

**Emergency Management British Columbia
Search and Rescue Safety Program Guide and Provincial Operational
Guidelines**

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why was the SAR Safety Program Guide created?

The SAR Safety Program Guide (which included Operational Guidelines) was created in 2009 to provide information and guidance to SAR Volunteers on safety issues. This document outlined the expectations of SAR Groups, SAR Leaders and SAR Volunteers who wish to be tasked by EMBC. This guide goes along with the Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer Safety Policy which provides an overarching statement with respect to key safety priorities for all disciplines.

Q: Why is the SAR Safety Program Guide being reissued again?

In January 2012 EMBC and the BC Search and Rescue Association formed a Joint Health and Safety Committee to review and update the SAR Safety Program based on feedback to the previous versions and input from the Levelling the Playing Field regional workshops.

The revised SAR Safety Program reflects input on including the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, using SAR specific rather than industry based language, and clarifying the responsibilities of SAR Groups and Volunteers.

Q: How are we sharing policies and procedures with all SAR groups?

Policies and procedures are distributed to SAR organizations electronically through the BCSARA and EMBC Regional staff. All policies and related documentation is posted electronically on the EMBC website located at www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/volunteers

As well, all Joint Health and Safety Committee minutes and related documents are posted to the BCSARA website at www.bcsara.com.

EMBC will also be setting up a series on line meetings to assist SAR Groups in understanding the updated SAR Safety Program Guide and Provincial Operating Guidelines.

Q: What is the process for SAR groups to provide feedback on the Policy and Guidelines?

The policies and guidelines will be reviewed and updated annually by the Joint Health and Safety Committee or on a case-by-case basis to reflect changing operating requirements, implementation of verified lessons learned from past experiences, and from input from the SAR community.

SAR Groups are encouraged to provide feedback through the Joint OSH Committee, osh@bcsara.com.

Q: Why are Provincial Operational Guidelines being issued?

Operating Guidelines (OGs) were included in the original SAR Safety Program Guide issued in 2009. In a subsequent version they were removed, A Safety Advisory was issued stating that SAR Groups were to draft their own OGs, and sample OGs were posted on the BCSARA websites.

The Joint Health and Safety Committee, based on their review and previous feedback, determined that the OGs were Provincial in nature and it is unreasonable/not appropriate that SAR Groups draft their own except where an additional hazard is specific to their area or SAR Group.

Q: Why are Provincial Operational Guidelines required and what is the benefit?

Operational Guidelines are basic expectations and provide guidance to SAR responders who wish to be covered by the Workers' Compensation Act. SAR Groups/Societies determine the search and rescue services they wish to engage in. The Provincial Operating Guidelines are designed to provide a consistent and clear direction to SAR Volunteers in order to ensure their activities are carried out in a safe manner.

SAR Groups are asked to formally adopt the Provincial Operating Guidelines. The overall intended result is improved operational safety, greater accountability and reduced risk.

Q: Is it the responsibility of SAR groups to draft their own Operational Guidelines?

Yes. While the Provincial Operating Guidelines cover most of the elements for Ground SAR in B.C, they do not cover all. SAR groups will need to look at their own operations to determine what if any additional OG's may be required.

OGs can be developed for virtually any function a SAR Group performs, examples include; training, administration and recruitment. High risk activities (E.g. technical rescue, motorized equipment operation, etc.) should be addressed first as most administrative issues generally have less risk and little potential for injury and are a lower priority.

Q: Will EMBC require a copy of SAR group specific OGs once they are in place?

No. The SAR Group specific OGs are SAR Group documents that are maintained at the Group level. Occasionally, EMBC may request copies of OGs such as in the case of an injury and/or serious incident.

Q. Could additional OGs be drafted by regional working groups, rather than by individual SAR Groups?

Yes. If SAR Groups determine that a Regional approach would be beneficial then a working group can be formed in conjunction with the appropriate EMBC Regional Office. Each SAR Group will still need to evaluate if they require additional specific OGs.

OGs and other materials developed by Regional working groups should be sent to the Joint Health and Safety Committee for review and for consideration as Provincial Operating Guidelines if applicable.

Q: Why are the Provincial Operational Guidelines so extensive? Isn't most of this material contained in training materials?

OGs are not intended to duplicate technical information or to provide step-by-step instructions. The knowledge and skills that volunteers require to safely perform specific assignments are addressed in professional level training. OGs, conversely, describe related considerations: safety, equipment maintenance, accident reporting requirements. Given the nature of SAR in the province, it is important that all responders understand when not to exceed their own training and to request specifically trained and equipped resources.

OGs can be developed for virtually any function a SAR Society performs however they are not required for all activities. Examples include training, administration and recruitment. High risk activities (E.g. technical rescue, motorized equipment operation, etc.) should be addressed first as most administrative issues generally have less risk and little potential for injury and are a lower priority.

Q: Are SAR groups able to adjust the table of contents to meet individual team requirements?

No. The SAR Safety Program and Provincial Operating Guidelines are designed to fulfill essential WorkSafeBC and other regulatory requirements.

Q. The whole SAR Safety Program seems onerous, what additional support is available for SAR Groups and volunteers?

The Joint Health and Safety Committee continue to work on a number of initiatives to support SAR Groups, SAR volunteers and agencies. Developing risk assessment and decision making tools, implementation checklists, and safety promotional materials are high priorities for the committee within its mandate from BCSARA and EMBC.