



2.12 SEARCH AND RESCUE

2.12.1 GENERAL

Emergency Management BC (EMBC) is responsible for facilitating and coordinating a provincial land and inland-water volunteer SAR capability (as per the *British Columbia Emergency Program Management Regulation*, Schedule II) and providing assistance in the activation and coordination of community based SAR volunteer and volunteer SAR organization responses when requested by local authorities, provincial agencies and/or federal departments. Additionally EMBC will:

- (1) Coordinate and commit, or recommend the commitment of resources that may be necessary during the response and recovery phases of a major emergency or disaster.
- (2) Provide available search and rescue resources to requesting local authority, agency, and/or department.
- (3) Conduct or coordinate training in emergency preparedness, response, and recovery to ensure that EMBC staff, EMBC volunteers, municipal authorities and other government emergency personnel has the necessary skills to respond effectively in the event of an emergency or disaster.

Note: This policy outlines the use of SAR Volunteers for SAR activities only and is not intended to include local authorities utilizing SAR volunteers for activities other than search and rescue, i.e. as emergency service volunteers.

Related Policies:

- [1.02 Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer Code of Conduct](#)
- [1.05 Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer Registration](#)
- [1.08 Application for Training Task Number](#)
- [2.02 Task Authorization](#)
- [2.06 Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer Safety](#)
- [5.01 Task Registration](#)
- [5.02 Expense Reimbursement](#)
- [5.04 Repair/Replacement of Lost/Damaged Equipment/Personal Property](#)
- [5.06 Volunteer Expense Reimbursement and Allowance Rate](#)
- [5.07 Injury, Disability, and Accidental Death Coverage](#)
- [5.08 Liability Coverage](#)



2.12.2 DEFINITIONS

See [Terms and Definitions](#)

Fire Protection Area: The physical boundary, established by a local government, that the Fire Services would provide coverage within. Permission by local authority is required to go outside the fire protection area to provide services.

Licensed Medical Service Providers:

- BC College of Physicians and Surgeons
- Emergency Medical Assistant Licensing Board
- Register Midwives Association of BC

Public Safety Lifeline (PSL) Discipline: A group of EMBC or local authority registered volunteers in one of the following disciplines. Registration provides for injury, disability, accidental death, and liability coverage.

- Search and Rescue (SAR)
- Emergency Social Services (ESS)
- Emergency Radio Communications
- EMBC Air
- Road Rescue

Requesting Agency: The agency with the jurisdiction/responsibility for a search and/or rescue.

2.12.3 POLICY STATEMENT

- (1) This policy is intended to provide clarification and guidance on how Search and Rescue Volunteers can be utilized in SAR activities. This policy provides direction to requesting agencies, EMBC staff, and SAR volunteers.

2.12.4 CONDITIONS/RESPONSIBILITIES

- (1) Search and Rescue within British Columbia falls into three basic categories:
- a. Air Search and Rescue.
 - b. Marine Search and Rescue.
 - c. Land and Inland Waters Search and Rescue.



- (2) Information from the public regarding missing, injured, or stranded persons must be referred to a responsible government agency and/or department. That agency will determine the appropriate response – agencies include Police, BC Ambulance Service, Canadian Forces & Canadian Coast Guard, Parks Canada, Coroner, and Fire Services.
- (3) The responsible provincial government ministry/agency or Federal government department must initiate all requests for SAR volunteer resources. The Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) will then provide a task number to the SAR team when the request for service or support is within EMBC Policy. This process ensures decision accountability and timely access to valuable volunteer assistance.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT BC

- (1) Upon activation of a volunteer SAR team, EMBC provides injury, disability, accidental death, and liability coverage, reimbursement of operational expenses, and repair and/or replacement of equipment in accordance with current EMBC policy.
- (2) Either the EMBC Regional Duty Manager (RDM) or the EMBC Provincial Duty Manager (PDM) will make decisions specific to the commitment of resources in support of an authorized requesting agency. The activities detailed in the following table have been identified as requiring specialized training.
- (3) Activities that are not specifically listed as eligible under this Policy statement should be considered as ineligible under EMBC task. If a SAR Team has any doubt about the eligibility of an activity or a request for support, they should contact the EMBC Regional Manager for guidance. Should specialized resources or activities that are deemed ineligible be required to complete a task under this policy, the RDM must be consulted for options.
- (4) When deploying SAR resources in support of a requesting agency, it is assumed that the requesting agency has responsibility for ensuring appropriate use of volunteers, and that safety practices and standard Incident Command System resource deployment handover protocols are followed (i.e. the requesting agency should not be asking the SAR Volunteers or the Team to take undue risks or place themselves in a position of liability for which they have no coverage or protection).
- (5) **TASK ELIGIBLE Search Activities (for appropriate requesting agencies):**
 - a. Wilderness search.
 - b. Urban search.
 - c. Surface searching on water.



- d. Equine search.
 - e. Dog search.
 - f. Evidence search (injury, disability, accidental death, and liability coverage only – no expense reimbursement by EMBC).
 - g. Air search.
- (6) TASK ELIGIBLE Rescue Activities (for appropriate requesting agencies):
- a. Avalanche rescue.
 - b. Swift water rescue.
 - c. Medical rescue (the rescue & transportation of an injured person to BCAS care).
 - d. Cave rescue.
 - e. Rope rescue.
 - f. Helicopter rescue.
 - g. Mountain rescue.
 - h. Domestic animal rescue (injury, disability, accidental death, and liability coverage only – no expense reimbursement by EMBC).
- (7) INELIGIBLE SAR Activities: EMBC task numbers do not support the following activities, even when a valid task number is otherwise in place:
- a. Underwater search and recovery involving the use of diving apparatus by volunteers.
 - b. Hazardous material response and/or cleanup.
 - c. Tree rescue (arboreal rescue) unless provided written permission from EMBC for this specific activity.
 - d. Fire suppression (structural or wild land).



- e. Searching for potentially dangerous individuals (people who may be armed with weapons, people who may be violent, people engaged in criminal activities, people fleeing from the police, etc.).
 - f. Transporting BCAS patients to medical care (riding in ambulances, driving ambulances, etc.).
 - g. BCAS First Responder patient move assists or lifts where the BCAS medical assessment indicates additional First Responder resources are required.
 - h. Transporting police or other law enforcement or regulatory agencies involved with search/apprehension of dangerous individuals/ criminal investigations.
 - i. Transporting fire department crews engaged in fire response activities.
- (8) EMBC task numbers provide injury, disability, accidental death, and liability coverage only for the following activity, and only when the SAR volunteer or team is engaged in a task eligible activity (liability coverage is provided under the *Good Samaritan Act* for persons providing services as a licensed medical service provider in BC):
- a. Provision of any licensed medical services.

NOTE: The provision of “first aid” by a trained SAR Volunteer is covered for injury, disability, accidental death, and liability.

POLICE

The investigation of a missing person(s) and of suspicious occurrences within the province of British Columbia is the responsibility of the police department having jurisdiction. Disoriented, lost, stranded, overdue, and other individuals in distress are also the responsibility of the Police. Domestic animal rescue for humane or public safety reasons are also the responsibility of the Police. The Police may request SAR volunteer resources through the ECC for the following eligible activities.

- (1) Eligible Land and Inland Water Search Activities:
- a. For missing persons – are initiated by the Police Department of jurisdiction.
 - b. For persons in distress (without injury) – are initiated by the Police Department of jurisdiction.
 - c. SAR Volunteer resources can assist police in searching for and gathering evidence related to criminal or investigative evidence searches. Police services are responsible for reimbursement of all expenses related to evidence searches.



(2) Ineligible SAR Volunteer Activities:

- a. Searching for potentially dangerous individuals.
- b. Pre-hospital medical rescue beyond first aid stabilization to ensure minimal injury while enroute to BCAS.
- c. Searching for and recovery of human remains.
- d. Ineligible volunteer activities as listed.

BC AMBULANCE SERVICE

The BC Ambulance Service (BCAS) is responsible for pre-hospital care and transportation of patients to medical facilities. The BCAS may request SAR volunteer resources through the ECC for the following activities.

(1) Eligible Land and Inland Water Medical Rescue Activities:

- a. Land and inland water medical rescues.

(2) Ineligible SAR Volunteer Activities:

- a. Searching for missing persons.
- b. Non-medical rescue.
- c. Patient lifts, medical response calls (First Responder) and/or transport of subject(s) where BCAS personnel can access the subject(s) as per BCAS policy.
- d. Domestic animal rescue.
- e. Ineligible volunteer activities as listed.

CANADIAN FORCES & CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Air Search and Rescue is the responsibility of the Canadian Forces. Marine Search and Rescue is the responsibility of the Canadian Coast Guard. Air and Marine SAR is initiated and coordinated by the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC). The JRCC may request SAR volunteer resources through the ECC.

(1) Eligible Air and Marine Search and Rescue Activities:

- a. Application of any of the SAR techniques in support of response to a downed aircraft or persons or vessels in distress.



(2) Ineligible SAR Volunteer Activities:

- a. Evidence search.
- b. Domestic animal rescue.
- c. Ineligible volunteer activities as listed.

PARKS CANADA

Land and inland water SAR, within national parks, is the responsibility of Parks Canada. Parks Canada may request SAR volunteer resources through the ECC for the following activities.

(1) Eligible Land and Inland Water Search & Rescue Activities:

- a. For missing, injured, and persons in distress, within national parks are initiated by Parks Canada.

(2) Ineligible SAR Volunteer Activities:

- a. Land and inland water search & rescue outside of jurisdiction.
- b. Evidence search.
- c. Domestic animal rescue.
- d. Ineligible volunteer activities as listed.

CORONER SERVICES

The Coroner may request SAR volunteer resources through the ECC for the following activities.

(1) Eligible Search and Recovery of Human Remains Activities:

- a. Searching for and recovery of human remains, under the direction of the Coroner, by SAR volunteers utilizing approved search and rescue techniques.

(2) Ineligible SAR Volunteer Activities:

- a. Domestic animal rescue.
- b. Ineligible volunteer activities as listed.



FIRE SERVICES

Fire Services may request the assistance of SAR volunteer resources to effect rescues where the SAR volunteers can utilize techniques approved in EMBC policy.

(1) Eligible Land and Inland Water Rescue Activities:

- a. May be initiated by Fire Services within Fire Protection Areas.
- b. Application of any of the SAR skills in support of response to an injured or stranded person in distress.

(2) Ineligible SAR Volunteer Activities:

- a. Land and inland water SAR outside of Fire Protection Area.
- b. Domestic animal rescue.
- c. Searching.
- d. Ineligible volunteer activities as listed.

2.12.5 AUTHORITIES

[Emergency Program Act](#)

[British Columbia Emergency Program Management Regulation](#), Schedule II

[Good Samaritan Act](#)

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Emergency Management BC

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2.12.6 RELATED DOCUMENTS

N/A