


<p><b>RABUN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE</b></p>  <p><b>General Order Number: 4.51</b></p>	<p><b>Date of Issue</b></p> <p>2/23/2016</p>	<p><b>Effective Date</b></p> <p>2/23/2016</p>	<p><b>Revision Date</b></p>
<p>Subject: <b>SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS</b></p>	<p>Amends:</p>		<p>Rescinds:</p>
<p>Index as: Rescue, Search and Rescue</p>	<p>State Certification Standards: 5.25</p>		
<p>Special Instructions:</p>			

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this General Order is to prescribe the policies and procedures of the Rabun County Sheriff's Office regarding the conduct of search and rescue operations of individuals reported lost, missing, or having escaped from custody.

**STATEMENT OF POLICY**

Departmental personnel will perform search and rescue operations when there is credible information that there is a missing individual or escaped prisoner in a given area.

**DISCUSSION**

The Rabun County Emergency Operations Plan has assigned search and rescue responsibilities as follows:

The search and rescue services function will be the primary responsibility of the Rabun County Fire Department according to jurisdiction, and secondary support for this function is the responsibility of the Rabun County Sheriff's Office.

In regards to escapees from custody from the Rabun County Sheriff's Office, the primary responsible department will be the Rabun County Sheriff's Office, with support from other agencies and departments.

## **I. INITIAL ACTIONS**

- A. The following information will be gathered by the first responding deputy:
  - 1. Name, age, sex, race and physical description of the victim and relationship of the reporting party to the missing person;
  - 2. Time, date, and place of last known location and the identity of anyone accompanying the victim;
  - 3. The extent of any previously conducted search or inquiries;
  - 4. Whether the victim has been missing on prior occasions and the degree to which the absence departs from established behavior patterns, habits, or plans;
  - 5. Whether the victim has been involved recently in domestic incidents; suffered emotional trauma or life crisis; demonstrated unusual, uncharacteristic, or bizarre behavior; is dependent on drugs or alcohol; or has a history of mental illness; and
  - 6. The current physical condition of the victim and whether the person is currently on prescription medication.
- B. If the missing person is a juvenile, information should be obtained concerning whether the child is or may be with any adult who could cause harm; may have been the subject of a parental abduction; has previously run away from home, has threatened to do so, or has a history of other absences for extended periods of time.

## **II. DECISION TO SEARCH**

The decision to conduct a physical search of a given area will be based upon the nature of the situation and whether there is credible information that the missing person is in a given location. Unless there is information to the contrary, a search will be initiated in accordance with the procedures outlined below, under the following circumstances:

- A. When an individual escapes from custody;
- B. When a small child is reported lost;
- C. When a person is reported lost/missing who was last seen in a wooded or large recreational area;
- D. When there is a report of an accident or crash involving watercraft; or
- E. When there is a report of an accident or crash involving an airplane within a remote setting.

## **III. NOTIFICATIONS**

- A. The Shift Supervisor will be notified of all situations when a search should be initiated.
- B. After reviewing the facts and circumstances of the situation, if the Shift Supervisor determines to conduct a search, she/he will direct the Rabun County Central Communications Center to notify the

Rabun County Fire Department and will also designate which Rabun County Sheriff's Office units are to respond to the incident scene.

- C. Contact will be made for the possible deployment of a canine team.
- D. When necessary, the Shift Supervisor will have the Rabun 911 Center contact off duty personnel to assist in search efforts.
- E. The Shift Supervisor will ensure that Rabun County Central Communications has made the proper notifications as required for the Command Staff and support personnel.

#### **IV. CHAIN OF COMMAND**

- A. In order to successfully manage a search and rescue operation, centralized control of all departmental resources under the command of a single individual is essential.
- B. The Watch Commander or Shift Supervisor will respond to all search and rescue situations and will assume duties as the Incident Commander until properly relieved.
- C. The Incident Commander will command all departmental personnel involved in the search and rescue operation; will provide direction and control by issuing orders and instructions to personnel as they arrive at the incident scene; and will make coordination, as necessary, with other commanders for additional personnel and equipment resources.

#### **V. SEARCH PROCEDURES**

- A. The first step when organizing a search is to establish an initial Command Post where response personnel can report and receive additional instructions.
- B. The location of the Command Post should be as near to the location where the subject/victim was last seen or, in the case of an accident in a remote setting, as close to the crash site as possible.
- C. The Command Post should also be positioned where there is adequate parking and access for emergency vehicles.
- D. The Incident Commander shall remain at the Command Post so that she/he can provide appropriate direction and supervision of response personnel until relieved by senior ranking officers.
- E. The Duties of the Command Post Personnel are as follows:
  - 1. Monitor on-going activities;
  - 2. Direct deployment of search personnel;
  - 3. Coordinate with the Rabun County Communications Center for additional assistance;
  - 4. Maintain accountability of search personnel; and

5. Insure an Incident Report is initiated and appropriate follow-up investigation activities are performed upon termination of the incident.

## **VI. ORGANIZATION**

- A. In order to exercise effective control of all response forces, the Incident Commander must assign functional areas of responsibility to specific individuals, who in turn will supervise other individuals as assigned.
- B. With regard to personnel from other outside agencies, the Incident Commander will exercise command through the ranking on-scene representative from the agency.
- C. As the situation develops over time, the Incident Commander should organize deployed forces into the following areas:
  1. Designated area search teams;
  2. Media relations; and
  3. Canine teams.

## **VII. IDENTIFYING THE SEARCH AREA**

- A. Search efforts should begin from the location where the subject/victim was last seen. This location should then be located on a map. The radius of the search area can now be calculated by estimating how far the person could have traveled through the terrain and area, as indicated on the map, in the amount of time that has elapsed since she/he was last seen. If the area indicated on the map is flat and relatively open, the individual would be able to travel further than if confined to a highly dense, wooded area.
- B. Also take into consideration the physical condition of the subject or victim, and whether the person may be lost or is attempting to elude capture. A person who has escaped from custody may be running away from where she/he was last seen, while someone who is lost may be wandering.
- C. Finally, once the radius is calculated, draw a circle around the location where the individual was last seen and establish the initial search area.

## **VIII. ORGANIZING AND CONDUCTING THE SEARCH**

- A. Use of Canine Units
  1. If a scent item is available, it should be left undisturbed and pointed out to Canine deputies.
  2. If no scent item is available, the exact area where the individual was last seen should be preserved for the dogs and shown to the handlers.

3. If the subject/victim departed from a vehicle, do not enter it. Preserve it for the dogs. The seat will make an excellent scent item unless someone else sat on it before the dogs have a chance to sniff it.
4. Turn off the motors of vehicles in the immediate vicinity. Exhaust fumes will discourage and sometimes sicken a scenting dog.

#### B. Personnel Assignments

1. The search area should be sectioned into workable pieces and search teams assigned to each area.
2. Each search team should be equipped with a portable radio.
3. If volunteers are used when searching for a missing/lost person, they should team-up with deputies who have radio communications.
4. Personnel accountability must be maintained and their status monitored at all times.
5. All search personnel must be provided with a detailed description of the subject/victim.

#### C. Identify the Roadways in the area

If there are roads running through or surrounding the search area, patrols should be assigned to look for the victim and to obtain information from others who may be in the area.

#### D. Grid Search

A "grid-search" formation consists of search personnel lining up to walk slowly through the search area. This should only be used as a last resort, when other methods fail. This formation is costly, time consuming, destroys clues, contaminates the area for search dogs, and stomps out shoe impressions and signs.

- E. The Department of Natural Resources, Georgia State Patrol, or local news media personnel should be contacted if air surveillance would be appropriate.
- F. When searching for an escaped prisoner, it is essential to surround the area and confine the subject. Roads or trails in the area should be heavily patrolled. Roadblocks should be established around the search area, using the circle system whereby every avenue of escape is blocked and each motorist is stopped and questioned.

#### G. Obtain as much information as possible to provide clues to the subject/victim's behavior and performance. For example:

1. What is his/her present physical condition?
2. How well can she/he survive the cold or heat?
3. Is the individual armed?
4. Is she/he experienced in wilderness survival?

5. Is the person right or left-handed? (When presented with a fork in a trail, right-handed people usually choose the right fork)
  6. What type of footwear is the person wearing? (Trackers may have to separate several different shoe impressions)
  7. Does the subject/victim have friends or relatives living in the area?
- H. All media requests for information will be handled in accordance with the General Order on "Media Relations" and in accordance with the Rabun County Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Operations Plan.
- I. Requests for outside agency support will be handled in accordance with the General Order on "Mutual Aid" and in accordance with the Rabun County Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Operations Plan.

## **IX. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

### **A. Aircraft Crashes**

1. Upon locating the crash site, establish an outer perimeter and clear the area of all non-essential personnel and spectators;
2. Allow no entry into the area except for other emergency personnel;
3. Under no circumstances, will any portion of the aircraft or any of its contents be moved until investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board give permission to do so; and
4. If possible, secure the pilot's license, medical certificates, and other aviation documents.

Note: Military Cargo and Aircraft should be treated with special care, as there may be weapons, explosives, or ammunition present that may be accidentally detonated.

### **B. Watercraft Crashes**

All searches of lakes and waterways will be conducted in accordance with General Order No. 13.07 A "Underwater Search and Recovery Team.

## **X. TERMINATION ACTIONS**

Once the search is terminated/concluded, the following actions should be taken:

- A. Account for all search personnel;
- B. Assist in the return of evacuees;
- C. Release mutual aid and support forces, if used;

- D. Prepare news release; (if appropriate) and
- E. Prepare Incident Report.



By Order of the Sheriff: **Chad K. Nichols**  
Sheriff, Rabun County