

# DISTRESSED VICTIM UNIT

## STAND, SCAN, & SEMAPHORE

### THE STAND

Your stand is your office. Its where you will watch over the guests and residents of the Town of Ocean City, perform rescues, administer first aid, offer information, and observe the events on your assigned beach. Your stand must be placed in position to give you the best vantage point, view of the shorebreak, and accessibility to the water; it needs to be placed ahead of the umbrella line and upon hard sand. You may need to move your stand two-three times per day during extreme tidal changes so that you position your stand optimally. ***The stand placement creates the legal eastern boundary for umbrellas and all forms of ball play; therefore placing the stand is legislative and should not be taken lightly.***

A sand pile must be placed at the base of the stand as a necessary safety precaution for jumping from the top rung of the chair. Moreover, SRTs should never jump from the platform

of the chair. Injuries sustained without following these safety precautions may not be covered by the Town of Ocean City.

There are signs posted on the back of the stand that cannot be covered with SRT equipment. If the signs have chalkboards, the boards must be filled out with weather, ocean and tide conditions daily, and before the SRT is considered "***on duty***."

### SEMAPHORE

The form of semaphore used for communication with the Ocean City Beach Patrol is not unique to this city. The form originates from the U.S. Navy, which used two flags to communicate between ships. The Beach Patrol has continued semaphore signaling between SRTs as a reliable means of communicating. The patrol has adapted this system of signaling to include a number of abbreviations that designate specific codes used in everyday language. Remember, using semaphore should not distract you from your primary duty of watching

the water. **KEEP MESSAGES SHORT AND TO THE POINT.** Use abbreviations when possible to cut down on the length of the message. **ALL** communication must be professional. The beach patrol is not the only organization that uses semaphore, and many messages may be interpreted by the inquisitive beach patrons who are always watching. Keep messages professional in language and demeanor.



#### ***Benefits of Semaphore:***

1. *No batteries required.*
2. *No radio interference.*
3. *Can be used from land or sea.*
4. *No equipment required.*
5. *Enforces north and south scanning.*
6. *Is critical component of coverage and back up procedures.*



***Buoy "Locked and Loaded"*** - Placed ~5 yards in front of the sand and leaning eastward with the rail against the sand. The harness should be strapped tightly along the west rail of the buoy. This placement is most effective for: 1) maintaining eye contact with the victim; 2) rescue speed and efficiency; and 3) establishing a zone for landing from the stand.

***Buoy Placed on Top Rung*** - The buoy on the front of the stand in a "ready knot" that can be dislodged instantly with the harness acting as a sling holding the buoy in place. This position is ideal for: 1) enhancing visibility to the neighboring guards; 2) preventing the buoy from being knocked down by tide and winds; and 3) placing the stand on the water's edge.

# PASSIVE VICTIM UNIT

## SEARCH AND RECOVERY

It is easy for families and groups to become separated in the beach environment. The long shore current sweeps unknowing bathers down the beach and they exit the water in a location different from where they entered. All ~9 miles of Ocean City's beach looks similar, especially to children and tourists; so when coming out of the water they can walk in the wrong direction and become lost. Additionally, the many activities and attractions to see at the beach will attract people away from the group. Occasionally the person fails to tell others in the group that he or she is going somewhere. In either case, after a while, that person is discovered missing, and the fear of a possible drowning inevitably enters the minds of the missing person's friends and loved ones.

Although the lost person may, indeed, be lost in the water, this is rare in Ocean City. In contrast, lost children situations are extremely common, sometimes hundreds of missing children are reported and returned over a single weekend. **If there was not a confirmed visual of the victim submerging, they are presumed missing, not drowned.** Each passing moment, however, causes the individuals belonging to the missing person's party to become more anxious with thoughts of the victim drowning, therefore the beach patrol needs locate the victim quickly and efficiently; this is where semaphore and our good scans makes us successful at returning approximately a thousand children each summer. When receiving the lost child message, make sure to take the time to add the victim's description to your scan. Often the child will be wandering alone along the water's edge or back of the beach. Most often they walk with the wind.

If a guard loses sight of a victim during a rescue, or if a person approaches a guard telling of a person he or she saw submerging, the search and recovery procedure is initiated immediately. The SRT will use 3 blasts each direction and jump from the stand and, if available, **should take fins and goggles.** A brief moment is required to **obtain an exact description of the last seen point** and the SRT will quickly begin surface dives or, in shallower water, tread through the area of the last seen point.

**Upon witnessing a search in progress a CC will make a call to headquarters of a possible missing person and have headquarters stand by until he or she arrives on scene to confirm the missing person. A radio operator must always remain on scene, so covering guards, other than the CC, will enter and assist the first rescuer until officers arrive.** During deep water searches, a group of no more than six guards should perform surface dives in the area of the last scene point. In deep water the buoy leash will hinder the depth of the dive, so the SRT will need to remove the harness. However, the buoys will be needed for victim retrieval and, during long search efforts, recovery for the rescuers. Therefore, SRTs should connect buoys by taking his or her harness and threading it through the crown of another guards buoy; then the buoy will be placed through its own harness to create a knot. This should take seconds and the neighboring rescuer can continue search attempts while the new-coming rescuer attaches the buoy. **The first guard to begin**



**surface dives at the last scene point must try to align two points, one behind the other, both to the north and south, and remember them to prevent the search from drifting and causing rescuers to lose their orientation.**

The highest ranking beach patrol member on scene will assume the incident command and will stay on the beach with a radio. They will also orchestrate search operations as more rescuers become available. **Responding quads and officers should be obtaining rovers and unassigned personnel from crews while en route to the location of the search.** Officers on scene are encouraged to use available wave runners or rescue boards with a radio bag, which will make for improved communication between the ocean and land; as well as improved visibility in the water. **Other groups of 4-6 rescuers can be made and search in various locations; a decision that the incident commander will make based on surf conditions and witness reports.** Remember, resuscitable victims are usually found at the last seen point, regardless of water conditions. Victims with a large amount of body fat, and victims that have been submerged a long time, are more likely to move with the current.

Shallow water searches involve trudging through water that is less than chest deep. Rescuers should have the buoy dragging passively behind them from the leash so that it doesn't impede the guards progress while marching through the surf zone. **Its important that the buoy lanyard is just a few inches longer than the rescuer's leg while the harness is worn. Long leashes will cause searching rescuers to trip.** Covering guards and additional rescuers will form a line, of no more than six people, locking arms and sweeping the area by foot using a systematic movement north and south in the area of the last scene point. **This will assure that the entire bottom of the last scene point has been searched.** As additional search lines are created, the search area should expand north, south and, if deemed necessary by the incident commander, a deep water group should be added to the search.

# ACTIVE VICTIM UNIT

**Pulling Back:** This is an Ocean City Beach Patrol procedure for seeking shelter. When pulled back a guard has a visual of his or her area of responsibility and can access it swiftly in case of an emergency. Guards must bring flags, first aid kit, and CPR mask to the pulled back area and have a buoy placed in front of the beach access point. They will be expected to rise and acknowledge passing beach patrol vehicles. Unless permission has been granted by the officer in charge, no more than two guards can be pulled back at the same location; except for the inlet crew and some other special circumstances.



## POOR WEATHER PROCEDURES

### Rain

Ordinarily crews will not pull back for rain except when the rain is so severe that the water is entirely clear of all patrons, including surfers. When the entire crew area water is clear, the crew chief may decide to pull back. *Like on a stand, SRTs may not leave the pull back location unless relieved by the rover. If any bathers or surfers return to the water, SRTs must go back out and can either stand at the base of the stand, on the beach in front of the swimmers, or get back up in the stand. If 1725, all SRTs must go back out on the beach and pull the stands back. Just like while on the stand, reading materials, cell phones, and electronic devices other than radios are not permitted.*

### Lightning

When lightning is in the area, SRTs must get off the stand, clear the water

and the beach, and pull back immediately. This decision is usually made by the crew chief, however if a SRT has a positive identification of lightning it must be reported to the CC through semaphore. **When any beach patrons or bathers, including surfers, do not heed the warnings of the SRT, the CC will log the refusal with headquarters. Covered beach patrol vehicles with public address systems will be used for all secondary attempts to clear the water and beach.** If a patron is struck by lightning, the SRTs must understand the Risk/Benefit equation and check the scene before risking his or her safety in making an emergency response. **A beach patrol supervisor in a covered vehicle will respond to the lightning strike victim using a code 3 response, and perform the necessary first aid or CPR from the shelter of the vehicle.**

### Fog

Fog is a very dangerous and deceptive element in all water environments. Even the most experienced guards can easily lose their ability to navigate back to shore. Since all bathers,

swimmers and surfers in an SRTs area will be hard to see from the stand, it is important that SRTs monitor the area from the shoreline on **Foot Patrol**. Foot Patrol is a unique method of guarding for several reasons: 1) *the decision to go on foot is made by the SRT, not the CC since semaphore communication is not possible when the fog approaches (note: foot patrol is not initiated until the neighboring stand (s) is inundated by fog and no longer visible), 2) this is the only time in which walking is permitted on the beach by an SRT.*

While on foot patrol, the SRT begins walking with a buoy, flags and first aid kit in the direction of the fog that is most dense. Bathers and swimmers are to be grouped together and kept west of the sandbar close to shore. Once the neighboring SRT is seen, the buoy is raised by each in acknowledgement, and foot patrol proceeds in the opposite direction. If the neighboring stand is reached before a visual of the SRT, an emergency is assumed and a guard should send "CVR," even if it goes unseen, and run a cover. *A guard's flags and first aid kit on the sand mark the point of rescue entry.*

# ACTIVE VICTIM UNIT

## Actively Drowning Victims



Actively drowning victims are at a critical point between life or death. Approximately, 15-20% of OCBP rescues are actively drowning victims. All efforts should be made to **minimize these rescues by responding promptly while**

**victims are distressed and by preventing non-swimmers from getting into areas where they are required to swim.** An active drowning victim is vertical in the water, attempting to maintain their airway above the surface. They will usually be facing shore, in a state of panic, and hyperventilating. The psychogenic hyperventilation may reduce their physiological drive to breathe due to reduced blood level of carbon dioxide; this could make them more susceptible blacking out while under water and lead to drowning. **Most active drowning victims can stay above water for between 10-60 seconds before submersion.**

### Signs and Symptoms

- Climbing the ladder
- Double-arm grasping
- Flailing arms
- Screaming help
- Splashes
- Doublehead, potential rescuer



**IMPORTANT:** SRTs must be aware that actively drowning victims are the victims that flat water or pool guards usually come across. These situations do not need to involve rip currents. Most often they occur when individuals step into an inshore hole, or fall off a flotation device. Therefore attention is also required outside of the surf zone, away from rock jetties, and rip currents where we are all responsible for a "large public pool."



### Identifying Non-Swimmers:

Scanning from rip-to-rip, guard stand-to-guard stand is an easy habit for a veteran guard to fall into. We must be reminded that we are guarding a very large pool of water, and not just dangerous ocean currents and shorebreak, so its mandatory that SRTs identify potential non-swimmers with each scan and be sure they are in safe areas of shallow water where they are not required to swim. Based on statistics, here are the signs of a non swimmer:

- Over-prepared for the water with flotation devices, goggles, water shoes, etc.
- Age extremes
- Physical frailty or obesity; deconditioned
- Pale or sunburned
- Minority
- Nervous in the water; appearing anxious.

### MANDATORY

The most serious victim circumstance is the active drowning victim, and it is the easiest situation for a guard focussed only on trouble spots, such as rips and rock jetties, to miss since it can occur at any time and at any place. SRTs must try to identify non-swimmers with each sweeping scan, and prevent those potential non-swimmers from entering water overhead. The SRT must notify the rover of the non-swimmers in the area before leaving their stand.

