

SOP 5.02 – Body Retrieval Procedures

Section 5 – Emergency Operations

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Effective Date – 10 December 2020

Review Date – 10 December 2022

Electronically Controlled Document

Purpose

To describe the procedure to be followed by applicable agency personnel involved in potential body retrievals.

Scope

This standard operating procedure (SOP) applies to all Life Saving Victoria (LSV) personnel (i.e., paid staff, officers and volunteer members) where engaged in body retrievals.

Policy Statement

The retrieval of deceased persons is an unfortunate but sometimes necessary part of search and rescue (SAR) operations. Through their patrol duties, lifesaving members may become involved as first responders.

It is not appropriate to risk life, serious injury or major equipment damage in body retrieval operations.



Definitions

Name	Definition
LSV	Life Saving Victoria
LSVComms	Life Saving Victoria Communications

Procedure

The retrieval of deceased persons is an unfortunate but sometimes necessary part of Search and Rescue operations. Lifesaving members through their patrol duties may become involved as first responders.

Members may locate bodies either on land or in water. A body in water under normal circumstances will initially sink and then over 36-72 hours depending on water depth and temperature as the body's cells degenerate, gas will be released and the body will float.

Note: Cold water will slow down degeneration and deeper water will compress the gases. This means that generally colder water will cause a body to take longer to rise to the surface.

General Principles

- The body should be disturbed as little as possible so as to allow Police to conduct any necessary investigation
- LSVComms should be notified as soon as practicable and they will then notify the Police.
- Isolate the area.
- Consider:
 - Members of the public,
 - Relatives / friends,
 - The deceased person.
- Note locations, times and other relevant details.
- Keep any witnesses close to the scene or take contact details.
- At no time should the media be advised of any details of the incident. All media enquiries should be handled by the LSV Media department by contacting the LSV Media Line on 0411 193 962 (24 hours/7days).

Land Recovery

- Assess the situation.
- A body must not be moved without authorisation from Police. If authorised, note any details and keep as close as possible to the original site.
- Minimise direct body contact.

Water Recovery

- Assess the situation.
- Recover body if authorised by the Police.
- Minimise direct contact with body.
- If recovery is not possible, mark or note the location and maintain contact and or sight of the body if possible.

Safety

Consideration should be given to risks during a body retrieval given the limited potential gains. Services should never be exposed to unnecessary risk in order to recover a clearly deceased patient.

All normal hazards associated with search and rescue operations apply. It is not appropriate to risk life, injury or equipment damage in body recovery operations.

The risk of exposure to infectious diseases is increased and the use of gloves, aprons and goggles are advised.

Personnel involved in operational activities should be aware of the available counselling services that aid in maintaining psychological health. Please refer to Critical Incident Management and Peer Support procedures.

Recovery Kits (Optional)

Lifesaving operation facilities that are involved in search and rescue operations should consider maintaining a body recovery kit.

This should include:

- body bag,
- arm length gloves (2 pairs),
- disposal blanket/sheet,
- biohazard bags/plastic bags,
- protective face masks (cloth),
- disinfectant, and
- a small anchor/buoy system.

Psychological First Aid

A voluntary operational debrief will be organised following an incident where any member has been involved in a body retrieval. This will be organised through LSVComms and facilitated by the LSV state duty officer or nominated representative.

Review	
Date of Issue	10 December 2020
Date Effective	26 December 2020
Date to be Reviewed	1 July 2022
Date to Cease	10 December 2022

Authority
The Life Saving Operations Council Executive has approved this SOP under section 8.3.6(e) of the Life Saving Victoria By-laws, 2019.

