

**PHOENIX REGIONAL  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

**WATER RESCUE OPERATIONS**

**M.P. 204.11**

**01/26-R**

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**SCOPE**

This procedure establishes a standard structure and guideline for all fire department personnel operating at incidents involving water rescue operations. The procedure outlines responsibilities for first-responders, TRT units, Command Officers, and other fire department personnel responding to such incidents. All other Phoenix Fire Department procedures shall apply to water rescue operations where applicable.

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this procedure is to establish guidelines for the response of fire department personnel and equipment to water rescue incidents. Because water rescue operations present a significant danger to fire department personnel, the safe and effective management of these operations require special considerations. This procedure identifies some of the critical issues which must be included in managing these incidents.

**TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Due to the inherent dangers associated with these operations, the Phoenix Fire Department *Risk Management Profile* shall be applied to all water rescue operations and shall be continuously reassessed throughout the incident. A phased approach to water rescue operations which include Arrival, Pre-rescue Operations, Rescue Operations, and Termination, can be utilized to safely and effectively mitigate these high-risk / low-frequency events.

**Additional technical information is available in the issued *Technical Rescue Field Operations Guide*.**

**Phase I    Arrival.**

**I. ESTABLISH COMMAND**

- A. First arriving company officer shall assume *Command* and begin an immediate size- up of the situation.
- B. First arriving TRT unit that is staffed with a TRT Company Officer should be assigned *Rescue Sector*. The TRT Company Officer assigned as Rescue Sector should remain with his crew. Rescue Sector responsibilities include:
  - Assuming technical rescue operations control.
  - Identifying hazards and critical factors.
  - Developing a rescue plan and back-up plan.
  - Communicating with and directing TRT resources assigned to Rescue Sector.
  - Informing Command of conditions, actions, and needs during all phases of the rescue operation.

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- C. Designate a *Safety Officer*. Considerations for Safety Officer include.
- Car 957 South or North
  - A Special Operations qualified Battalion Chief and/or FIT.
  - Any other experienced TRT Company Officer assigned to the incident.
- D. Following the transfer of Command to a Command Officer, a *Technical Advisor* should be assigned to join the Command Team at their location to assist in managing personnel and resources engaged in the technical aspects of the incident. The Technical Advisor is responsible for ensuring that the rescue plan developed by Rescue Sector and communicated to Command is a sound plan in terms of the safety and welfare of both victim(s) and rescuers. Considerations for the Technical Advisor include:
- A Special Operations qualified Battalion Chief and/or FIT.
  - Car 957 South or North
  - Any other experienced TRT Company Officer assigned to the incident.

*The Technical Advisor position within the Command Team should be filled prior to the implementation of any rescue plan proposed by Rescue Sector.*

**II. Size-Up**

- A. Secure a witness to assist in gathering information to determine exactly what happened and the location of any victim(s). If no witnesses are present, Command may have to look for clues on the scene to determine what happened.
- B. Assess the immediate and potential hazards to the rescuers.
- C. Isolate immediate hazard area, secure the scene, and deny entry for all non-rescue personnel.
- D. Assess on-scene capabilities and determine the need for additional resources.

**Phase II Pre-rescue Operations**

*It must be determined if this will be a RESCUE operation or a RECOVERY operation based on the survivability profile of the victim(s) which include factors such as the location and condition of the victim(s), and elapsed time since the accident occurred.*

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**I. MAKE THE GENERAL AREA SAFE**

- A. Establish a hazard zone perimeter.
- B. Keep all non-essential rescue personnel out of the hazard zone.
- C. Remove all non-essential civilian personnel at least 150 feet away from the hazard zone.

**II. MAKE THE RESCUE AREA SAFE**

*All personnel operating at or near the water shall be in proper personal protective equipment (PPE) which will include at a minimum: personal flotation device (PFD), approved water rescue helmet, and approved footwear.*

- A. Identify hazards that are present which include but are not limited to:
  - The volume of water.
  - The velocity of the water.
  - Debris in the water.
  - Hydraulics.
  - Depth of the water – rising / falling.
- B. Assign personnel upstream.
  - Rescue personnel shall be assigned upstream to advise Rescue Sector of any upstream hazards that may affect the rescue operation.
- C. Assign personnel downstream.
  - Rescue personnel shall be assigned downstream with throw bags to capture rescue personnel or victim(s) that may be washed downstream.
- D. Assemble all necessary personnel, equipment, and patient packaging equipment that will be required for the rescue operation.

**Phase III Rescue Operations**

*Technical rescue operations shall be conducted under the direction of Rescue Sector by trained Technical Rescue Technicians.*

**I. RESCUE SECTOR**

Rescue Sector responsibilities shall include the following:

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- Ensure that all personnel operating in Rescue Sector are accounted for and wearing appropriate PPE.
- Develop a rescue plan and a back-up plan.
- Ensure the plan and back-up plan, which include emergency procedures, are communicated to all personnel operating on the incident.

## **II. THE RESCUE PLAN**

Rescue operations should be conducted with as little risk to the rescuers as necessary to affect the rescue. Low-risk operations may not always be possible but should be considered first. The order of rescue from low-risk to high-risk are:

- A. **TALK** – if water is calm or slow moving, try to talk the victim into self-rescue if possible.
- B. **REACH** – extend an arm, pike pole, rescue hook, or any other such object to reach the victim and pull from the water.
- C. **THROW** – attempt to throw the victim(s) a throw-bag rescue line or some other type of approved safety flotation device and “pendulum-belay” or “haul” the victim(s) to the bank.
- D. **WADE** – enter the water as a team, facing upstream and no further than knee deep, taking a PFD and helmet for each victim. Assist the victim(s) to shore.
- E. **HELO** - Helicopter operations shall be decided upon through consultation with Rescue Sector, Safety, Command, and the Technical Advisor. Prior to considering the use of a helicopter for rescue operations, Command must determine if a rescue-qualified pilot is available for the rescue operation. If so, the Pilot In Command (PIC) will have the final say on *if* and *how* the helicopter will be used in the rescue operation
- F. **ROW** - If it is determined that a boat-based operation shall be utilized, Rescue Sector shall assign a company on the opposite bank to assist in establishing an anchor for an approved rope system.
- G. **GO** - If it is not possible to row to the victim, Rescue Sector should consider putting a rescuer or rescuers in the water to reach the victim. This is a very high-risk operation and shall be conducted exclusively by trained TRT personnel. Prior to entering the water, rescue personnel shall be briefed on the

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plan, the back-up plan, and emergency procedures. Rescue personnel shall never be attached to a lifeline without the benefit of a quick-release mechanism approved for water rescue. Rescue personnel shall never do a "breath-hold" surface dive in an attempt to locate a victim beneath the surface of the water.

### III. ASSESS THE VICTIM

When the rescuers reach the victim, a primary survey shall be completed. If the victim is conscious, rescuers should determine if the victim can assist in the rescue. If the victim is unconscious, the rescue must be completed as quickly as possible.

### IV. TREATMENT

- A. Initiate C-spine precautions as soon as possible.
- B. Conduct a secondary survey and correct any life-threatening conditions.
- C. Provide for ALS level treatment and transportation to a hospital as indicated.

#### Phase IV Termination

- A. Ensure personnel accountability.
- B. Consider decontamination of victim(s) and rescuer(s).
- C. Recover all tools and equipment used in the rescue/recovery. In cases of a fatality, consider leaving everything in place until the investigation process has been completed.
- D. Consider a Post Incident Critique (may be more appropriate at a later date).
- E. Return to service after returning all equipment to apparatus.

### ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### I. COMMAND STRUCTURE

- A. The first arriving unit shall assume *Command* of the incident. This unit shall remain in Command until Command is transferred to improve the quality of the Command organization. A Command Team shall be assembled to include, at a minimum, a Chief Officer and a Technical Advisor.
- B. Considerations for the *Technical Advisor* include:
  - A Special Operations Qualified Battalion Chief and/or FIT.

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- One of the Regional Special Operations Qualified Safety Officers.
  - Any experienced TRT Company Officer assigned to the incident.
- C. The first arriving TRT unit that is staffed with a TRT Company Officer should be assigned *Rescue Sector*. Rescue teams, Upstream, Downstream, and any other such functional team operating near the water shall be under the direction of Rescue Sector. Rescue Sector shall communicate directly with TRT units assigned to the various functions within Rescue Sector and shall keep Command informed during all phases of the rescue operation.
- D. Considerations for *Safety Officer* include:
- One of the Regional Special Operations Qualified Safety Officers.
  - A Special Operations Qualified Battalion Chief and/or FIT.
  - Any experienced TRT Company Officer assigned to the incident.
- E. *Treatment Sector* should be assigned to any ALS company assigned to the incident.

**II. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- A. For incidents involving Salt River Project canals and laterals, call their 24-hour emergency Association Dispatch Center (ADC) at 602-236-5296 and provide the closest cross streets. They can provide gate control and other useful information.
- B. Consider the effects of inclement weather and water conditions on the hazard profile, the victim(s), and the rescuers, with particular attention to the effects of hypothermia.
- C. Water rescue incidents attract the news media; consider assigning a P.I.O
- D. Use of drone for aerial reconnaissance.