



<b>Wintergreen Fire and Rescue Standard Administrative Policy</b>	
Subject:	Water Rescue
Reference Number:	OPER 03-023
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Signature of Approval	Curtis Sheets, Chief

**Background:**

The Wintergreen Fire - Rescue Department has the responsibility of providing for the rescue needs of the Wintergreen community and, through mutual aid agreements, assistance with the rescue needs for surrounding areas.

**Purpose:**

To establish guidelines for the response of Wintergreen Fire - Rescue Department personnel and equipment to incidents which utilize specialized equipment and training to aid in water rescue events.

**Definitions:**

Cold Zone: Any area greater than 10 feet from the waters edge.

Hot Zone: Any activity taking place in the water.

Slack: Release tension on rope while maintaining positive control of the rope.

Stop: All Systems and movement shall be stopped until concern is addressed.

Tension: Remove slack in the system until the rope is under manageable tension.

Warm Zone: The warm zone begins 10 feet from the water's edge.

River Right: Side of river on right when facing downstream.

River Left: Side of river on left when facing downstream.

Swiftwater: Any water moving at a speed greater than 1 knot/hr.

Surface Water: Any water that is still or moving less than 1 knot/hr.

**Procedure:**

1. Safety
  - a. The incident management system shall be used at all water rescue incidents.
  - b. Any personnel operating on or within ten (10) feet of a body of water that is greater than 3 feet in depth shall wear an approved personal floatation

device (PFD). Any member working the shoreline of a swift-water rescue or environment shall wear an approved water rescue helmet.

- c. Only rescuers with the proper training and equipment should be allowed to enter the water.
- d. Structural firefighting turnouts and bunker style boots shall not be worn within 10' of the water's edge, in the boat, or in the water.

## 2. Tactical Considerations

- a. Perform a size up. Determine the number, age, description, condition, and the last seen point of the victim and/or their vehicle.
- b. Once the extent of the rescue is determined the Incident Commander should have the OIC initiate a career call-back for additional staffing, if required.
- c. Establish a command post and keep the witnesses in a centralized location.
- d. Isolate the area and deny entry to untrained and/or unequipped personnel
- e. Determine rescue vs recovery.

## 3. Modes of Rescue

- a. Talk - If the victim is capable of safely rescuing themselves and merely needs instruction from rescuers, this should be done first.
- b. Reach – A hand, pike pole, tree branch, or other item can be used to reach the victim from shore.
- c. Throw – A throw bag or rope may be thrown to the victim, who is then pulled to safety by the rescuer.
- d. Row – If necessary a boat or personal watercraft may be used to reach the victim
- e. Go or Tow – Swimming to perform rescues is extremely hazardous to both the rescuer and the victim. These types of rescues may only be performed by the members specifically trained and equipped for these types of rescues only after other efforts have failed.
- f. Helicopter – Helicopter rescues are also extremely hazardous and have a high potential for failure and disaster. This is the last rescue option and may only be considered after eliminating all other rescue options, and after performing a risk benefit analysis. A helicopter shall not be used for a recovery operation.

## 4. Communications

- a. Whistle blasts will indicate the following:
  - i. One Blast – Attention (look at me)
  - ii. Two Blasts – Upstream
  - iii. Three Blasts – Downstream
  - iv. Four Blasts (Multiple/Erratic) – Help
- b. Hand Signals will indicate the following:
  - i. Hand patting top of head – I'm OK
  - ii. Point Downstream – Look Downstream
  - iii. Point Upstream – Look Upstream
  - iv. Wave Hand(s) Overhead – Help
  - v. Both arms held out, parallel to ground: Don't come down stream
  - vi. Single Hand held up in air: may continue down stream

## 5. Swiftwater/Flood

- a. Operational zones for swift water:
  - i. Hot Zone- this is considered in or over swift water and PFD's are required. Swift Water Technician certification is required to operate in the Hot Zone.
  - ii. Warm Zone- this is considered within 10 feet of the water and PFD's are required. Operations Level and below are required to operate in the warm zone.
  - iii. Cold Zone- this is considered greater than 10 feet from the water. Any untrained personnel operate in the cold zone.
  - iv. Zone Considerations - the distance and locations of the warm and cold zones may be increased as deemed necessary for the incident. Some of the considerations may include but are not limited to geography, weather, topography, or changing conditions.
- b. To enter the water, rescuers must have completed an Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) approved swift-water rescue class.
  - i. Any time a rescuer or victim is located in the water there shall be an upstream spotter and downstream safeties with retrieval devices available. These personnel are dedicated to these positions and may not be used in any other capacity unless immediately replaced.
    - 1. A minimum of 2 down-stream safeties will be deployed prior to putting a rescuer in the water.
    - 2. An up-stream spotter will be required prior to putting a rescuer in the water.
  - ii. Flood situations or other contaminated water environments require the use of dry-suits.
  - iii. If it is not a flood situation or contaminated water, the rescuers can enter the water without dry suits.
  - iv. Never tie a rope around or on a rescuer except when using a "live bait", type V rescue PFD for a "go" rescue evolution. Use only the approved steel ring attachment in the back of the PFD for rope attachment.
  - v. When possible have personnel assigned to the opposite riverbank for incidents involving swift-water rescue.
  - vi. Never put feet down if swept away. (Potential for foot entrapment).
  - vii. An equal number of backup rescuers should be dressed and ready in case they are needed.

## 6. Surface Water

- a. To enter the water, rescuers shall have completed an AHJ Surface Water training.
  - i. A minimum of 2 safeties will be deployed prior to putting a rescuer in the water.
  - ii. Contaminated water environments require the use of dry-suits.
  - iii. Never tie a rope around or on a rescuer except when using a "live bait", Type V rescue PFD for a "go" rescue evolution. Use only the approved steel ring attachment in the back of the PFD for rope attachment.

7. Rope Operations
  - a. Basic rope operations may be needed to affect water rescues. In this case, consider activating the Technical Rescue Team.
    - i. If there is an activation, establish a group supervisor to communicate the needs due to the dynamic environment of water rescue.
    - ii. The group supervisor over the TRT rope team needs to have a minimum Swift Water Technician and will ultimately be responsible for the rope aspect as it relates to the needs of the water team.
8. Vehicle Rescues in Swiftwater
  - a. Rescuers shall be Swift Water Technicians and Boat operator certified if power boats are needed
    - i. At least four rescuers are needed to safely perform vehicle rescue.
    - ii. Always approach the vehicle from the downstream side in the eddy.
    - iii. If patients are entrapped, consider the use of a power boat or paddle craft to transport tools to the vehicle.
    - iv. Stabilize the vehicle with a rope or cable to the upstream post closest to the working side.
    - v. Downstream safety crew needs to be put in place and will be responsible for water crews and patients.
9. Vehicle Rescues in Static Water
  - a. First in Engine Company Officer's discretion whether or not to put rescuers in the water.
  - b. Surface Water trained personnel are recommended but not required for a lifesaving emergency. The shift captain or their designee will make the determination for non-certified personnel to enter the water.
  - c. A Class V PFD shall be worn at all times when in the water and less than 10' from the water's edge.
10. Ice Incidents involving partially or completely frozen bodies of water
  - a. To enter the water/surface on the ice, rescuers shall have completed an approved swift-water rescue course.
    - i. The only absolute in ice safety is to stay off of the ice!
    - ii. A "Go" rescue will be a last resort.
    - iii. Use a tether line connected to the rescuer's chest.
    - iv. Rescuers shall be in a dry-suit prior to entering the water/ice.
    - v. Rescuers working on ice should use all means to distribute their weight over the surface and be prepared for breakthrough at all times. Use of a ground ladder is a recommended method of accomplishing this.
    - vi. Request an additional ambulance to use as a warming station.