

PEMIGEWASSET VALLEY SEARCH & RESCUE TEAM



Standard Operating Guidelines

January 2020

Original: April 13, 2005
Revised: July 9, 2008
Revised: January 8, 2020

I. Purpose:

- A. The purpose of the Standard Operating Guidelines (“SOG”) is to provide members of the Pemigewasset Valley Search and Rescue Team (“PVSART”) with guidelines for field operations, personal responsibility, and expectations surrounding on and off-scene professionalism.
- B. The SOG's are designed with safety as the highest priority. Members wishing to maintain membership in the PVSART must abide by these guidelines. At any time, members may be dismissed from the scene by a PVSART officer should he/she compromise the safety of any party during field operations.
- C. The mission of PVSART is to provide support to the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department who, under NH RSA 206:26 (XII), is the controlling authority of all woodlands Search and Rescue services in the State of New Hampshire. PVSART will provide personnel and resources to assist with non-urban rescues and will assist in the search for lost or missing persons (“Operation”).
- D. PVSART is not a “First Responder” organization and due to liability issues will only respond if requested by the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department.
- E. PVSART primary response area is Grafton County and the western side of the White Mountains, but may be called on at times to assist in Operations outside of this region.

II. Preplanning

- A. PVSART members must:
 - 1. Thoroughly understand and comply with the guidelines listed herein.
 - 2. Possess and maintain at all times a 24 hour ready cache, with the items described in the PVSART Equipment List which can be found on the PVSART website. Members must be equipped to endure the rigors of a Search and Rescue (“SAR”) operation without outside support for 24 hours.
 - 3. Maintain themselves in a fit manner to be able to endure the rigors of an Operation for 24 hours.
 - 4. Train on a regular basis to remain proficient in the skills needed to participate in Operations.
 - 5. Possess appropriate personal clothing and gear for the weather conditions and terrain that are likely to be encountered during an Operation.

- B. Understand and be able to work within the Incident Command System (“ICS”).
- C. Maintain with the Officers of PVSART a current address, cell phone number, cell phone provider, and email address.

III. Notification and Dispatch for an Operations Response:

A. Receipt of Notification:

1. An Officer of PVSART will be notified of a request to respond to an Operating Incident only from the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department. If contacted by another Public Safety agency they will be advised to call NH Fish & Game.
2. Information regarding the incident will be obtained consisting of the following:
 - a) Requesting Agency
 - b) Call Back Phone Number
 - c) Nature of Operation
 - d) Number of Members Requested
 - e) When the Team is needed
 - f) Where the Team is to Report (Staging Area)

B. Member Notification:

1. Members will be notified primarily by the telephone number provided and additionally by e-mail, text message, and an optional smartphone app.
2. Dependent upon the needs and location of the Operation it is possible that all Members will not be notified of an Operation.

C. Requesting Agency Verification

1. Once members are notified the PVSART member taking the initial notification will call the Requesting Agency to confirm the number of members that will respond to the Operations.

IV. Departure to Scene:

- A. Prior to responding to the Staging Area PVSART members shall take the necessary time to be certain they are properly dressed and have the necessary equipment.
- B. All PVSART members when responding to the Staging Area of an Operation shall abide by all laws of the road. They shall not speed and shall not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

- C. Members must transport themselves to the Staging Area in a safe and responsible manner.
- D. Emergency lights and/or audible warning devices of any kind are not to be used en-route to or returning from from a callout. Use of emergency lights or audible warning devices will result in automatic suspension and possible expulsion from the team.

V. On Scene Arrival:

A. Signing In:

- 1. All members must sign the NH Fish & Game Volunteer Log as soon as they arrive at the Staging Area or complete another form of signing in.
- 2. If PVSART members are already in the field when a callout is received and it is more practical for those members to proceed directly to a subject's suspected location they should attempt to notify Command or a PVSART Officer.

B. Staging Officer:

- 1. The first arriving PVSART member assumes the responsibility as Staging Officer until relieved by a member of PVSART of higher authority or seniority.
- 2. The Staging Officer is responsible for screening members as they arrive to ensure they possess the proper equipment, physical, and mental condition appropriate for the expected mission and conditions. If members are not suitably prepared they shall not be allowed to participate in the mission.
- 3. The Staging Officer shall sign members in and ensure accountability.
- 4. The Staging Officer is responsible for signing out PVSART equipment to members. Members must return any signed-out equipment upon the completion of a mission
- 5. During a search, a Staging Officer shall:
 - a) Report to the Incident Commander once all expected members have arrived and the team is assembled.
 - b) Identify and assign members to a team for a particular mission, providing a mission brief before that team leaves the Staging Area.

- c) Instruct any PVSART members arriving after an earlier team has been dispatched to remain at the Staging Area until a new team is assembled and assigned a mission.
 - d) Remain in the Staging Area until all PVSART members have returned from their assigned missions and signed out or have made other arrangements to account.
6. During a carry-out, a Staging Officer may:
- a) Send individual members into the field without the team being fully assembled.
 - b) Leave the Staging Area to participate in a mission only after all of the expected members have arrived.

VI. Professionalism:

- A. Behavior of all members of PVSART must display a professional attitude on the scene as well as off.
 - 1. Professional attitude is dictated by common sense, the standard to which each member is trained, and a regard for the personal safety of all parties involved both during and after an Operation above all other issues.
 - 2. Members must not claim to be proficient in their ability to perform procedures in which they have not been trained or for which they lack confidence in their skills and abilities to complete.
- B. Members must continue to display a professional attitude and not perform an action that could reasonably be expected to reflect poorly on PVSART, its membership, or the larger New Hampshire search and rescue community.
- C. Members must remember that PVSART is part of a broader community of search and rescue organizations that cooperate closely on a regular basis. Every effort should be made to support and foster intra as well as inter-agency camaraderie.
- D. Photographs or videos during and after a mission may be taken provided:
 - 1. They are made for the purposes of a search or do not otherwise interfere with the Operation;
 - 2. They are in good taste and not graphic;
 - 3. They are not distributed outside of PVSART without permission of the photographer and either the PVSART President or Vice President.

4. They are not copied, downloaded, posted, displayed or forwarded by members to non-members.
- E. Members must not publicly disseminate any of the following information about an ongoing or completed mission (including to friends, family, news media, or on any public or private Internet-based social media platform) without approval from the PVSART President or Vice President unless such information is already in the public domain:
1. Identities of subjects;
 2. Medical conditions or medical procedures performed on subjects;
 3. Any matters that would be considered confidential;

Speculation, rumors and other unconfirmed information discussed or overheard during Operations.

VII. Planning, Strategy, Tactics and Operations

A. The Chain of Command

1. The overall planning and operational authority of a field response belongs to the NH Fish & Game Department.
2. The overall incident will be run under the Incident Command System (ICS). PVSART members must be familiar with the form and vocabulary of the ICS in order to function smoothly with other agencies.
3. The Team Leader is responsible for all PVSART operations and has the authority to stop any unsafe behavior.
4. During a search each crew departing the Staging Area on a mission will have a Leader assigned by the Staging Officer.
5. During a carryout the first PVSART member to arrive at the patient will assume the role of Team Leader until relieved by a member of higher authority or seniority.
6. On scene changes in the Team Leader role must be clearly communicated to all involved. Both members, the one giving up the position, and the one undertaking the position must be present together and aware of the exchange and all others in the Team's chain of command must be notified.

B. Knowledge and Skills of SAR

In general, members need to be familiar with and are responsible for working to meet the objectives listed in the PVSART SAR Technician Objectives. All members should, at a minimum, be familiar with:

1. The Incident Command System (ICS-100)
2. Personal safety
3. Land navigation (e.g., map and compass, GPS)
4. Basic Search Techniques (e.g., Types I-III, confinement operations, concepts of active and passive search)
5. Basic patient packaging and transport techniques (e.g., Stokes Litter, SKED)
6. CPR and Basic First Aid

C. Communicating with the Media

It is the policy of PVSART to not communicate with the news media during field operations. Refer all questions to the Command Post.

D. Safety

Personal and team safety are of the highest priority in all phases of search and rescue operations. Any member uncomfortable with a particular duty or situation due to safety concerns should relay the circumstances by the appropriate chain of command to the Team Leader. Members may refuse to perform an action that they deem unsafe or beyond their abilities at any time.

E. Providing Medical Care in the Field

Team members are expected to perform to their level of training and within the limits of the relevant laws and regulations when providing medical care while on an Operation.

F. Personal Preparation

It is the responsibility of the PVSART individual team member to be appropriately prepared for SAR operations. Any unprepared member may be required to end their participation in an Operation and depart the scene.

G. Attitude

Members on a call represent the PVSART and are expected to behave professionally at all times. Any behavior counterproductive to the team's efforts

will not be tolerated. Unessential critiques and dissent have no place during or after an operation.

H. Dismissal

Any PVSART Officer or Team Leader can dismiss someone from the field at any time without discussion, and that person must be prepared to leave as ordered. This is only done when necessary to protect the Team and maintain the safety of its members as well as the subject.

VIII. Upon Completion of an Emergency

A. Reporting PVSART Member Injuries

Members shall report any injuries to the Team Leader who shall in turn report any injuries to the Incident Commander so that they may be documented as necessary by State law.

B. Reporting PVSART Member Equipment Damage

Members shall report any personal or PVSART equipment damaged during a mission to the Team Leader. A repair or replacement for the damaged personal equipment may be reimbursed by PVSART.

C. Collecting Equipment

The Staging Officer shall collect and sign back in any PVSART equipment used during the mission and report any damaged or consumed equipment to the Team Leader so it can be repaired or replaced as necessary.

D. Leaving the Scene

All members must sign out after returning from a mission and before departing the scene. Members who depart a scene without signing out must promptly contact a PVSART Officer to maintain accountability. The Staging Officer must verify by the Mission Log that all members have departed the scene before the Staging Officer leaves the scene.

E. Debriefing Report

When appropriate, the Team Leader present on the call shall provide a written report of the mission.

F. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

Members of PVSART are encouraged to use available resources after any incident that may have been psychologically trying. There are local critical

incident stress debriefing teams composed of people trained to help others recover from the psychological trauma that often accompanies emergency work. A Critical Incident Stress Debriefing can be arranged through any PVSART Officer.

IX. Personal Responsibility/Liability

- A. All members must be aware that the activities of PVSART are hazardous and that there is the possibility of death, disability, and/or loss of property and that the member recognizes and accepts these risks, releasing PVSART and its members from all liability.
- B. When working or training directly under the auspices of New Hampshire Fish & Game, PVSART members are considered State of New Hampshire employees and are provided with Workers Compensation and are indemnified from liability except for cases of negligence or illegal activities.