



**Rogers Fire Department**  
**Special Operations**  
**616 Water and Ice Rescue**  
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## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to give general guidelines to be used by rescue personnel conducting a water rescue. Rescue personnel must use judgment, experience, and training to adapt to the specific situation.

## **POLICY**

According to federal regulations and standards, the Rogers Fire Department's Special Operations Team (SOT) shall act and perform as the city's swift water rescue response unit and provide:

- Technical expertise
- Assistance
- Appropriate equipment
- Response for the protection of life, property, and the environment

## **Water Rescue Assignment**

The City Wide Tour Commander (CWTC) shall evaluate incidents dispatched that may have the potential of being a swift water rescue incident. Besides the CWTC, any company officer may call for a SOT response for rope rescue in the event they find themselves in a situation requiring additional resources and expertise. The 1st alarm assignment for a rope rescue inside the city includes the following:

- 2 Closest Fire Companies
- Closest Medic Unit
- Truck 1
- Rescue 5
- Battalion 1

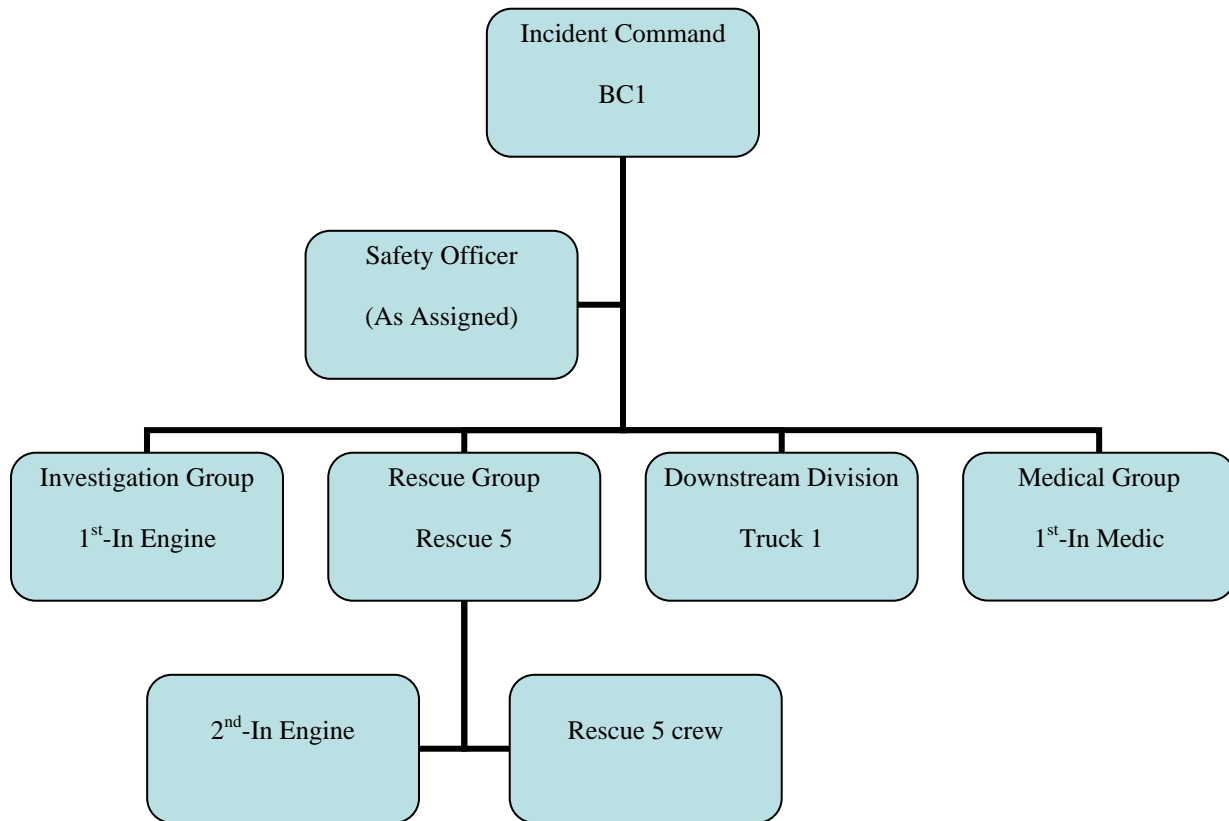
The standing orders for these first alarm companies are as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup>-In Engine Company: Establish Investigation Group. Perform scene assessment, immediate control actions, and locate witnesses and maintenance personnel. Upon arrival of the SOT, establish Upstream Division.
- 2<sup>nd</sup>-In Engine Company: Report to Rescue Group. Be prepared to perform support/supply functions.
- Medic Unit: Establish Medical Group
- Truck 1: Establish Downstream Division. Responsible for downstream operations.
- Rescue 5: Establish Rescue Group. Crew should be prepared to perform victim rescue/recovery functions.
- Battalion 1: Incident Command

All technical rescue incidents shall have a structured intervention system. This system, under NIMS, shall be group based and have the responsibilities listed in this document. In large multi-strategy incidents, a rescue branch may be enacted. Most incidents will involve an ICS setup similar to the chart below.



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A safety officer shall be assigned by the incident commander utilizing responding command staff or company officers as manpower allows. The Incident Commander shall act as the Safety Officer if manpower dictates.

The Incident Commander may return units they feel are not needed to safely control the incident after a complete size-up has been completed. Other Fire Department units may be requested and dispatched during the first alarm, as needed. Responding units should ensure that the response to such incidents meet the procedures contained within this document.

**Safety**

1. All personnel participating in a water rescue operation shall wear at a minimum a personal flotation device within 25 feet of water, work gloves, and a helmet - no structural firefighting gear including fire helmet at any time!!
2. Immediate assessment and resource allocation is critical to a successful operation.
3. In swift water operations, no rescuer shall be attached to a fixed line.
4. Crews must maintain strict continuity and PAR during water rescues.



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## **Tactical Considerations**

### **Phase I: Scene Arrival and Assessment**

Upon arrival at a water rescue operation and prior to the arrival of SOT response teams, first response personnel should undertake an initial assessment and initial strategy. These potential scenarios exist:

- The victim is not in immediate danger of drowning, but special skills will be required to remove the victim/s from the water.
- The victim is struggling to keep from going under water or has already submerged, but there is still a rescue/resuscitation hope.
- The victim reportedly has been carried downstream and intensive search efforts are required to locate victim/s for rescue
- The operation is a body recovery. If a body recovery is confirmed, slowing all incoming units to a non-emergency response is suggested.

A. Secure responsible party or witness

Command should locate witnesses as soon as possible after arriving on scene. This will help in identifying and locating victim/s, determining causes and problems, and establishing search/rescue/recovery operational action plans.

B. Assess the need for additional resources

Command should immediately begin assessing the need for additional resources.

C. Assess the hazards

A thorough assessment of all scene hazards must be completed as soon as possible. All personnel should be briefed on the hazards that are present. Hazards associated with water rescue operations include: volume, velocity, and temperature of water, floating debris, unusual drop-offs, hydraulic effects, and depth of water.

D. Decide on "Rescue" or "Recovery"

Based on the conditions present and the hazards to rescuers, Command will have to make the decision to operate in the rescue or recovery mode. If Command determines that the operation will be run in the rescue mode, rescue should begin as soon as resources are available.

E. Decide on an action plan

Command should establish an action plan as soon as possible. The step-by-step plan should be communicated to all personnel involved in the rescue.

### **Phase II Pre-Rescue Operations**

A. Group/Division Responsibilities for Water Rescue



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The **Upstream Division** (Preferably the 1<sup>st</sup>-In Engine after completing investigation) shall be responsible for spotting floating debris that is approaching the rescue area and notifying Command.

The **Downstream Division** (Preferably Truck 1) shall deploy with throw bags for use in the event that victims are washed downstream from the rescue area.

The **Rescue Group** (Preferably Rescue 5 crew) shall be responsible for performing the rescue/recovery function.

B. Make the general area safe

Secure a perimeter around the hazard area and prohibit non-emergency personnel from approaching in or around the water. Consideration should be given to the use of a helicopter for the task of aerial recon for victim search and hazard spotting.

C. Make the rescue area safe.

Personnel working in the rescue area (waters edge) shall have personal protective equipment (PPE), including personal flotation device (PFD), gloves, and a water rescue helmet, or appropriate SCUBA gear during dive rescue/recovery operations.

D. Pre-Rescue/Recovery.

The **Rescue Group Supervisor** shall be responsible for consulting with the **Incident Commander** to formulate a rescue plan and shall see that necessary equipment is gathered to operate according to the action plan. The **Rescue Group Supervisor** shall assign personnel to conduct the rescue, and support personnel to support the rescuers, during the actual rescue phase.

### **Phase III Rescue Operations**

All personnel shall be briefed on the rescue plan prior to its implementation. Rescue operations should be conducted from low-risk to high-risk. Rescues should be conducted with the least amount of risk to the rescuers necessary to rescue the victim. The order of water rescue from low risk to high risk will be:

#### **Talk**

If possible, talk the victim into swimming to shore or assisting the rescuers with his/her own rescue. If a victim is stranded in the middle of a flash flood, this will not be prudent.

#### **Reach**

If possible, the rescuer should extend his/her hand or some other object, such as a pike pole, to remove the victim from the water.

#### **Throw**

If the victim is too far out in the water to reach, rescuer(s) should attempt to throw the victim a throw bag or some piece of positive flotation (i.e., PFD, rescue ring). Downstream personnel should be in position during the actual rescue operation. If the victim is able to grab the throw bag, the rescuer can pendulum belay or haul the victim to the nearest bank. Care should be taken to assure the victim will be belayed to a safe downstream position.



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Note: Personnel that have had operational level water rescue training should be able to conduct the above rescues without the help of the Special Operations Team (S.O.T). If the victim cannot be reached by either of these methods, Command should consider stopping the operation until units of the S.O.T. arrive.

### **Row**

If it is determined that a boat based operation shall be run Command should assign a company on the opposite bank to assist the **Rescue Group** in establishing an anchor for a rope system. The company on the opposite bank will be made aware of the action plan. The **Rescue Group Supervisor** will be responsible for seeing that the rope system used for the boat based operation is built safely and correctly. A minimum of a 2-point tether should be built for swift-water operations. The **Rescue Group** should consider personal protective equipment (PPE) for victim(s).

### **Go**

If it is not possible to ROW (boat base operation) to the victim, it may become necessary to deploy a rescuer into the water to reach the victim. This is a very high risk operation. Only rescuers with the proper training and equipment should be allowed to enter the water. Prior to the rescuer actually proceeding into the water, he/she shall discuss the action plan, including specific tasks and objectives, hazards and alternate plans. The rescuer shall never be attached to a life line without the benefit of a quick-release mechanism. The rescuer should take PPE of at least a PFD to the victim. Members shall not do a breath-hold surface dive in an attempt to locate a victim beneath the surface of the water.

### **Helo**

At times the use of a helicopter is the most reasonable method of reaching the victim. Helicopter operations over water are considered high risk operations. Command should consult with the **Rescue Group Supervisor** and the pilot to determine the risk/benefit of the use of a helicopter. The **Incident Commander** will have the final say on the use of a helicopter for water rescue operations. The pilot will have the final say on how the helicopter will be used.

### **Vehicle in the Water**

Many problems associated with a vehicle in the water can be avoided if rescuers first carefully evaluate the situation and develop a definitive plan before attempting any rescue. Consideration include:

1. Risk/benefit
2. Rescue versus body recovery
3. Question witnesses
4. Where and in what condition are the victims?
5. Is the vehicle partially submerged?
6. Is the vehicle fully submerged? (The chance of an air pocket existing is very slim.)
7. What is the likely condition of the vehicle based on mechanism of impact?
8. What are the water conditions? (swift, cold, warm)



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**Assessing the Victim**

Once the rescuer(s) have reached the victim, they should do an immediate assessment of the victim; a quick assessment of the ABC's and the exact method of entrapment. If the victim is conscious, the rescuer should determine if the victim can assist in his/her own rescue. If the victim is unconscious, a rapid removal is warranted. The victim should be brought to shore as soon as possible.

**Treatment**

As soon as the victim is brought to safety, an assessment should be done by Medic unit personnel. Treatment shall be administered as per local protocol. If necessary, the victim shall be transported to the appropriate facility. Special considerations should be taken regarding hypothermia and secondary drowning.

**Phase IV Termination**

Command should begin termination as soon as possible after the victim has been removed from the water. This shall include securing all the equipment used for the rescue and personnel accountability. Members should not become part of a towing operation to remove vehicles from the water. One company should stand by for rescue if a tow truck driver insists on retrieving the vehicle.