
**Ocean City Fire Department
Standard Operating Guidelines**

Special Operations

Subject: Underwater Rescue
Revised: 12.18.2019
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Approved: 01.10.2020
Section: 508.00

508.01 Scope

This guideline applies to all members of the Ocean City Fire Department that are responsible for participating with an underwater emergency.

508.02 Purpose

The purpose of this SOG is to provide a guideline for conducting underwater search, rescue and recovery operations.

508.03 Terms

- A. Underwater emergency/rescue - submerged victim with a chance of resuscitation (up to 1 hour in cold water situations)
- B. Diver – SCUBA certified member of the OCFD Dive Rescue Team
- C. Rescuer – SCUBA certified diver
- D. Ocean City Fire Department’s Dive Rescue Team – is a team of a maximum of 16 certified SCUBA divers organized to perform underwater rescue and recovery.
- E. Dive Team Commander – certified SCUBA
- F. Recovery – may be a body, evidence, or a search for a particular object. If it pertains to a victim, there would be no chance of resuscitation.

508.04 Procedure

- A. Phase 1 – Response
 - 1. Rescue Dive calls - all on-duty divers (City-wide) are needed at the scene, and all off-duty Dive Team members shall be alerted on the initial dispatch for Level 2 and 3 WTRRES nature codes. Divers on crews that were not dispatched initially shall respond with the permission of the OIC. The OIC will assist with this process and may rearrange crews to maintain EMS coverage. Recovery Dive calls – on-duty divers will not be utilized for these types of call without the prior permission of a Deputy Chief or designee. The Deputy Chief will notify the Duty Chief. The dive team will be alerted with normal dispatch procedures but only off-duty divers and volunteer divers will be utilized for these types of calls

2. The Water Rescue Vehicle shall function as the primary dive unit with three (3) sets of dive gear.
 3. A Utility vehicle should be sent immediately to Station 3 to pick up the Dive Team Trailer.
- B. Phase 2 – Arrival on Scene, Establish Command & Scene Size-up
1. Scene Safety
 - a. The local law enforcement agency (OCPD, Worcester County Sheriff, or Maryland State Police) should secure the scene and any witnesses.
 - b. Determine hazard zones and appropriate PPE
 - 1) hot, warm, cold
 - 2) PFD, exposure protection
 2. Additional Resources
 - a. Law Enforcement (Police, USCG, MNRP)
 - b. Mutual Aid Dive Teams
 - 1) Primary (Millville, Selbyville, MSP, Dept. of Natural Resources Police)
 - 2) Secondary (Salisbury and Millsboro)
 - 3) Side Scan Sonar (Millville, Selbyville, Millsboro, MNRP, OCFD Fire Boat 2)
 - 4) Underwater Metal Detector (Sta. 3)
 - 5) FLIR (Aviation, OCFD Fire Boat 1))
 - 6) Night Vision Binoculars (7540)
 3. Scene Evaluation / Witness Interview
 - a. secure witness
 - b. examine physical/scene evidence
 - c. conduct a Risk/Benefit Analysis
 - d. determine Rescue vs. Recovery
 - 1) Rescue <60 minutes
 - 2) Recovery >60 minutes
 - e. Mark witness location(s) to use as reference points
 - f. Establish a last point seen (LPS)
 4. Mode of Operations
 - a. Rescue – Immediate entry by Primary rapid diver for a systematic search of last seen point.
 - b. Recovery
 - 1) expand Command Structure (Unified Command)
 - 2) prepare for and assist in investigation
 - 3) continue scene evaluation.
- C. Phase 3 - Pre-Rescue Operations
1. Make the Hazard Zone Safe - establish staging area within walking distance from the water.
 2. Use Aviation units and/or OCFD Fire Boat 1 which are equipped with FLIR for recon of the area
 3. Make rescue area safe
 - a. brief diver on potential hazards
 - b. establish medical triage/treatment area
 - c. appropriate PFD's - **No Turnout Gear Near Water**
 - d. Rapid Neurological Exam on diver(s)

D. Phase 4 – Rescue/Recovery Operations

1. Surface Rescue
 - a. talk victim into self-rescue
 - b. reach for the victim with some object like a pike pole
 - c. throw the victim a throw bag or PFD
 - d. consider boat rescue
 - e. Only rescuers with proper training and equipment (buoy/PFD) will be allowed to enter the water. Prior to entering the water the rescuer will discuss the action plan including specific tasks and objectives, hazards and alternate plans. The rescuer shall never be attached to a lifeline without a quick-connect release mechanism. At no time will members hold their breath in an attempt to locate a victim beneath the surface of water.
 - f. Upon successful rescue the victim is to be assessed in the triage/treatment area by medical staff and transport determined
2. Submerged vehicle or victim submersion/vessel rescue requiring use of the Rapid Diver System (RDS)
 - a. The function and intent of the RDS is for rapid entry rescue of a recently submerged victim and may be used without communications and with limited backup tethered personnel or safety measures usually established at the scene of a full dive incident. Only SCUBA certified team members may use the RDS equipment.
 - b. Depth shall be limited to twenty (20) feet and must be tended with line by land based individuals using quick release shackle and harness from dive gear bags.
 - c. Prior to entry, the initial crew including the RDS diver will perform and provide a scene size-up and a risk/benefit analysis before entering the water.
 - d. The RDS diver shall not enter into any confined space other than by arm's reach.
 - e. At no time shall RDS be used for search and recovery operations.
 - f. Once additional dive members and full service SCUBA equipment arrive, the RDS will be retired from use for the incident and full SCUBA with communications will be engaged following OCFD dive procedures and SOGs.
 - g. If the subject has an unknown or unwitnessed disappearance greater than one (1) hour, or an unknown location, the RDS shall not be used. Only an incident with a verified location and time will justify the use of the RDS for entry.
3. Underwater Rescue (All positions shall have a Tender assigned)
 - a. Divers to receive witness information as well as last seen point or information gathered from a diver using RDS.

- b. Primary Diver to determine “Dive” or “No Dive” Decision
- c. Primary Diver to determine search pattern needed
 - 1) shore based sweep pattern
 - 2) shore based parallel pattern
 - 3) shore based snag pattern
 - 4) boat based pattern
 - 5) tank pressure, entry time, neuro exam recorded
 - 6) equipment check
 - 7) jack stay
- d. Dive plan relayed to Operations and Command
- e. Primary Diver and Safety Diver 100% in-Service
 - 1) tank pressure, times and neuro exam recorded
 - 2) equipment check
- f. 90% diver moved into position
 - 1) immediate area of Safety Diver
 - 2) able to assume the immediate role as Safety Diver
- g. Victim located
 - 1) diver to note position of the body and depth of water
 - 2) signal tender that “Target” is located
 - a) Rescue – diver ascend to the surface with the victim. Tender assists entry by pulling search line inward. EMS to immediately provide BLS and ALS care
 - b) Recovery – safety diver deploys down the search rope with a Victim Recovery System or body bag. Victim is placed in the system and swam up the search rope to shore where additional resources assist in the body removal. Body to be assessed by ALS to confirm death prior to being turned over to Law Enforcement or Medical Examiner.

E. Phase 5 – Additional Considerations

- 1. Temperature variations (heat/cold) - rotate crews frequently
- 2. Rain/Snow – consider effects on hazard profile
- 3. Time of Day – consider lighting, strobes, glow sticks
- 4. Consider effect on family, friends and bystanders. Keep them informed of operations, goals and objectives. Ensure them that we will continue as long as it is safe to do so.
- 5. Assign PIO to make media/news contacts

F. Phase 6 – Demobilization

- 1. Accountability
 - a. Divers
 - b. Tenders
 - c. Boat Crew
- 2. Decontamination
 - a. Gross – water
 - b. Biohazard – Cavicide, Spray 9 and water
- 3. Debriefing
- 4. Equipment Accountability

5. Fill tanks to appropriate pressure while submerged $\frac{3}{4}$ of their length in water in order to avoid "hot fills".
6. Restock equipment if necessary.
7. Secure the scene in conjunction with law enforcement.
8. Thoroughly wash and rinse gear, hang to dry.

508.05 Eligibility

- A. Membership is open to members of the Ocean City Fire Department. Other public safety personnel may be considered for membership at the discretion of the Fire Chief.
- B. Interested personnel must submit a copy of diver certification cards/certificates and letter of intent to the Dive Team Commander for review.
- C. The Dive Team Commander along with the Battalion Chief assigned to the administration of the Dive Team will interview and decide which individuals are best qualified to be members of the Dive Rescue Team. Qualified individuals shall be referred to Fire Chief for appointment to the team.
- D. The Ocean Fire Department's Dive Rescue Team will be the primary organization deployed to both emergency and non-emergency events where the possibility of an Underwater Rescue situation may occur.

