

NEVADA COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

**SEARCH AND RESCUE
VOLUNTEER MANUAL**



NEVADA COUNTY SHERIFF'S SEARCH AND RESCUE MANUAL

Mission Statement:

We are committed to providing excellence in public service in partnership with our community.

Policy and Responsibility:

The State of California mandates that the Sheriff of Nevada County shall have the responsibility to search for lost persons and evacuate the injured or ill (California Government Code sections 26614 and 26614.5). The Board of Supervisors has authorized the Sheriff of Nevada County to conduct search and rescue activities within the County of Nevada.

Objectives:

1. To give appropriate priority to the protection of human life.
2. To find and provide necessary medical care to subjects in distress.
3. To evacuate subjects as necessary.

To discharge this duty, a Search and Rescue Team has been organized with an officer in charge of operations as the Coordinator and trained deputies as Search and Rescue Incident Commanders.

The nucleus of the team is a group of volunteers who have been trained for such service: Nevada County Sheriff's Search and Rescue Inc. (NCSSAR).

Purpose:

The primary purpose of Nevada County Sheriff's Search and Rescue Inc. (NCSSAR) is to act under the direction of the Nevada County Sheriff's Office with all respects associated with locating, rescuing and recovering all lost, stranded, injured or otherwise incapacitated individuals. These activities may be acted upon by the request of the Nevada County Sheriff, the California Office of Emergency Services or other governmental agencies and is not limited to the geographical boundaries of Nevada County. NCSSAR is organized to respond consistent with the requirements of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

General Provisions:

The Sheriff shall have the responsibility and the authority for the development of overall plans, policies and standards to assure that effective levels of SAR services are maintained in the County of Nevada. The Sheriff has appointed a sworn officer as Coordinator of Operations. This officer shall implement the policies and procedures developed by the Sheriff, oversee daily operations, as needed, establish a course of study and field training he/she deems appropriate for the qualification and certification in all categories of SAR. The officer or his/her representative is in charge of all SAR missions in Nevada County.

The Sheriff shall have the authority to suspend, revoke, decertify, for cause, any process or certificate he has issued. The Sheriff shall have the authority to remove from membership and/or suspend any persons of NCSSAR.

Application and Background:

Application for membership in NCSSAR shall be made to the Coordinator. All accepted applicants must be eligible to be deputized, "without peace office powers", and to be registered as a disaster worker under the appropriate laws, rules and regulations of the State of California. Any NCSSAR member receiving an inquiry regarding volunteer membership shall refer the interested party to the Coordinator. Persons applying directly to the Nevada County Sheriff's Office shall be given an application and instructions in filling out the application. This person will be advised to contact the Coordinator, to set up an interview, upon completion of the application. Persons applying for membership in NCSSAR must be in reasonably good health, must possess a valid California driver's license and must be at least eighteen years of age. A special category of membership has been established for youth between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. This special category requires a waiver signed by the parent or legal guardian of the applicant, and this minor must be accompanied to all SAR functions by the parent, guardian or other responsible adult. Due to the nature of SAR activities, including death, and dying victims, no one under fourteen is allowed to be a member of NCSSAR.

When the Coordinator has received an application he/she will review it for completeness. An interview between the Coordinator and/or his/her designee and the applicant, shall take place within ten days of review of the application.

The interview shall include but not limited to:

1. Information gathering in areas of expertise, motivation and limitations.
2. Requirements and expectations from the Sheriff, including participation in ongoing training and search activities. Yearly minimums have been established for participation.
3. Upon completion of a background investigation and approval by the NCSSAR Board, an applicant will be notified of his/her acceptance or rejection to NCSSAR. Accepted applicants will be called in to receive their identification card and a schedule of training and meeting dates.

Membership NCSSAR:

It is important that a clear understanding of conditions and procedures be explained to all who are considering membership with the NCSSAR Team. These conditions and procedures include, but are not limited to, the following list:

1. No payment will be rendered for your services, and you will furnish your personal equipment. Only in certain instances will the County be responsible for loss or damage to your equipment. Meals will be furnished whenever possible while engaged in missions. Each member should carry food and water sufficient for 24 hours.
2. While on assigned duty, you will be covered by Workman's Compensation. Voluntary service to a law enforcement agency may affect the validity of your own insurance. Whether or not the County will be civilly liable for your actions while on assigned duty will depend on individual circumstances.

3. You will be expected to respond immediately when called, regardless of time of day, unless you have a valid excuse. Habitual failure to respond, even with an excuse may result in termination.

4. The success of a SAR mission is directly related to a maximum effort offered by each member. Individual recognition, however, should not be the goal of any member. Full cooperation, along with a positive and encouraging attitude is vital whenever engaged in any SAR activity. Persons creating disharmony among other personnel (poor attitude and/or derisive behavior, and negative attitudes that affect the effectiveness of other SAR volunteers) will be grounds for dismissal.

5. No member will converse or submit to an interview with the Press or news media at any time. If questioned by any representative of the Press or family members, volunteers will refer him or her to the Nevada County SAR Coordinator or SAR Public Information Officer. Should the Press take candid photographs of a search scene, volunteers will conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times.

6. No member will converse with or interview any family member or friend of a missing person, unless assigned as an interviewer by the SAR Coordinator, or is a crisis intervention member who has been assigned by the SAR Coordinator or an Incident Commander to interview or talk to these people.

7. You will work as assigned, at the direction of the SAR Coordinator, or any other person designated as your supervisor and/or Search Manager.

8. You will be expected to serve on an assigned mission until it is completed, or your services are no longer needed.

9. Time off arrangements with your employer for SAR must be made by you. The department will not make such arrangements, nor intercede on your behalf if your employer disapproves.

10. You will conform to department standards regarding personal conduct while on duty, and in no way use your affiliation with SAR for your own benefit. Do not use NCSSAR Identification Card for personal gain.

11. You will not have peace officer powers, nor be permitted to carry firearms during your service as a volunteer member of SAR.

12. No member or other person(s) pressed into service for Nevada County, under the appropriate process, shall coerce another or be coerced by another, to attempt any feat or perform any task which he/she is not qualified, by virtue of skill or training. Each person shall be the final judge as to their ability and the capability of their equipment. No person shall attempt a task that entails an unacceptable measure of risk. Unacceptable risk shall be defined as: Any feat of danger that fails to provide a margin of safety through a back-up system capable of aborting the attempt and retrieve the participants.

The foregoing conditions are not intended to discourage those who wish to offer assistance. Rather, they are stated as objectively as possible, so that the volunteer will fully understand the situation and its potential disadvantages, and to protect both the volunteer and the department.

Search and Rescue Uniform:

The uniform shirt shall be a bright orange cotton polyester blend dress type shirt. This shirt is the property of the Sheriff's Office and must be returned upon resignation or termination. Long or short sleeve style is optional; however, there are certain advantages in having long sleeves (such as protection from poison oak, mosquitoes, abrasions from brush, cold weather, etc.). This shirt will be issued when you receive Mission Ready status. You may purchase an orange SAR T-shirt to be worn at any SAR event from the quartermaster. An optional cap may also be purchased.

The authorized pants to wear during a SAR activity will be solid color olive green BDU style pants for fieldwork and black pants for formal occasions. The more standardized our SAR uniform, the more professional we will appear to the public and the news media. These hard finish pants make it difficult for tick and weeds to attach to and provide tie bottoms as added protection against ticks. These pants may be purchased at any military supply store. The Coordinator must approve any exceptions to this dress.

SAR volunteers are expected to attend all SAR activities in standard SAR uniform; this includes actual searches and special events such as the County Fair and fund raisers. During training exercises SAR dress is optional.

The SAR Coordinator will provide NCSSAR patches at the same time you are issued an orange shirt. These items remain the property of the Sheriff and must be returned upon your resignation or termination from SAR. NCSSAR shoulder patches are to be centered on each sleeve 1" (one inch) below the shoulder seam. The nametag will be centered immediately above the right pocket. Any patch designating a SAR member's medical status (EMT, etc.) can be centered 1" (one inch) above the nametag. Any SAR member attending any official OES school (Search Management) may wear a patch designating same, 1" (one inch) above the nametag. One specialty tag issued by attendance of an approved school of 40 (forty) hours or more may be worn centered 1" (one inch) above the left pocket (man tracking, CARDA, etc.). NCSSAR patches are to be worn on approved items only. **NO OTHER PATCHES OR ATTACHMENTS ARE TO BE DISPLAYED ON THE UNIFORM UNLESS THERE HAS BEEN PRIOR APPROVAL BY THE COORDINATOR.**

Call-out Procedure:

A computer generated callout system is currently being utilized. It calls you home phone and cell phone as well as sends a text message and an e-mail notice. Initial call-out provides brief information on a search or might put members on standby status.

Meeting Attendance:

Meetings are conducted monthly. These sessions include administrative issues, upcoming special events, current topics of SAR concern, upcoming training, discussions of recently completed search activity, etc. These meetings increase camaraderie. All SAR members are **requested** to participate.

Training and Certification:

Because of the diversity of call-outs and the high risk involved with some types of call-outs, the NCSSAR has established a rigorous, comprehensive training program that incorporates in-house training classes and joint training with other emergency response agencies.

The Basic Academy consists of approximately 40 hours of training. This program consists of: Introduction to NCSSAR, Map Tracking, Map and Compass, Rough Terrain, Blood Borne Pathogens, CPR and First Aid. NCSSAR members are also trained in specialty areas such as swift water safety, ATV, horses, dogs, incident command and air operations.

NCSSAR training policy requires that each Mission Ready member participate in bi-yearly field recertification. A field recertification is held each fall with mandatory attendance. Put this date on your calendar early. Members who do not have current certification are not eligible to participate in search activities; however Trail Ready members can be used at the discretion of the Search Manager or Coordinator. Members are encouraged to attend the yearly basic academy. This promotes more effective teamwork and an enhanced safety. Each member must attend the basic academy at least every other year. CPR must be done every year. Members must attend at least 50% of training classes offered each year.

NCSSAR training hours in specialty areas are set by the individual team leader. These training hours are in addition to the basic training.

NCSSAR has additional training each year in basic search skills beyond the basics but not within the specialty areas. These may include communications, helicopter safety, wilderness travel, winter survival, victim packaging, litter tending, SAR 24 hour pack, etc. All training is vital to the safety of the individual. ATTENDANCE IS EXPECTED.

Upon completion of the basic academy a trainee becomes Mission Ready. This allows full participation in all SAR activity within Nevada County. This allows participation in Mutual Aid Requests from out of County. A shirt and NCSSAR patches are issued to each Mission Ready person. Mission Ready status is not permanent. Each person must comply with the ongoing training requirements. Only with training will we maintain a degree of safety and develop a feeling of trust for our fellow SAR members.

Trainees are allowed one year to complete the five basics to achieve Mission Ready status. During this year, trainees are encouraged to come to searches. Their participation will be limited to help around the search base. They will not be allowed in the field. Trainees not completing the basic academy in one year will be interviewed by the Coordinator for a determination of status retention.

Members receiving training from other than NCSSAR are responsible for providing a copy of this training to the Coordinator. Members transferring from other SAR agencies are responsible for providing copies of their training to the Coordinator who will then make a determination of their status (TR or MR).

A training file is maintained on each NCSSAR member in the Sheriff's Office. It is the member's responsibility to keep the Coordinators informed of any changes.

SAR Units:

All SAR personnel are first ground pounders and may be utilized at any search in this capacity. Certain specialty areas may appeal to the individual member. These include:

ATV: The Sheriff provides ATV's for SAR. The ATV unit is a mechanized off-road team that specializes in searching the back country in areas inaccessible to auto. Privately owned ATVs may be used if the driver is qualified.

Dog Units: The Dog Unit consists of highly trained and certified handlers and their dogs able and willing to meet a diversity of SAR needs. All dogs are individually owned and cared for.

Incident Command: The IC Team is responsible for carrying out all the Command Center activities including communications during SAR operations, planning of search strategy, assigning and deployment of search teams including the debriefing of returning teams, providing the logistical needs of the search and documentation of all search activities.

Man Tracking: Man trackers have received at least 40 hours of specialized training. Each member has obtained a minimum of track aware certificate. They are part of a first response (Hasty) team. Man trackers establishing direction of travel for a missing person essential in planning the search.

Mounted Unit: The Mounted Unit is a team of searchers on horseback. They can search remote areas inaccessible to the mechanized units and can provide transportation to victims. All horses are individually owned and cared for.

Nordic Unit: The Nordic Unit is specialized in winter searching in the high country utilizing snowmobiles, skis and snowshoes.

Search Guidelines:

Experienced SAR team members have found that following certain guidelines while searching tends to improve results, maintain a high level of safety, increase efficiency and making searching easier. Some examples:

1. Stay alert and maintain the proper attitude for effective searching. Searching is hard work and can be boring, tedious and fatiguing.
2. Use all your senses for searching. Use your eyes, your nose, your ears and your head.
3. Look behind you while searching. This might allow you to see things that might not be visible by merely looking ahead.
4. Yell and make noise occasionally and intermix regular moments of silence. The noise may attract a response from a lost victim and the silence can allow you to hear the response.
5. Always be prepared. Have the proper equipment and clothing with you so that you can be an asset rather than a detriment. Have a ready pack and know what is in it.
6. Learn the names of the searchers on the other side of your search line.
7. At night, never shine your flashlight into your eyes or that of your fellow searchers. Sometimes not using lights is preferred if safety and effectiveness can be maintained.
8. Do not become a victim yourself.

Anatomy of a NCSSAR Mission:

1. The Nevada County Dispatch is notified of a missing, overdue or injured person.
2. A deputy or SAR Coordinator responds to the area where the missing person was last seen.

3. The deputy takes a report from the reporting person. The deputy then reports to the Patrol Sergeant and/or the SAR Coordinator. The Coordinator makes a determination of how many and what type of SAR resources is required.
4. The first resource used is normally the QRV (Quick Response Vehicle) with the Hasty Team. The Hasty Team is a small, highly mobile and well trained team of searchers that will use man trackers and one or two dogs to check areas most likely to produce clues.
5. A search plan is developed by the Coordinator and IC planning section. The operations section of IC assigns team members, brief teams on search areas and deploys the teams to their designated search areas.
6. The teams search their assigned areas and report any clues. At the conclusion of an assignment, the search team is debriefed by the operations section as to any clues or findings. This information is communicated to the planning section for use in planning further search activities.
7. The Coordinator/ Incident Command Team will prepare for incoming SAR resources and organize the search base to handle those resources.
8. If successful, the lost subject is LOCATED, their position is ASSESSED, the condition is STABILIZED and finally the victim is TRANSPORTED back to the search base or hospital as needed. This is known as the LAST philosophy.
9. The SAR teams are recalled to the search base for debriefing and then released.
10. No one is to leave until the entire team is accounted for.