

SAR ABC's

The following guidelines for searchers come from a book called "Mountain Search and Rescue Techniques" published by the Rocky Mountain Rescue Group. It is a good, brief summary for newcomers and old-corners alike.

THE DO'S OF SEARCH: Keep alert. Use your eyes, sometimes your nose, and always your head. Look behind you (this is important), make some noise, and also some silence in which to listen for the victim. This is a particularly good technique at night when the victim is thought to be uninjured or at least conscious. Call out the name of the lost person. You should have learned the name and description of the missing person including type and color of clothing, prior to leaving base camp, even though this information should not be trusted fully. Be properly clothed and equipped. When talking to another searcher at night, be careful not to shine your headlamp into his dark-adapted eyes. On a line search [a grid search] learn the names of the searchers to each side and don't change your outer layer of clothing without their noticing. Bright colored, highly visible clothing is always appropriate in the mountains and is particularly important in line searches.

Searchers should always use common sense, checking the obvious. This means for example, looking in buildings which would make good shelter, inquiring of hikers encountered along the way, or even checking with anyone seen walking along a road near the search area, since such a person may be the missing one.

The safety of the searchers is more important than the search itself. If the individuals or teams are put in danger because of lack of personal skills for the terrain at hand or due to objective hazards or weather, that part of the search must be at least temporarily abandoned.

It is very important for individual searchers to maintain a proper attitude towards the search. Searching is hard work, rather boring and tedious, and usually does not turn up anything. If an individual cannot discipline himself to be an effective searcher in spite of bad weather, fatigue, and discouragement, he should sign out of the search area and not discourage those who can.

When in the base camp area, individuals should stay out of the mission headquarters. Loose talk about the mission must be avoided in base camp, since a casual remark may be overheard by the press or may be the origin of a distracting rumor.

Only the mission coordinator may give information to the press. The best response to a question about the mission from any stranger is, "I don't know. Ask the mission coordinator over there." Complaints about the conduct of the mission should be made in private to the team leader, or saved for the critique meeting.

TEAM LEADER RESPONSIBILITIES: A team leader should always brief his team as to their assignment. If this is a line search, he should give a very short summary of the techniques and terminology to be used. The time spent on such a lecture will be saved many times over in avoiding confusion later.

A map and compass should be taken along and used carefully by the team leader or other designated person so that the terrain covered and the location of any clues found can be accurately reported to the mission leader. An altimeter is frequently of value. The assigned area should be completely covered and any deviations reported to the mission leader.

If a possible crime situation is encountered, the absolute minimum number of personnel should approach the scene, and the entire area secured until the arrival of authorities. All evidence must be left in place and marked by flagging. The only reason for moving anything is to assist an injured victim. Likewise, in the case of a fatality, the area should be secured.

Care must be used in the choice of words spoken over the radio, because press and relatives may be listening to every word, and prearranged code words may be required. All messages should sound routine.

SAR Tips

- To keep true and magnetic straight: True bearings are larger than magnetic bearings. The formula $T=M+D$ confirms this.
- To have more stamina on search missions: Chug-a-lug water before you leave, and during your search. Because lots of water improves circulation, your muscles get more oxygen and fuel, you stay warmer and you think more clearly.
- To get the government to pay you (a little) for SAR: keep track of the mileage you drive to and from meetings, searches and trainings. It's deductible. So is the cost of your uniform.
- To make your radio heard when conditions are bad:
 1. Let a woman talk. A woman's voice breaks through static better than a man's does.
 2. If you have a speaker/mike, you can hold the radio up high as you transmit.
 3. If you have an ICOM 1116 radio, use the spare AA battery pack. It's higher voltage pumps up the radio's power.
- To stay on course in dense forest: walk so your shadow stays at the same angle relative to your body.
- To quickly show that you've checked this cabin: write your team number on the gatepost or the door with blackboard chalk.
- To commit a shoe print to memory: **Draw it.**
- To flag a shoe print quickly: circle it with powdered chalk or flour from a squirt bottle.
- To eat an MRE without making a mess: open the package by slitting it down the long side.