet the agencies policies.
- j.** Assemble man-tracking and/or tracking/trailing K-9 teams if applicable, brief them using the available information, and then start them from the point where the lost person was last seen.
- k.** Designate a staging officer and have him/her assemble search teams and watercraft from available personnel in the staging area. If not, enough trained personnel are in the staging area, have the IC call for additional personnel.
- l.** After initial operations have been completed, the IC should designate a planning officer to begin planning for an orderly transition of shifts for all personnel, including the command post and ICS staff, medical teams, watercraft, and field searchers.
- m.** The IC should determine what additional resources may be needed and acquire those resources as needed. Search and Rescue resources should be notified as early as possible to allow them time to respond to the scene. The following resources are particularly important:
 - 1.** K-9 search teams
 - 2.** Drones
 - 3.** watercraft
 - 4.** Trained water search teams
 - 5.** Search Management personnel



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6. Logistical support, including food, water, shelter, fuel, and equipment for search personnel. IC can assign this task to anyone.

n. Once the preceding actions have been initiated, the IC should assign search teams and other resources to search various segments of the search areas, as they are available to do so, in accordance with the prevailing conditions and the capabilities of the resources available.

o. The investigation and development of information about the lost subject(s) should be an ongoing process, which is continued throughout the search. Information developed by the investigator (s) should be relayed to the field teams during briefings or by radio if needed.

p. All personnel must be briefed before being sent into the field and must be debriefed after returning from the field. All personnel should check in when joining the search operation and check out when leaving the search operation.

q. The IC should consider activating PEER Support and/or the chaplain for long term incidents.

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Individual search teams should consist of a minimum of two people depending upon their function and existing condition. This should include a mixture of the following.

- a.** Fire/rescue personnel trained in basic land search and rescue or an equivalent.
- b.** A law enforcement officer, who may also handle crime scene and detect clues and perform other functions for the team.
- c.** A team medic, a trained EMT-basic, if possible, but shall have a minimum of First Responder Level certification.
- d.** One individual may hold two or more of these positions, so long as all appropriate skills are available to the team. Specialized teams, such as man-tracking teams or K-9 teams should include specialized personnel such as trackers or K-9 handlers. In areas where potential dangers to search personnel may exist, a law enforcement officer should provide protection for the teams.

Team equipment should include, at a minimum:

- a.** A flashlight or other light source for each member.
- b.** One (1) or more two-way radios with spare batteries.
- c.** A first aid or medical kit capable of providing care for cuts, sprains, fractures and other BLS medical needs.
- d.** Maps of the segment to be searched, if available two or more compasses and other navigational aid (GPS, etc.) if available.



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Team members should be briefed before going into the field. The briefing should include information about the missing subject, the area (s) to be searched the expected weather conditions, how communications will be conducted and any other items important to the search.

Teams which find clues or the subject while in the field, shall contact the command post in accordance with the search communication plan and inform the IC of the situation. The team shall be advised of what action to take. If the search indicates only clues those should be marked or flagged properly.

Each team member must be debriefed after they return from the field. They should give a full and complete report of the area they searched, what clues (if any) were found, what they think their probability of detection (POD) for the area was. All information from the debriefing should be forwarded to the planning officer for use in updating the search plan.

SAFETY

At no time shall field personnel work alone. A “buddy system” will always be used to ensure that no searcher is in the field without a backup.

At least one (1) radio will be assigned to each field search team however, two (2) are preferred if available to help ensure that communication does not fail due to radio failure.

All personnel in search teams shall carry two (2) flashlights when they might be out after dark.

All personnel shall wear a PFD when on or in any watercraft as well as any other required safety equipment specific to the watercraft they are operating.

Each search team will have at least one (1) first aid or medical kit, and a team medic (First Responder or EMT-Basic) will be assigned to each team.

Personnel should mark/flag and report all hazardous conditions or clues they find in their search area to the operations officer so he/she can relay the information to the IC and planning officer.

TERMINATING OR SUSPENDING THE SEARCH OPERATION

The search operation shall be terminated if the lost subject is found. The operation may be suspended, either for a period or indefinitely, if:

1. The IC determines that the search area has been thoroughly searched, and that the probability of finding the subject within the search area is too low to justify a continuation of the search.



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2. Insufficient personnel and/or other resources are available to continue the search in a safe and efficient manner.
3. Hazardous conditions exist or are expected to occur which may endanger the searchers.
4. Evidence is found which strongly suggest that the subject is not in the search area.

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