

Emergency Management British Columbia

Search and Rescue Volunteer Safety Policy and Operational Guidelines

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why was the Safety Policy and Safety Program Guide created?

The Safety Policy and Safety Program Guide were created in 2009 to provide current information and guidance to Public Safety Lifeline Volunteers on safety management and operational issues. These documents outline the expectations EMBC/PEP has of volunteer societies, volunteer supervisors and volunteers who wish to be tasked by EMBC/PEP. The policy specifically provides an overarching statement with respect to key safety priorities for all Public Safety Lifeline disciplines.

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/PEP Regional staff. All policies and related documentation is posted electronically on the PEP website located at www.pep.bc.ca

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

The Safety Program Policy and Guidelines were originally created by a working group comprised of an Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) consultant, Public Service Agency OHS specialists, EMBC/PEP staff, and SAR Volunteers. This project was announced in 2007, with the draft documents distributed to all SAR groups in the spring of 2009. The BC SAR Association (BCSARA), as the organization tasked with providing SAR advice to government on behalf of the volunteer SAR community, was involved in the project and assisted in gathering feedback from SAR Groups through the Occupational Health and Safety workgroup. EMBC/PEP also received some feedback directly from specific SAR Societies which was shared with the BCSARA OSH workgroup. The resulting feedback (observations, comments, suggestions and recommendations) was consolidated by EMBC/PEP staff, reviewed, and where practical and reasonable incorporated in to the final document that was distributed on July 23, 2011 to all EMBC/PEP regional offices and BCSARA.

Q: Where are the sample Operational Guidelines that were originally included in these documents?

Sample Operational Guidelines are located in the BCSARA Electronic Library. To access them please visit their webpage and if you require access please contact your BCSARA director.

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

Operational Guidelines are basic expectation of WorkSafeBC to provide guidance to those emergency responders who wish to be covered by the Workers' Compensation Act. SAR Societies determine the search and rescue services they wish to engage in. The sample operational guidelines are designed to provide a consistent and clear direction to their members in order to ensure their activities are carried out in a safe manner. The sample OGs cover the key elements required to satisfy WorkSafeBC expectations and are designed to readily adoptable by the SAR societies saving them valuable time in effort in creating OGs from scratch. SAR Society executives need a mechanism to convey operational guidance to their members and to ensure awareness and compliance with laws, regulations, standards and best practices. SOGs are essential to SAR operations and SAR Societies cannot operate safely or effectively without a comprehensive set of SOGs. 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. The Sample Standard Operational Guidelines (OGs) were separated from the Volunteer Safety Guide so that they could be customized to meet the unique and specific needs of individual SAR societies.

Q: Will EMBC/PEP require a copy of OGs once they are in place?

No. OGs are society documents that are maintained at the society level. From time to time EMBC/PEP may request copies of OGs such as in the case of an injury and/or serious incident.

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

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 address first as most administrative issues generally have less risk and little potential for injury and are a lower priority. 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. An example of the difference between technical skill training and what would be included in an OG is provided below.

Example – Snowmobile Operations “Training vs. Guidelines”

Technical Skills Training	Sample Standard Operational Guidelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avalanche risk zone recognition• Location of vehicle controls• Pick-up / Trailer loading• Driving and parking skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avalanche risk exposure thresholds.• Permissible speeds.• Operator well-being check-in criteria.

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

The Safety Program Policy and Guide are designed to fulfill essential WorkSafeBC and other regulatory requirements. The Sample Standard Operating Guidelines that were developed are purposefully designed to provide the basis for the further and ongoing development of specific and unique operations guidelines that meet the need of individual SAR Societies.

Q: I don't see where the responsibility of EMBC/PEP is defined, aren't they the 'Employer' as per Worksafe B.C. regulations?

Based on recent enquiries from the SAR community EMBC/PEP is making further enquiries with various authorities including WorkSafeBC to provide a definitive answer in regard to this long standing question. These enquiries are specific to developing a definitive understanding the various roles and responsibilities of EMBC/PEP, SAR Societies and SAR volunteers to health and safety requirements.

Presently the role and responsibilities of EMBC/PEP are stated in the Volunteer Safety Policy available at www.pep.bc.ca/volunteer/Vol_Safety_Policy.pdf

At this time our understanding is that EMBC/PEP's role is not the same as an employer in an industrial setting, but as the provider of WCB coverage under a Task Number is fully committed to safety including the

establishment of a Safety Program for Volunteers. Safety is everyone's responsibility; see the Volunteer Safety Policy for full details.

Q: Is there an opportunity for further feedback on these documents?

Yes, it is critical that the policies, safety program information, and OGs be reviewed to ensure consistency with regulatory requirements, training, current practices and the outcome of post operational debriefs formal reviews and investigations. EMBC/PEP will assist BCSARA as requested on any questions related to the adoption and implementation of Operating Guidelines. Feedback can be emailed to BCSARA at ohs@bcsara.com or Search and Rescue Specialist Jeff Haack at Jeffrey.Haack@gov.bc.ca