



Emergency  
Management BC

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **CHANGES TO THE SEARCH AND RESCUE SAFETY PROGRAM SINCE THE GOAT RIVER FATALITY IN JUNE 2011**

Emergency Management British Columbia (EMBC) and the British Columbia Search and Rescue Association (BCSARA) have worked cooperatively to improve the safety program for Search and Rescue (SAR) volunteers originally implemented in 2009. Since the death of a SAR volunteer during a Swiftwater rescue in June 2011 a number of changes have been implemented, not only related to Swiftwater Rescue but also from a program wide perspective. This document provides additional information to the *Update to Recommendations from the Swiftwater Inquest* which lists actions taken specific to the recommendations.

1. Swiftwater Taskforce: formed by EMBC and BCSARA in January 2012 to review and address recommendations from the initial investigations and subsequent inquest of November 2012 into the fatality. The Taskforce was expanded as recommended by the Coroner's Inquest. Actions taken by, or under the direction of, the Swiftwater Taskforce include:
  - a. Developing Swiftwater Rescue Standards for SAR in B.C.; in consultation with training providers, experts from other jurisdictions (Alberta and California), The SAR Volunteer Joint Health and Safety Committee, the SAR volunteer groups, and other subject matter experts. The Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) was engaged to develop the Provincial Operating Guideline and B.C. Qualification Competency Matrix based on the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards 1670 and 1006.
  - b. Issuing a SAR Safety Advisory reinforcing that SAR Volunteers are not to engage in any activities or use equipment that they have not been trained in.
  - c. Conducting an Invitation to Qualify (ITQ) process in which Swiftwater Training Providers submitted course outlines for consideration as being recognized as containing the competencies within the new standards.
  - d. Providing updates on actions underway and completed to SAR Groups and agencies through the Joint health and Safety Committee minutes and periodically revised 'Updates to Recommendations from the Swiftwater Inquest' table.

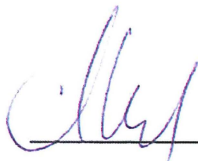
2. Search and Rescue Volunteer Joint Health and Safety Committee: agreement to form a Joint Health and Safety Committee between EMBC and BCSARA reached in October 2011 based on feedback received during regional workshops with SAR Groups and Agencies. Following the model used in industry the committee consists of representatives from the SAR community and government to address health and safety issues across all aspects of volunteer involvement in search and rescue. Actions taken by the Joint Committee include:
  - a. Establishing open communications with volunteer SAR groups and their volunteers to identify safety concerns, find solutions to issues, and provide information about changes to the Safety program.
  - b. Revising the SAR Safety Program Guide to include the roles and responsibilities of all agencies and to reflect SAR specific terminology. The Operating Guidelines were re-issued as Provincial Operating Guidelines to ensure consistency. The revised Safety Program Guide and Provincial operating Guidelines were implemented in September 2012.
  - c. Establishing Working Groups to establish or revise Provincial Operating Guidelines on First Aid Requirements, Medical Direction and Helicopter Rescue.
  - d. Completing Provincial Operating Guidelines on the Recovery of Human Remains and Fit for Service.
  - e. Developing presentations and other materials to assist SAR Groups in implementing requirements within the SAR Safety Program.
  - f. Revising and clarifying reporting requirements and processes related to Near Misses, Incidents with Loss and Injury Incidents.
3. A Review of Search and Rescue Training in B.C.: An independent consultant was engaged to review the provision of training for SAR volunteers, the final report of April 2013 details a number of challenges and outlines recommendations concerning coordination, funding, and tracking. The recommendations are addressed within the *Alternative Support Model*.
4. Alternative Support Model For Search and Rescue in B.C.: In October 2013 the BCSARA presented the Minister of Justice with a discussion paper proposing a SAR Foundation which would manage adequate and sustainable funding, coordinate training, and reduce administrative work for SAR Groups. EMBC and BCSARA have further refined this concept over the past year preparing for presentation of a complete model for consideration.
5. Leveling the Playing Field: BCSARA with support from EMBC was successful in accessing federal NIF funding to conduct regional and provincial workshops with SAR groups and agencies to identify best practices, challenges and solutions, and establish a baseline to gauge improvements. Feedback received related to funding, equipment, Health and Safety, communications, and administration; and lead to development of a 3 year Action Plan for BCSARA, establishment of the Joint Health and Safety Committee, and the Alternative Support Model proposal. The two year \$430,000 project ran from April 2011 to March 2013, funding was also used to purchase Personal Locator Beacons (PLBs) for all 80 SAR groups in the province.



6. Response Assessment and Decision Support (NIF) project: BCSARA with support from EMBC was successful in accessing federal NIF funding to design and implement a field ready tool to assist SAR Managers and Team Leaders in assessing risk and making decisions before engaging in response activities, and taking mitigating actions. The 2 year project with a budget of \$580,000 also includes development of on-line training for all volunteers in the use of the Response Assessment and Decision Making Support (RADeMS) card, and their roles and responsibilities, as well as design and provision of safety awareness materials including posters. The project cumulates with a provincial conference of representatives from all SAR groups in March, 2015.
7. Implementation of New Swiftwater Standards NIF project; BCSARA with support from EMBC was successful in accessing federal NIF funding to provide training in the new Swiftwater Standards and replace equipment which may not be suitable. The 3 year \$750,000 project involved a meeting of representatives from all Swiftwater Rescue Teams in October 2014 to present the standards and discuss implementation. All teams were required to review their equipment for certification and suitability, replacement of \$144,000 of equipment is underway. Recertification training at the new Qualification levels for B.C. will continue over the next 2 years.

EMBC and the BCSARA Board are committed to continuous improvement to the SAR Safety Program, and maintaining the priority of safety for all responders. The Search and Rescue Joint Health and Safety Committee will continue to address safety issues across all disciplines that SAR volunteers may engage in. Several projects are underway, including the tracking and monitoring of training and implementation of the Safety Program.

Signed this date April 10 / 2015



president

British Columbia Search and Rescue Association



Ex Dir Operations

Emergency Management British Columbia

**UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SWIFTWATER INQUEST**  
**SWIFTWATER TASK FORCE, April 2015**

| Recommendation   | Action  | Status  |
|--|---|---|
| <p>1. That Emergency Management B.C. (EMBC) expand the existing Swift Water Task Force to include members of Search and Rescue operations as well as the RCMP, B.C. River Guides Association, Worksafe B.C. and any other appropriate stakeholders.</p>  | <p>a. In addition to the Task Force specific to Swiftwater, EMBC and BCSARA have established an SAR Volunteer Joint Health and Safety Committee to further the SAR Safety Program and develop implementation tools. As well, working groups specific to other technical disciplines are being formed to review training and operational guidelines.</p> <p>b. Task Force expanded to include RCMP, B.C. River Outfitters Assn (there is no river guides assn), Royal Lifesaving Society, representatives from SAR groups/swiftwater teams, and Worksafe B.C. ( on request).</p> | <p>a. Completed, Joint Committee continues to work on Safety program.</p> <p>b. Completed.</p>  |
| <p>2. That EMBC and British Columbia Search and Rescue Association (BCSARA) develop universal standards for Swiftwater rescue and recovery training to ensure consistent language and training applications. These universal standards would require all Swiftwater training providers to conform to these prescribed standards.</p> | <p>c. Meetings held with Swiftwater training providers, swiftwater task force and subject matter experts to establish what standards could be utilized.</p> <p>d. Facilitated meeting with Swiftwater providers in July 2013 to further work on establishing standards.</p> <p>e. Draft standards(Provincial Operating Guideline) and training competencies with the assistance of contracted expertise.</p>  | <p>c. Completed.</p> <p>d. Completed. Decision to base on NFPA 1670 and 1006.</p> <p>e. Completed. Provincial Operating Guideline and Competency Matrix issued.</p> |
| <p>3. That EMBC and BCSARA develop universal standards for swiftwater rescue and recovery equipment.</p>   | <p>f. Part of Task Force mandate, in conjunction with training providers and subject matter experts.</p>  | <p>f. Completed, as part of Provincial Operating Guideline.</p>   |

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| Recommendation  | Action  | Status   |
|---|---|--|
| <p>4. That an audit be conducted of all Search and Rescue (SAR) communities by BCSARA to ensure that each SAR community has the required equipment (including personal protective equipment) and training for their respective communities based on their unique areas. Where it is determined that there is a lack of the required equipment and/or training for that area, immediate consultation with BCSARA and EMBC must occur to determine steps to obtain the equipment and/or training with the goal of safety of all SAR members in B.C.</p> | <p>g. Development of a 'review' or audit process for health and safety is part of the BCSARA Action Plan assigned to the Joint Health and Safety Committee.</p> <p>h. Following approval of standards for training and equipment by Swiftwater Task Force a list of approved equipment will be distributed to SAR groups with requirement that they respond as to compliance.</p> | <p>g. Completed. Part of New Initiatives Fund (NIF) project, and ongoing development.</p> <p>h. Completed. Part of Swiftwater (NIF) project.</p> |
| <p>5. That EMBC review and evaluate funding models to better support SAR operations, training and equipment similar to Volunteer Fire Department's funding.</p>   | <p>i. Funding for training is part of the Review of SAR Training in B.C. conducted in March 2013.</p> <p>j. EMBC is working with BCSARA to review the feasibility of the funding model presented to the Minister of Justice.</p>  | <p>i. Completed. Part of funding model discussions.</p> <p>j. Completed review, discussions on implementation underway.</p>                      |
| <p>6. That Swiftwater teams use only their own equipment during search and rescue operations whenever possible. If any unfamiliar is introduced into a task, a proper risk assessment must be completed. The appropriate tools for self rescue and companion rescue must be immediately accessible.</p>   | <p>k. A SAR Safety Advisory Notice issued as a interim measure pending development and implementation of further standards.</p> <p>l. Standards that will be approved by the Swiftwater Task Force will provide direction to SAR groups on what equipment and tools are to be used.</p>   | <p>k. Completed.</p> <p>l. Completed, within Provincial Operating Guideline.</p>   |



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| Recommendation  | Action  | Status                         |
|---|---|--------------------------------|
| 7. That the Volunteer Policy and Procedures Manual specifically the policy for "Utilization of SAR Volunteers for SAR Activities Policy" be reviewed by EMBC to clarify and amend, where required, the roles and responsibilities of varying agencies involved in SAR Activities. These groups include, but are not limited to SAR, Policing agencies, Coroner, Parks Canada, B.C. Ambulance and Fire Services. | m. SAR Safety Program Guide amended to include the role of all agencies related to safety.<br>n. Review of policies by EMBC.  | m. Completed.<br>n. Completed. |
| 8. That during an operation, a specific Safety Officer be designated whenever possible. This Safety Officer's position will be their sole function.   | o. SAR Safety Program amended to include the role of Safety Officer.<br>p. SAR-NIF project includes development of on-line training for all roles, including Safety Officers. | o. Completed.<br>p. Completed. |
| 9. That EMBC with the assistance of the SAR Stakeholders develop a standardized risk assessment tool for use in Swiftwater operations.  | q. SAR-NIF project (\$500,000 over 2 years) to develop risk assessment and decision making tools for all disciplines within SAR including Swiftwater.                         | q. Completed.                  |