

Bureau County Mounted Search and Rescue

What To Do When We Get a Call Out

Leaving Home

Is your SAR bag ready to go? Are the items packed inside suitable for the weather?

Upon arrival, we don't know what kind of parking is available. Will it be a large parking lot? A narrow country gravel road? A muddy field? Be prepared.

Signing In

The first thing that we need to determine when we arrive is "Where do we sign in?" Please do not proceed on horseback until you have signed in. Usually, the sign in sheet will be located near the parking. If parking is strung out (like on a narrow gravel road) the sign-in sheet (and staging area) may be located nearby.

Staging Area

The Staging Area is the central place for searchers to congregate. It is usually separate from the Command Post, where only the command staff operates. The Staging Area should have food, water, and bathroom facilities. Unless parking is a problem, the Staging Area will be close to where members park their vehicles. At the Staging Area, members receive a pre-search briefing and search assignments, and move to the field. The Staging Area is always a separate from the place where the family and friends of the subject reside.

The Staging Person will brief you. The Staging Person is responsible for communications and for the safety of the team. Any equipment that is available will be handed out. The Staging Person must remain in the staging area for the whole search so will not be a mounted or a ground searcher. If you do not plan on searching today, please let Command Post know that you are available to be the Staging Person.

The briefing is given by the Staging Person to:

- inform the team of the situation
- provide an orientation to the area
- provide an objective
- present subject information
- and answer questions

The briefing must be as complete as possible. Give Subject Information, outline the terrain on a map, and be specific about the assignment/mission. All information given must be recorded and posted at the Command Post. All team leaders will write down all information presented and any information found in the field.

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Command Post Operations

The Command Post is the heart and mind of SAR. Only designated support personnel will work at the Command Post. The Search Manager, Assistant Manager, Support Leader, and Communication Coordinator will be at the Command Post. The command post has radios or scanners covering all the frequencies used, maps, food and water, SAR equipment, operation information, and will issue all search missions. People will be designated to contact places where the subject might have called or returned to (home, cabin, friends, bars, hospital, motels, etc.).

Site Safety

Searcher well-being greatly affects search quality. The site must be made hospitable to SAR crews. Looking for and preventing exhaustion and dehydration in fellow searchers is everyone's responsibility. Control of the media and on-lookers and protecting site access becomes important in searches. All site problems should be relayed to the Command Post. Any searcher may be pulled from the field by any leader if safety problems develop.

Attraction

Attraction is the action of leading the subject to a location. Various signaling devices are used to guide/attract the subject including: police and fire-engine sirens, mega-phones, car and air horns, flashing lights, bonfires, balloons, illuminated posters, chemical lightsticks, flashlights, bright string, and markings on the ground.

Confinement

The purpose of confinement is to keep a person within a specific area. This can be done many ways. Trail and road blocks can monitor all traffic, report any sightings, and should be continually manned. Lookouts are at prominent points that provide a good view of likely travel areas, provide signaling to the subject. Track traps are cleanly raked dirt areas that may the subject may walk over and leave tracks.

Survey Taping

All trails and routes traveled should be marked with survey tape. Also, all clues should be flagged. On the tape, record the leader's name, time & date placed, and any clue information. All tape must be removed at the end of the search. Note: when a clue is found, DO NOT MOVE IT (unless necessary). Mark it and record the position.

Subject Communication

The subject may try to call for help. Three of a kind of anything is an emergency signal. It may be three gunshots, three radio clicks, or three light flashes. Other messages include trail signs, (disrupted items), dropped articles and tracks. All searchers should be alert to any communication attempts or clues anywhere. Also be wary of any 'clues' (candy wrappers, etc.) that could be from other searchers.

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Dealing with Subject's Relatives/Friends

During a search, a lost subject's relatives and/or friends are under stress, will worry about the subject, and can be influenced easily.

- Even the slightest off-comment can create problems. Care must be taken not to cause more injury.
- Do not talk of unsuccessful past searches, what problems the person may be encountering, or of other negative subjects.
- Do not ignore them or allow them to disrupt SAR operations.
- Do support the people via care and concern for them, the situation, and the lost subject.
- Show professional action in SAR activities, provide constant feedback, and speak of hope and the strength of the subject.
- Make them as comfortable, mentally and physically, as possible.
- They should not be in the field, or at the Command Post.

What if I can't search today?

My horse is lame and I can't ride.

-- Are you willing to be a ground pounder? We always need people on the ground. We also need gophers. Be prepared to do anything.

I broke my foot, but I don't want to be left out.

Perhaps you can be the Staging Person. Or you can assist the staging person. Or you can monitor the radio. Or maybe be a lookout. There is always something to do. (Bring your own chair)