

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA, DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

SEARCH AND RESCUE PROGRAM

STANDARDS FOR

INCIDENT COMMANDER FOR GROUND SEARCH AND RESCUE (ICG)

I. SCOPE

- A. The Incident Commander for Ground Search and Rescue (ICG) standards are intended to define the minimum requirements for individuals who manage search and rescue (SAR) incidents within the Commonwealth of Virginia's search and rescue system. These standards address the requirements for large (Type I) through smaller (Type III) search incidents.
- B. These standards define the generic Incident Commander (IC) function as described under the Incident Command System into a standard applicable to SAR in the Commonwealth of Virginia. ICS functions other than IC are not addressed and are beyond the scope of this document.
- C. The certification issued under these standards is a requirement only for those Personnel who wish to voluntarily participate in the search and rescue program of the Virginia Department of Emergency Management at the level indicated in the standards.
- D. The ICG should be able to perform the following functions in the general environment of the Commonwealth of Virginia.
  - 1. Evaluate, organize, coordinate and manage missing person search missions in urban, suburban, rural, and wilderness environments.
  - 2. Evaluate, organize, coordinate and manage the ground search portion of a missing aircraft search mission.
- E. The ICG should be capable of performing these functions in any location where needed, any time of the year, day or night, and in all weather conditions experienced in the Commonwealth. The ICG may work with a variety of individuals and organizations, including law enforcement, fire and rescue, casual volunteers and family members of the missing subject(s). In order to accomplish this the ICG should be able to:
  - 1. Understand the search and rescue system used in the Commonwealth, including the various management systems currently in use.
  - 2. Understand the theoretical and practical application of current search theory as it applies to missing person search and to missing aircraft search.
  - 3. Understand the role of Federal, State, and Local government agencies in the management of SAR incidents and be able to coordinate with any agency that may be involved in an incident.

4. Understand and work within the legal constraints and issues involved with SAR in the Commonwealth.
5. Evaluate a potential or actual SAR problem and determine:
  - a. Its viability as a incident
  - b. The degree of urgency and the priority
  - c. Skilled and unskilled resources needed
  - d. Logistical resources needed
6. Evaluate the incident, develop objectives, and prepare an incident action plan.
7. Organize and manage a staff to implement the strategies and tactics necessary to accomplish the objectives, and evaluate the effectiveness of subordinates.
8. Organize and work within a Unified Command System.
9. Prepare and deliver briefings to the staff, the responsible agent(s), the family and the media.
10. Address the needs and concerns of the subject's family, including providing appropriate information, coordinating mental health services, assisting with facility arrangements and providing staff liaison services.
11. Coordinate the incident investigation.
12. Evaluate the safety considerations of the incident and initiate appropriate safety measures.
13. Insure that incident documentation is complete and that all reports are prepared and distributed appropriately.
14. Organize and conduct an incident critique, when appropriate.

## II. TERMINOLOGY

The definitions listed here are for the purpose of these standards only. They may or may not reflect the definitions used by other individuals, groups, or agencies.

**SAR Emergency** - Any SAR incident, whether related to any other type of incident or not, that requires utilization of resources to resolve, due to the threat or potential threat to life or property.

**Legal Responsible Agent (RA)** – The official and/or agency having legal responsibility for the emergency response to a SAR incident. In ICS this person is known as the "Agency Administrator."

**Coordinator of Emergency Management** - The person appointed by the Governor, pursuant to Title 44, Code of Virginia, as the agency head of the Department of Emergency Management, with the responsibility to coordinate and administer Emergency Management operations in the Commonwealth.

**State SAR Coordinator** – The person designated by the Coordinator of Emergency Management to coordinate the Search and Rescue program of the Department of Emergency Management and to coordinate overall state SAR operations.

**State Coordinating Officer** – The person designated by the Coordinator of Emergency Management to be the agent of the Coordinator during a specific SAR incident.

SAR Mission Coordinator (SMC) – The person designated by the Legal Responsible Agent to coordinate and manage on-scene operations during a specific SAR incident. Depending upon the management system used and the organizations involved, this person may be called the Mission Coordinator (MC), On-Scene Commander (OSC), or Incident Commander (IC).

Local SAR Coordinator – The person responsible for coordination of SAR operations within a given jurisdiction.

Incident Action Plan (IAP) – The IAP contains general control objectives reflecting the overall incident strategy, and specific action plans for the next operational period. The IAP is prepared on ICS Form 202, with attachments.

Tracker – An individual who can detect and follow signs of human passage.

Type I Incident – Largest most complex search incident. Multiple state, local and SAR agencies involved. Could require the use of two or more divisions/branches for one shift or more. Significant external influences present.

Type II Incident – Multiple SAR resource types required.

Type III Incident – Single SAR agency/resource type involvement. Limited number of resources. Often initial stage of a search incident. Can be a stabilized search.

Handler - The person who controls and directs a dog during a search. This person does not have to be the owner or trainer of the dog.

Dog Team – 1 handler and 1 dog.

Air Scent Dog - A search dog that will detect airborne human scent. The air scent dog can be scent discriminating or not.

Tracking dog – A search dog that will follow the ground scent of a person who has passed through an area in which the dog is searching.

Trailing dog - A search dog that will follow the scent trail of a specific individual, after the dog has been allowed to smell an article or object that has been in contact with that individual. The trailing dog is scent discriminating.

Urban, suburban – Moderately to heavily populated areas given primarily to business and residential development.

Rural – Country often given to farming or to woodland and sparsely to moderately populated.

Wilderness – An area generally uncultivated and uninhabited and often inaccessible by road.

### III. KNOWLEDGE AND PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

All types of ICGs will demonstrate an understanding of the items listed under each subject. Specific tests designed for this purpose are described in Section IV, Certification Procedures, and are included as part of these standards.

#### A. SAR Operations

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the laws, policies, procedures, operating instructions, memorandums and agreements that govern SAR operations in the Commonwealth.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the NIMS Incident Command System as it applies to SAR and how the system can be adapted to any size incident.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the SAR resources listed below including how they are obtained, and their appropriate and inappropriate uses.
  - a. Air scent search dogs
  - b. Tracking/trailing dogs
  - c. Trackers
  - d. Specialized SAR management teams
  - e. Specialized SAR field teams
  - f. Mounted search teams
  - g. Fixed wing aircraft
  - h. Rotary wing aircraft
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the non-SAR resources listed below including how they obtained and their potential function in a SAR incident.
  - a. Clergy and religious organizations
  - b. Critical Incident Stress Debrief Team
  - c. State Coordinating Officer
  - d. Coroner
  - e. Child Protective services
  - f. Public safety agencies such as fire, police, rescue, National Guard
  - g. Federal agencies such as National Park Service (NPS), National Transportation and Safety Board (NTSB), Health and Human Services, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), military units, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and others.
  - h. Support services such as Red Cross, Salvation Army , and civic clubs
5. Demonstrate an understanding of the individuals or groups listed below including how they impact a SAR incident, what their concerns are, how to interact with them, when and how to effectively use them, and how to mitigate against inappropriate external influences.
  - a. Psychics
  - b. Media
  - c. Family and friends of the missing subject(s)
6. Describe the role of the Incident Commander in relation to the Legal Responsible Agent (RA) in the following situations:
  - a. When the RA is uncooperative
  - b. When the mission involves or expands into other jurisdictions
7. Describe the role of the IC in relation to the various resources that may participate in a search mission in the following situations:
  - a. When the IC has overall responsibility for all resources present
  - b. When the mission involves or expands into other jurisdictions

8. Demonstrate an understanding of certain legal issues related to SAR including:
  - a. Temporary detaining order, emergency care order
  - b. Trespassing
  - c. Confidentiality
  - d. Criminal investigations
  - e. Management of deceased subjects
  - f. Restricted airspace
  - g. Restricting access to various areas
  - h. Site security and surveillance
  - i. Maintaining the chain of evidence
  - j. Use of minors in SAR incidents
  - k. Liability for supplies, equipment, and services lent or donated for use during an incident
  - l. Use of SAR personnel for apprehension of criminals and crime scene investigation
  - m. Discovery of non-incident related illegal activities

B. Search Management

1. Demonstrate the ability to develop or manage the development of an Incident Action Plan, including both daily and overall incident goals and objectives.
2. Demonstrate the ability to develop and manage a staff and describe when, where, and why various functions should be assigned to which staff positions, including the following functions:
  - a. Operations
  - b. Plans
  - c. Logistics
  - d. Finance
  - e. Media liaison
  - f. Interagency liaison
  - g. Safety
  - h. Investigations
  - i. Clue Analysis
3. Demonstrate the ability to communicate with the staff by means of briefings, meetings, and written communications.
4. Describe the internal staff information flow system, including verbal, written and electronic communications, required to insure that information is properly collected, evaluated, disseminated, utilized, and stored throughout the incident.
5. Describe the ability to work within a unified command system.
6. Describe when and how to contact Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) and what type of incident information VDEM requires.
7. Identify outside influence problems common to search missions, describe solutions and justify the solutions.

8. Identify potential safety issues and describe how they can be countered (if they can be).
9. Describe when risk factors outweigh the need to continue operations.
10. Describe the differences in deployment of resources in urban, suburban, rural and wilderness searches, and in the ground portion of an aircraft search.
11. Describe the various search strategies that can be applied to the ground search portion of a missing aircraft mission.
12. Describe prioritization of limited resources and how such shortages can be overcome (if they can be).
13. Describe how to effectively and efficiently use non-SAR resources who may offer help at all types of searches.
14. Describe the process used in making the decision to suspend a mission.
15. Explain the IC's role after the subject or target has been located.
16. Describe the common signs of incident stress and define the criteria for recommending a critical incident stress debriefing.
17. Demonstrate the ability to complete all necessary mission documentation.

Additional requirements:

- A. Type III ICG:
  1. Be at least 21 years of age.
  2. Be an active member, in good standing, of a search and rescue group currently operating under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Commonwealth. Or a member of an emergency services organization such as a law enforcement agency, a rescue squad, or a fire department that is a part of or operates under federal, state or local government jurisdiction.
  3. Have completed a course presented by the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, search and rescue program, or equivalent, that allows the applicant to function in a position of field leadership (e.g. Field Team Leader, Operational Dog Handler)
  4. Have completed either the Managing the Search Operations (MSO) course or an approved equivalent.
  5. Have completed either the Practical Search Operations (PSO) course or an approved equivalent.
  6. Successfully completed the Incident Commander for Ground (ICG) SAR course presented by the Virginia Department of Emergency Management, Search and Rescue Program
  7. Document mission/simulation practical experience as follows:
    - a. Field Team Leader or equivalent on 6 tasks. No more than three of these tasks may have occurred during simulations.
    - b. Serve in a base position in Operations or Plans on at least 4 incidents.
      1. No more than 2 of the 4 incidents may have occurred during simulations.

2. Provide a letter of evaluation from your supervisor or the Incident Commander of the four incidents.

B. Type II ICG:

1. Meet all requirements for Type III ICG
2. Successful completion of FEMA IS-195 Basic Incident Command system, or an approved equivalent.
3. Document mission/simulation practical experience as follows:
  - a. Participate as an incident staff person in Operations, Plans or Command in at least six type two incidents during the four years immediately prior to the date of application.
    1. No more that three of these incidents can be simulations.
    2. During these incidents, document having served at least 2 shifts as Operations Chief (OPS) and 2 shifts as Plans Chief (PSC).
  3. Provide two letters of evaluation from the Incident Commander or Responsible Agent of the six incidents.

C. Type I ICG

1. Meet all requirements for Type II and III ICG
2. Complete a basic Public Information Officer (PIO) and Media Relations Workshop or approved equivalent course
3. Successfully complete the Inland SAR School course or an approved equivalent.
4. Successfully complete FEMA IS-1, IS-2, IS-5, and IS-275 or an approved equivalent.
5. Document mission practical experience as follow:
  - a. Function as a Type II Incident Commander on at least 10 ground missions within the five years prior to making application for this certification. **Simulations may not be counted towards meeting this requirement.**

IV. APPLICATION PROCEDURES

A. ICG-III

1. Complete application form and attach documentation to show completion of:
  - a. FTL, Dog Handler, or other approved field leadership course/role.
  - b. MSO, or an approved equivalent.
  - c. PSO, or an approved equivalent.
  - d. ICG, or an approved equivalent.
2. A statement signed by the candidate's group leader and training officer stating that the candidate is an active member in good standing and recommending the candidate be certified as an ICG-III.
3. A copy of a mission log or some other written documentation that demonstrates the requirements of paragraph III.A.7.a-b have been met.
4. Following the successful review of the application by the state SAR coordinator or his/her designate, and providing that all requirements are met, the candidate will be issued a certification by VDEM that they have met requirements as an "Incident Commander for Ground Search and Rescue – Type III (ICG-III)" in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
  - a. The certificate awarded does not constitute a license to practice skills tested, but signifies only that the person holding the certificate has met an established standard of knowledge and performance and demonstrated competency at the level indicated at the time of issuance.

- b. The certificate will be valid for three years from date of issue.

B. ICG-II

1. Complete application form and attach documentation to show completion of:
  - a. FTL, Dog Handler, or other approved field leadership course/role.
  - b. MSO, or an approved equivalent.
  - c. PSO, or an approved equivalent.
  - d. ICG, or an approved equivalent.And;
  - e. IS-195, NIMMS, or approved equivalent course
2. A statement signed by the candidate's group leader and training officer stating that the candidate is an active member in good standing and recommending the candidate to be certified as an ICG-II.
3. A copy of a mission log or some other written documentation that demonstrates that the requirements of paragraph IV.B.3 have been met. The documentation must be validated by the candidate's group leader and training officer.
4. Following the successful review of the application by the state SAR coordinator or his/her designate, and providing that all requirements are met, the candidate's application will be announced for thirty days of public comment. After review of public comment and the approval of the SAR coordinator the candidate will be issued a certification by VDEM that they have met requirements as an "Incident Commander for Ground Search and Rescue – Type II (ICG-II)" in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
  - f. The certificate awarded does not constitute a license to practice skills tested, but signifies only that the person holding the certificate has met an established standard of knowledge and performance and demonstrated competency at the level indicated at the time of issuance.
  - g. The certificate will be valid for three years from date of issue.

C. ICG-I

1. Complete application form and attach documentation to show completion of:
  - a. FTL, Dog Handler, or other approved field leadership course/role.
  - b. MSO, or an approved equivalent.
  - c. PSO, or an approved equivalent.
  - d. ICG, or an approved equivalent.
  - e. IS-195, NIMMS, or approved equivalent courseAnd;
  - f. A basic Public Information Officer (PIO) and Media Relations Workshop or approved equivalent course.
  - g. Inland SAR School or approved equivalent
  - h. FEMA IS-1, IS-2, IS-5 and IS-275 or an approved equivalent.
2. A statement signed by the candidate's group leader and training officer stating that the candidate is an active member in good standing and recommending the candidate to be certified as an ICG-I.
3. A copy of a mission log or some other written documentation that demonstrates that the requirements of paragraph IV.C.5.a. have been met. The documentation must be validated by the candidate's group leader and training officer.
4. Following the successful review of the application by the state SAR coordinator or his/her designate, and providing that all requirements are met, the candidate's application will be announced for thirty days of public comment. After review of public comment and the approval of the SAR coordinator the candidate will be issued a certification by VDEM that they have met requirements as an "Incident Commander for Ground Search and Rescue – Type I (ICG-I)" in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

- h. The certificate awarded does not constitute a license to practice skills tested, but signifies only that the person holding the certificate has met an established standard of knowledge and performance and demonstrated competency at the level indicated at the time of issuance.
- i. The certificate will be valid for three years from date of issue.

V. Equivalent Training and/or Experience

- A. Members of recognized search and rescue organizations who are currently certified as IC's by that organization and who are currently practicing as IC's in the Virginia SAR system, during or before the year 1999 may be state certified as an ICG-III, ICG-II or ICG-I provided the following conditions are met.
  - 1. The organization has written standards for incident commanders.
  - 2. The organization's standards meet or exceed the spirit of the state prerequisites and mission requirements as determined by the state SAR coordinator.
  - 3. The organization submits a copy of their written standard and a group roster listing those members for equivalent certification.

VI Review

- A. The state SAR coordinator will review all submitted applications.
  - 1. A candidate who is denied certification will be provided with a recommendation for additional training and/or other corrective action and may apply again after the corrective action has been addressed or after six months from the date of notification.
  - 2. A candidate who is denied certification may appeal to the Coordinator of Emergency Management, in writing, within 30 days of receipt of the SAR Coordinator's decision.
  - 3. The decision of the Coordinator of Emergency Management is final.

VII. RECERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

- A. Certification may be renewed by meeting the following requirements:
  - 1. Submit an application for re-certification on an approved form to the office of the State SAR Coordinator.
  - 2. Maintain active membership in a group or organization as described in paragraph IV.A.2. ,B.2 or C.2
  - 3. Each person is responsible for making individual arrangements for

re-certification with the SAR Coordinator.

4. Certification will be valid for three years from the date of issue.
5. Additional requirements for recertification:
  - a. ICG-III
    1. Document a total of at least 6 shifts in staff positions, two **must** be as Incident Commander, on a total of at least three ground SAR incidents for either missing persons or missing aircraft, during the three years immediately prior to the date of application for re-certification. Simulations may be counted toward re-certification requirements.
    2. The requirements for one shift may be fulfilled with 12 hours of category II continuing education
    3. The requirements for two shifts may be fulfilled with 24 hours of category I continuing education or one shift with 12 hours
    4. Continuing education may only be used for a total of 2 shifts and may not substitute for IC shifts.
  - b. ICG-II
    1. Document a total of at least 6 shifts in type II staff positions, two **must** be as an Incident Commander, on a total of at least three ground SAR incidents, for either missing person or missing aircraft, during the three years immediately prior to the date of application for re-certification.
    2. All shifts may be as an IC, of which at least 3 shifts must be on actual missions, or;
    3. The following combination will be accepted:
      - a. At least 2 shifts as IC, actual/simulation missions
      - b. At least 4 shifts in other staff positions, actual or practice missions, or continuing education
        1. The requirements for one shift may be fulfilled with 12 hours of category II continuing education.
        2. The requirements for 2 shifts may be fulfilled with 24 hours of category I continuing education or one shift with 12 hours.
        3. Continuing education may only be used for a total of 2 shifts, and may not substitute for IC shift time.
  - c. ICG-I
    1. Document a total of at least 6 incidents as a type II or I Incident Commander, for either missing persons or missing aircraft, during the three years immediately prior to the date of application for re-certification.
      - a. The requirements for one incident may be fulfilled with 24 hours of category II continuing education.
      - b. The requirements for two incidents may be fulfilled with 40 hours of category I continuing education.
      - c. Continuing education may only be used for a total of two shifts.

IX. FAILURE TO RE-CERTIFY

- A. If the ICG fails to re-certify within three (3) months of the expiration date, the certification will be dropped as follows:
  - 1. An ICG-I will revert to ICG-II for a period of one year. If re-certification is not obtained in that year, certification will revert to ICG-III. After one additional year with failure to re-certify certification will be dropped.
  - 2. An ICG-II will revert to ICG-III for a period of one year. If re-certification is not obtained in that year, certification will be dropped.
  - 3. Those holding ICG-III certification will lose certification after an additional six month grace period from the date of the end of their certification.
- B. If the ICG wishes to be re-certified after certification has been dropped, the entire process described in Section IV must be repeated.
- C. If there are extenuating circumstances that prevent the ICG from re-certifying within the allotted time, he/she should file for an extension with the SAR Coordinator. Requests for extensions must be in writing and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

X. SUSPENSION AND DECERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

- A. Suspension of an ICG
  - 1. An ICG may be suspended, by the State SAR Coordinator or his/her designee, from an active search or from responding to future searches as a state ICG, for the following reasons:
    - a. When requested by the RA, the SCO, or the local SAR Coordinator.
    - b. The State SAR Coordinator or his designee receives sufficient information from any source to determine that retaining the ICG will impair the progress of the incident or potentially endanger the missing subject(s), or will compromise the integrity of the incident, or that such a situation has existed on a previous search.
    - c. Evidence of gross negligence or willful misconduct.
  - B. The State SAR Coordinator will investigate the allegations as soon as possible and may reverse the suspension if the allegations prove unfounded.
  - C. If the allegations appear to have merit the State SAR Coordinator will schedule a review panel that will meet within 30 days of the effective date of the suspension. The review panel will be composed of the SAR Coordinator or his designee, and two currently certified ICGs selected by the Coordinator.
  - D. The review panel will review all available information pertaining to the case, will hear pertinent testimony, and will render a recommendation to the SAR Coordinator that the suspension be reversed, that the suspension be continued for a specified period of time, or that the ICG be decertified. The panel may also recommend corrective actions.
  - F. All decisions and recommendations by the SAR Coordinator or Review Panel may be appealed to the Coordinator of Emergency Management. All decisions made by the Coordinator are final.
- G. De-certification
  - 1. An ICG may be decertified for the following reasons:
    - a. Following a suspension when ordered by the SAR Coordinator or Coordinator of Emergency Management.
    - b. Failure to maintain membership affiliation
    - c. Failure to re-certify as described in Section VIII.
  - 2. An ICG who has been decertified for reasons other than gross negligence or an order from the Coordinator of Emergency Management may re-apply for certification after one year from the date of de-certification. All of the requirements described in paragraph IV.A.2 section IV must be met.

- a. An ICG who has been decertified by order of the Coordinator of Emergency Management will be considered for re-certification only if so ordered by the coordinator.
- b.* An ICG who has been decertified for gross negligence will not be reconsidered.

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SIGNATURES AND EFFECTIVE DATE

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Michael M. Cline  
Coordinator of Emergency Management

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Effective Date