

Public Safety Lifeline Volunteers

Safety Policy

Definitions

"Volunteer" means an individual, including a supervisor, registered by the Provincial Emergency Program for the purpose of preparing for (i.e. training or exercising) and responding to a disaster or an emergency.

Note: A **"Convergent Volunteer"** is also considered a volunteer for the purposes of this policy. A "convergent volunteer" means an individual that offers their service and/or expertise during a PSL activity and is signed in to the task (but is not a registered PSL volunteer)

"Supervisor" means a person with direction and control over PSL volunteers and other persons while preparing for or responding to a disaster or an emergency. This includes, but is not limited to; Training Officers, Team Leaders, Section Chiefs.

"Work" means all activities carried out by a volunteer or responder while under a training or response task number.

"PSL (Public Safety Lifeline) Discipline" means one of the following:

- Search and Rescue (SAR)
- Emergency Social Services (ESS)
- Emergency Radio Communications
- PEP Air
- Road Rescue

"PSL (Public Safety Lifeline) Organization" means a PEP recognized provincial, federal or community based society, or unincorporated group established to support volunteers engaged in preparing for and responding to emergencies, and/or providing advice to government

Introduction and Scope

This policy covers the safety of all Public Safety Lifeline volunteers while participating in and preparing for and responding to a disaster or an emergency for which PEP has issued a task number. The policy supports the first priority of the B.C. Emergency Response Management System (BCERMS); **'Provide for the Safety and Health of All Responders'**.

The Provincial Emergency Program (PEP) is committed to the safety of all Public Safety Lifeline (PSL) volunteers. Safety policies and programs, along with training and exercising are important in maintaining an effective volunteer resource.

The safety of Public Safety Lifeline volunteers is a shared responsibility between PEP management & staff, local authorities (where applicable), Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer Organizations, supervisors and individual volunteers. All reasonable and practicable safeguards for the safety of PSL volunteers will be taken.

Safe work practices and procedures will be developed for each PSL discipline to reflect the nature of their emergency response roles and working environments. These will meet the following minimum requirements or standards of care:

- Safety will be a primary consideration in all training and response activities;
- Safety responsibilities will be clearly assigned;
- On-going efforts will be undertaken to identify hazards and risks associated with training, exercise and response events in order for preventive measures to be undertaken to eliminate or reduce volunteer injury or illness;
- Input will be encouraged from volunteers on issues that impact their safety.

Roles and Responsibilities

PEP:

- Develop, implement and maintain policies and programs for the prevention of work related injuries and disease to Public Safety Lifeline volunteers;
- Provide support and guidance to Public Safety Lifeline volunteer Organizations on the implementation and effective management of safety programs and practices, including training and development;
- Provide tools to assist Public Safety Lifeline volunteer organizations and volunteers in maintaining required records of training, exercising and response.

Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer Organizations

- Take all reasonable and practical steps to ensure the safety of volunteers;

- Develop, implement and maintain a safety policy, program, practices and procedures appropriate to training and other activities involving preparing for and responding to a disaster or an emergency;
- Ensure records are maintained of training completed by individual volunteers, participation in exercises and, roles volunteers fill during responses;
- Provide volunteers access to information on safety policies, training, and programs;
- Ensure that volunteers have the relevant training and skills to safely perform their assigned activities;
- Ensure safety is a standing item on the organization's meeting agendas, with discussions and follow up actions recorded;
- Provide PEP access, upon request, to safety records, including training, exercising, response, and safety agenda/minutes.

Supervisors

- Take all reasonable and practical steps to ensure the safety of volunteers;
- Assign volunteers to activities that are consistent with their knowledge, skills, ability;
- Remove any volunteer from activities if the supervisor has concerns as to the volunteer's ability to safely perform their duties;
- Ensure a risk assessment has been completed relative to specific activities and environment;
- Provide direction to volunteers on acting safely consistent with identified risks;
- Ensure incidents of unsafe situations, hazards, accidents and injury are reported and investigated in a timely manner.

PSL Volunteers

- Follow safe work practices and procedures when training, exercising and responding;
- Advise their supervisor if they believe that their assigned activities cannot be safely performed;
- Immediately report all incidents of unsafe situations, hazards, accidents and injury to a designated supervisor;
- Participate in training and orientation activities required to safely undertake assigned roles and responsibilities;
- Provide records of completed training and certification to the appropriate PSL Organization and/or PEP staff upon request;
- Cooperate with PSL supervisors and fellow volunteers on matters related to safety.

Safety program components

The following key components will be part of each PSL discipline safety program. The nature and complexity of program operations and anticipated event situations will determine the content and detail for each component.

Supervision of Volunteers

While under a training or response task number the direction and control of PSL volunteers is the responsibility of a person designated within the reporting structure of the relevant event. These individuals are defined as supervisors. The following are examples of supervisor roles; actual roles may vary depending on the PSL discipline and event;

- Training: designated training officer or instructor
- Exercising: training officer or leader designated within reporting structure
- Response: person designated within reporting structure

The supervisor must ensure:

- volunteers have the knowledge and skill to perform their duties safely;
- proper safety procedures are followed;
- adequate briefings are provided to all volunteers;
- appropriate emergency medical response/rescue capability is available in the event of volunteer injury;
- proper communications are in place, and;
- any observed or reported hazards or unsafe conditions are identified and assessed and, incidents are investigated.

Worksite/Event Risk Assessment

PSL volunteers often carry out duties in a wide range of dynamic events, work environments and locations. For this reason a worksite inspection and/or risk assessment, appropriate to the circumstances will be conducted prior to and during an event. This will facilitate identification of potential risks and hazards and establish injury prevention and emergency medical response/rescue requirements specific to each event.

Orientation, Education and Training

Volunteers will be trained in and provided with written safe work procedures (or standard operating guidelines (SOG's) for the safe performance of the volunteer's work. Supervisors will ensure that all volunteers including new volunteers receive orientation on safety policies and safe work procedures/practices, including checks on proficiency and skill/knowledge evaluation

Incident investigation and reporting

An investigation will be conducted following any report of injury or near miss incidents involving PSL volunteers. If the injury is minor, the investigation will entail a PSL supervisor or other designated person interviewing the injured and witnesses that were present when the incident occurred. Immediate preventive action will be taken if the potential for further injury exists. A written report is to be completed and a copy included with Task reports required by PEP.

If a serious injury has occurred, or if a near miss could have resulted in a serious injury, a more formal investigation is required. If the incident occurs during response, the

investigation is to be conducted with the agency of jurisdiction (with the overall responsibility for the response) and a PEP representative. There may also be requirements under other legislation necessitating involvement of safety boards, police or other agencies depending on the incident. The PEP Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) should be informed immediately and support will be provided by the appropriate Regional Manager and specific staff.

An investigation is not to delay treatment and transportation of any injured. Reporting of injuries is to follow the process outlined in PEP Policy 5.13 [Workers Compensation Board Claims](#).

Records

Where practicable PSL volunteer organizations will maintain records of volunteer training, exercising and response activities and provide access to these records upon request of a PEP representative. Individual volunteers are to maintain records of their participation in training, exercising and responses and provide access to these records upon request of a PSL or PEP representative or other designated authority.

PEP will maintain records and statistics on injuries reported, and actions taken as a result of incident investigations.

Management meetings

Public Safety Lifeline organizations are to maintain safety as a standing agenda item on PSL program management or business meetings. Items of concern are to be brought forward to PEP with recommendations for corrective action should they be deemed required.

Other Safety Program Components

Other safety procedures may be appropriate where a risk assessment has identified a risk of injury or illness, including but not limited to:

Violence to Volunteers

An assessment of the risk of violence to volunteers and other responders will be undertaken and preventive measures taken to eliminate or reduce the identified risks. The risk may be increased by the emotional aspects of responding to emergencies, e.g. families and friends of missing or injured persons may become agitated due to perceived delays in responding to an event. As in the risk from natural hazards the first priority is responder safety. Circumstances may preclude a full response until the situation is assessed by police or other trained personnel and the risk mitigated with their assistance.

Working alone or in isolation

The risk to volunteers from working alone or in isolation is to be assessed and appropriate measures taken to eliminate or minimize the identified risks, including appropriate check in and communication procedures.

Dangerous Atmospheres/Confined Space

PSL volunteers will not enter any location or space such as a confined space, where it may be dangerous to breathe the air. Should any concerns over air quality exist or there is a need to enter a confined space, volunteers are to request the assistance of trained personnel to ascertain the safety and to respond with appropriate equipment and training.

Hazardous Materials

In situations in which PSL volunteers have the potential to be exposed to any hazardous materials, the risks must be assessed by a qualified person. Volunteers shall be made aware of any identified risks and how to maintain their safety. Appropriate safety procedures will be followed to reduce the potential for volunteers to be exposed to hazardous materials as much as reasonably practicable.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

If PPE is required to protect a volunteer from a risk of injury/disease, volunteers will be trained in the proper use and maintenance of the equipment. Records of equipment maintenance and inspection and, training in use of PPE, will also be maintained by the supervisor.

Signatory

Signatory

Date