

SOP 5.04 – Search and Rescue Operations

Section 5 – Emergency Procedures

Page 1 of 3

Effective Date – 1 September 2018

Review Date – 1 September 2020

Electronically Controlled Document

Purpose

To define the procedures involved in Search and Rescue Operations during and outside normal patrol hours.

Scope

These procedures apply to all operational levels of Life Saving Victoria.

Procedures

Introduction

A Search and Rescue (SAR) operation is defined as a situation which involves the dispatch of a rescue team to an incident, the exact location of which may or may not be known.

Search and Rescue operations are primarily the responsibility of Victoria Police.

In all marine incidents where volunteer rescue organisations are utilised in Victoria, all actions are coordinated by, and under the direct control of Victoria Police.

It is important that lifesaving clubs across the State maintain a first-hand liaison with their local Police and ensure that the Police are aware of the depth of personnel, rescue and communication equipment that they have available.

Inflatable Rescue Boat (IRB) / Rescue Water Craft (RWC) and Offshore Rescue Boat (ORB / RIB) crews must ensure they are aware of the various hazards and dangers that exist in their area of operation, and also the black spots which occur in radio communication.

The number of suitably qualified members available to participate in a search and rescue mission will vary from summer to winter, weekend, workday or after dark. It is important that clubs maintain and provide up-to-date emergency response contact information to Life Saving Victoria.

During normal patrol hours, it is reasonably easy to call upon selected personnel to participate in a SAR operation. However, it is much more difficult at other times, and therefore each club should have a selected club officer who should be familiar with those willing to participate and draw up a "call out" schedule accordingly.

**S
O
P**

The local Police should contact the Police Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) who will contact Life Saving Victoria's 24 hr emergency contact number 13 SURF (**13 7873**). This number must be called for activation of Lifesaving resources.

For **ALL** callout's to a major incident during patrol hours or out of hours, you must obtain permission from the State Duty Officer **prior** to responding (this must be done by contacting LSVComms either by phone or radio). Irrespective of whether the request to attend something has come from police, ambulance or other Emergency Service Organisations (ESO) in person or by phone.

Safety First: it is essential to Stop, Plan, Act as Member safety is our first priority

You must not assume that LSVComms will overhear your internal radio communication. Although LSVComms monitors many channels and may be involved with many incidents at the same time, It is your responsibility and that of the lifesaving service responding to ensure that all involved are acting within Current SOPs and are communicating specifically to LSVComms / the State Duty Officer.

Initial search and rescue response

If a problem arises that appears to involve a search and rescue, LSVComms should be contacted initially and they will contact appropriate agencies.

Search and rescue operations – Daytime

A simple rescue utilising an Inflatable Rescue Boat can generally be achieved by three or four members, depending on the way in which the boat can be launched.

- One member should act as an observer/recorder on the beach to ensure beach access is clear and will maintain constant communication with the IRB Crew via radio as well as with 13SURF via either radio communication or phone and have radio contact with the IRB.
- A minimum of two qualified crew members (Driver and Crewman) in the IRB with an approved radio in waterproof bag/harness and wearing L50 Lifejackets.

Before embarking on a search and rescue, the crew of the boat should ascertain the following details regarding the incident:

- At minimum the 4 P's (Position, People, Problem, Progress)
- Details of incident.
- Location and time when incident occurred.
- Description of craft / persons if applicable.
- Potential emergency evaluation.
- Direction of wind and sea currents.
- Tidal Movement.

**S
O
P**

The name, address and best contact number of the person who reported the incident should be recorded.

Where possible, the beach observer should maintain some form of contact with the Police and LSVComms.

The probability of finding survivors and their chance of survival diminish with each minute after an incident occurs. Therefore, the response time to an incident should be kept to a minimum whilst maintaining safe practices. The principles of pause, plan and respond should be adhered to.

Additional information can be relayed via radio to the rescue IRB as the search and rescue proceeds.

It is essential that radio communications are maintained at regular intervals to the rescue boat. It may be necessary to dispatch a Radio Operator to maintain radio contact and/or telephone contact with the Police and LSVComms.

A concise written record should be maintained during the course of the SAR, noting the time and sequence of each important event.

Members called out to a search and rescue should be appropriately attired and readily identified as Lifesaving members.

Search area

From the information available, the crew of the boat in conjunction with the search authority must try to establish as accurately as possible, the area within which the survivor or craft is located.

Having determined the size of the area to be searched, the crew must then decide on the search pattern to be used, taking into consideration the utilisation of other resources should they be available. Victoria Police may also provide direction in regard to search pattern and size.

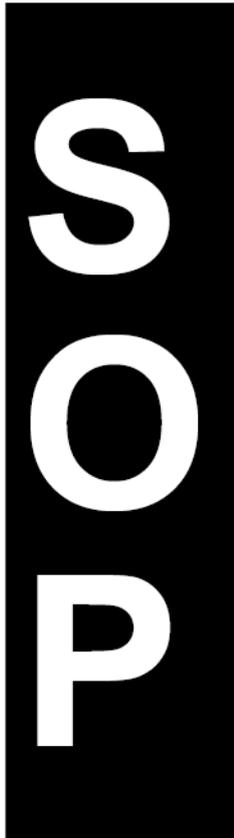
The distance between each leg of a search pattern will depend on the size of the search target being sought and sea conditions.

These two factors must be carefully evaluated to ensure that the search area is visually covered.

Accordingly, the distance between each leg of a search pattern should be equal to the estimated distance that the search target can be readily discerned in the prevailing conditions.

It should be appreciated that the horizontal view from an IRB is very restricted. As an example, in flat sea conditions with good visibility the following sight distances could be expected:

- IRB Driver sitting - 2.5 nautical miles
- IRB Crewman standing - 2.7 nautical miles



Depending on the height of the search target, the visual distance can be increased accordingly:

- Small boat (1 metre high side view) + 2.0 nautical miles
- Medium boat (3 metre high side view) + 3.6 nautical miles
- Large boat (5 metre high side view) + 4.6 nautical miles

In bad sea conditions, the IRB crews' vision can be reduced significantly.

It is essential that the police member in charge of a search and rescue is aware of the visual limitations of our rescue craft, and in combined SAR exercises, realise that when directing an IRB to a rescue, that their visual limits are far less than that of an Offshore Rescue Boat or a Rescue Helicopter.

Fatigue

Crews participating in search and rescue operations should be aware of their diminishing operational capabilities with the advent of fatigue over a period of time.

Records compiled over a period of years reveal that that the success rate of crews of search and rescue missions falls rapidly over a period of four hours.

Fatigue has a direct relationship to "visual vigilance" and "mental-physical reflexes" which materially affects the capabilities of an IRB crew to perform given tasks in varying sea conditions. Accordingly, the following crew schedules are recommended as maximums during any consecutive 24 hour period.

Patrol & Surveillance

- Seas under 1.5 metres - 8 hours
- Seas 1.5 metres and over - 6 hours

Daytime Search & Rescue

- Seas under 1.5 metres - 4 hours
- Seas 1.5 metres and over - 3 hours

Search & Rescue at Night

- Seas under 1.5 metres - 2 hours
- Seas 1.5 metres and over - 1.5 hours

After dark search and rescue operations

Search and Rescue operations after dark are **not approved** for IRBs because of their small size and vulnerability to capsize in surf conditions that are not clearly visible.

S
O
P