

**NEVADA COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT**

**SEARCH AND RESCUE  
VOLUNTEER MANUAL**



# NEVADA COUNTY SHERIFF'S SEARCH AND RESCUE MANUAL

## **Mission Statement:**

We are committed to providing excellence in public service in partnership with our community.

## **Policy and Responsibility:**

The State of California mandates that the Sheriff of Nevada County shall have the responsibility to search for lost persons and evacuate the injured or ill (California Government Code sections 26614 and 26614.5). The Board of Supervisors has authorized the Sheriff of Nevada County to conduct search and rescue activities within the County of Nevada.

## **Objectives:**

1. To give appropriate priority to the protection of human life.
2. To find and provide necessary medical care to subjects in distress.
3. To evacuate subjects as necessary.

To discharge this duty, a Search and Rescue Team has been organized with an officer in charge of operations as the Coordinator and trained deputies as Search and Rescue Incident Commanders.

The nucleus of the team is a group of volunteers who have been trained for such service: Nevada County Sheriff's Search and Rescue Inc. (NCSSAR).

## **Purpose:**

The primary purpose of Nevada County Sheriff's Search and Rescue Inc. (NCSSAR) is to act under the direction of the Nevada County Sheriff's Office with all respects associated with locating, rescuing and recovering all lost, stranded, injured or otherwise incapacitated individuals. These activities may be acted upon by the request of the Nevada County Sheriff, the California Office of Emergency Services or other governmental agencies and is not limited to the geographical boundaries of Nevada County. NCSSAR is organized to respond consistent with the requirements of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

## **General Provisions:**

The Sheriff shall have the responsibility and the authority for the development of overall plans, policies and standards to assure that effective levels of SAR services are maintained in the County of Nevada. The Sheriff has appointed a sworn officer as Coordinator of Operations. This officer shall implement the policies and procedures developed by the Sheriff, oversee daily operations, as needed, establish a course of study and field training he/she deems appropriate for the qualification and certification in all categories of SAR. The officer or his/her representative is in charge of all SAR missions in Nevada County.

The Sheriff shall have the authority to suspend, revoke, decertify, for cause, any process or certificate he has issued. The Sheriff shall have the authority to remove from membership and/or suspend any persons of NCSSAR.

### **Application and Background:**

Application for membership in NCSSAR shall be made to the Coordinator. All accepted applicants must be eligible to be deputized, “without peace office powers”, and to be registered as a disaster worker under the appropriate laws, rules and regulations of the State of California. Any NCSSAR member receiving an inquiry regarding volunteer membership shall refer the interested party to the Coordinator. Persons applying directly to the Nevada County Sheriff’s Office shall be given an application and instructions in filling out the application. This person will be advised to contact the Coordinator, to set up an interview, upon completion of the application. Persons applying for membership in NCSSAR must be in reasonably good health, must possess a valid California driver’s license and must be at least eighteen years of age. A special category of membership has been established for youth between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. This special category requires a waiver signed by the parent or legal guardian of the applicant, and this minor must be accompanied to all SAR functions by the parent, guardian or other responsible adult. Due to the nature of SAR activities, including death, and dying victims, no one under fourteen is allowed to be a member of NCSSAR.

When the Coordinator has received an application he/she will review it for completeness. An interview conducted between the Coordinator and/or his/her designee and the applicant, at a time of mutual agreement.

The interview shall include but not limited to:

1. Information gathering in areas of expertise, motivation and limitations.
2. Requirements and expectations from the Sheriff, including participation in ongoing training and search activities. Yearly minimums have been established for participation.
3. Upon completion of a background investigation and approval by the NCSSAR Board, an applicant will be notified of his/her acceptance or rejection to NCSSAR. Accepted applicants will be scheduled to attend the next training academy. Upon successful completion of the academy will receive their identification card and placed on the search callout list.

### **Membership NCSSAR:**

It is important that a clear understanding of conditions and procedures be explained to all who are considering membership with the NCSSAR Team. These conditions and procedures include, but are not limited to, the following list:

1. No payment will be rendered for your services, and you will furnish your personal equipment. Only in certain instances will the County be responsible for loss or damage to your equipment. Meals will be furnished whenever possible while engaged in missions. Each member should carry food and water sufficient for 24 hours.

2. While on assigned duty, you will be covered by Workman’s Compensation. Voluntary service to a law enforcement agency may affect the validity of your own insurance. Whether or not the County will be civilly liable for your actions while on assigned duty will depend on individual circumstances.

3. You will be expected to respond immediately when called, regardless of time of day, unless you have a valid excuse. Habitual failure to respond, even with an excuse may result in termination.

4. The success of a SAR mission is directly related to a maximum effort offered by each member. Teamwork is paramount for successful missions. Individual recognition, however, should not be the goal of any member. Full cooperation, along with a positive and encouraging attitude is vital whenever engaged in any SAR activity. Persons creating disharmony among other personnel (poor attitude and/or derisive behavior, and negative attitudes that affect the effectiveness of other SAR volunteers) will be grounds for dismissal.

5. No member will converse or submit to an interview with the Press or news media at any time. If questioned by any representative of the Press or family members, volunteers will refer him or her to the Nevada County SAR Coordinator or SAR Search Manager. Should the Press take candid photographs of a search scene, volunteers will conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times.

6. No member will converse with or interview any family member or friend of a missing person, unless assigned as an interviewer by the SAR Coordinator, Search Manager, or is a crisis intervention member who has been assigned by the SAR Coordinator or Search Manager to interview or talk to these people.

7. You will work as assigned, at the direction of the SAR Coordinator, or any other person designated as your supervisor and/or Search Manager.

8. You will be expected to serve on an assigned mission until it is completed, or your services are no longer needed.

9. Time off arrangements with your employer for SAR must be made by you. The department will not make such arrangements, nor intercede on your behalf if your employer disapproves.

10. You will conform to department standards regarding personal conduct while on duty, and in no way use your affiliation with SAR for your own benefit. Do not use NCSSAR Identification Card for personal gain.

11. You will not have peace officer powers, nor be permitted to carry firearms during your service as a volunteer member of SAR.

12. No member or other person(s) pressed into service for Nevada County, under the appropriate process, shall coerce another or be coerced by another, to attempt any feat or perform any task which he/she is not qualified, by virtue of skill or training. Each person shall be the final judge as to their ability and the capability of their equipment. No person shall attempt a task that entails an unacceptable measure of risk. Unacceptable risk shall be defined as: Any feat of danger that fails to provide a margin of safety through a back-up system capable of aborting the attempt and retrieve the participants.

The foregoing conditions are not intended to discourage those who wish to offer assistance. Rather, they are stated as objectively as possible, so that the volunteer will fully

understand the situation and its potential disadvantages, and to protect both the volunteer and the department.

### **Search and Rescue Uniform:**

The uniform shall consist of a bright orange cotton polyester blend dress type shirt, T-Shirt, Olive Green TDU style pants and a HI-Vis Yellow 8 & 1 jacket. This uniform is the property of the Sheriff's Office and must be returned upon resignation or termination. Long or short sleeve style is optional; however, there are certain advantages in having long sleeves (such as protection from poison oak, mosquitoes, abrasions from brush, cold weather, etc.). This uniform will be issued when you receive Mission Ready status. You may purchase additional uniform apparel to be worn at any SAR event from the Volunteer Coordinator.

SAR volunteers are expected to attend all SAR activities in standard SAR uniform; this includes actual searches and special events such as the County Fair and fund raisers. During training exercises SAR dress is optional.

### **Call-out Procedure:**

A reverse 911 callout system is utilized to notify members of a search. You will receive a phone message, text message and email regarding the search including the nature of the search, approximate location, reporting location and time to report. Come prepared with the appropriate clothing and equipment for the mission.

### **Meeting Attendance:**

Meetings are conducted monthly. These sessions include administrative issues, upcoming special events, current topics of SAR concern, upcoming training, discussions of recently completed search activity, etc. These meetings increase camaraderie. All SAR members are requested to participate.

### **Training and Certification:**

Because of the diversity of call-outs and the high risk involved with some types of call-outs, the NCSSAR has established a rigorous, comprehensive training program that incorporates in-house training classes and joint training with other emergency response agencies.

The Basic Academy consists of approximately 40 hours of training. This program consists of: Introduction to NCSSAR, ICS System, Interviewing, Crime Scene, Radio Communications, Clue Awareness, Map Tracking, Map and Compass, GPS, Rough Terrain, Search Tactics, CPR and Wilderness First Aid.

NCSSAR training policy requires that each Mission Ready member participate in bi-yearly field recertification. A field recertification is held twice a year. Put this date on your calendar early. Members who do not have current certification are not eligible to participate in search activities. Members are encouraged to attend the semi-annual basic academy. This promotes more effective teamwork and an enhanced safety. CPR must be done two years and wilderness first aid every year.

NCSSAR training hours in specialty areas are set by the individual team leader. These training hours are in addition to the basic training.

Upon completion of the basic academy a trainee becomes Mission Ready. This allows full participation in all SAR activity within Nevada County. This allows participation in Mutual Aid Requests from out of County. A uniform is issued to each Mission Ready person. Mission Ready status is not permanent. Each person must comply with the ongoing training requirements. Only with training will we maintain a degree of safety and develop a feeling of trust for our fellow SAR members.

Trainees are allowed two opportunities to pass the mission ready skills tests to achieve Mission Ready status after completing the academy.

Members receiving training from other than NCSSAR are responsible for providing a copy of this training to the Volunteer Coordinator. Members transferring from other SAR agencies are responsible for providing copies of their training to the Coordinator who will then make a determination of their status (TR or MR).

A training file is maintained on each NCSSAR volunteer. It is the member's responsibility to keep the Volunteer Coordinator informed of any changes.

### **SAR Units:**

All SAR personnel are first ground pounders and may be utilized at any search in this capacity. Certain specialty areas may appeal to the individual member. These include:

**ATV:** The Sheriff provides ATV's for SAR. The ATV unit is a mechanized off-road team that specializes in searching the back country in areas inaccessible to auto. Privately owned ATVs may be used if the driver is qualified.

**Crisis:** This team assists the friends, loved ones, and family members of missing persons by providing them with privacy, food, water, a place to rest, or other amenities. They may also provide spiritual support through prayer, meditation, or simply an overall comforting presence to anyone affected by the search. They are careful listeners who "hold the space" while also lending an ear to any information that may be valuable to the search effort.

**Dive:** Dive Team is tasked with the recovery of drowning victims from the waterways within the geographical constraints of Nevada County. It is comprised of sworn deputy sheriff's from the department and civilian members of the Sheriff's Search & Rescue Team.

**Dog Team:** The Dog Unit consists of highly trained and certified handlers and their dogs able and willing to meet a diversity of SAR needs. All dogs are individually owned and cared for.

**Evidence Team:** The Evidence Team is comprised of a small group of experienced searchers who can perform thorough, detailed searchers at crime scenes.

**Incident Command:** The IC Team is responsible for carrying out all the Command Center activities including communications during SAR operations, planning of search strategy, assigning and deployment of search teams including the debriefing of returning teams, providing the logistical needs of the search and documentation of all search activities.

**Man Tracking:** Man trackers have received at least 40 hours of specialized training. Each member has obtained a minimum of track aware certificate. They are part of a first response (Hasty) team. Man trackers establishing direction of travel for a missing person essential in planning the search.

**Mounted Unit:** The Mounted Unit is a team of searchers on horseback. They can search remote areas inaccessible to the mechanized units and can provide transportation to victims. All horses are individually owned and cared for.

**Nordic Unit:** The Nordic Unit is specialized in winter searching in the high country utilizing snowmobiles, skis and snowshoes.

**Motorcycle:** This team must maintain a DMV certificate for operations of a motorcycle. They are a team that can respond over single track trails and reach remote sites in a minimum of time.

**Ropes:** This unit is highly trained in using ropes in areas requiring access or recovery in areas with high slopes and extremely rough terrain.

### **Search Guidelines:**

Experienced SAR team members have found that following certain guidelines while searching tends to improve results, maintain a high level of safety, increase efficiency and making searching easier. Some examples:

1. Stay alert and maintain the proper attitude for effective searching. Searching is hard work and can be boring, tedious and fatiguing.
2. Use all your senses for searching. Use your eyes, your nose, your ears and your head.
3. Look behind you while searching. This might allow you to see things that might not be visible by merely looking ahead.
4. Yell and make noise occasionally and intermix regular moments of silence. The noise may attract a response from a lost victim and the silence can allow you to hear the response.
5. Always be prepared. Have the proper equipment and clothing with you so that you can be an asset rather than a detriment. Have a ready pack and know what is in it.
6. Learn the names of the searchers on the other side of your search line.
7. At night, never shine your flashlight into your eyes or that of your fellow searchers. Sometimes not using lights is preferred if safety and effectiveness can be maintained.
8. Do not become a victim yourself.

### **Anatomy of a NCSSAR Mission:**

1. The Nevada County Dispatch is notified of a missing, overdue or injured person.
2. A deputy or SAR Coordinator responds to the area where the missing person was last seen.
3. The deputy takes a report from the reporting person. The deputy then reports to the Patrol Sergeant and/or the SAR Coordinator. The Coordinator makes a determination of if SAR resources are required.
4. The first resource used is normally the Hasty Team. The Hasty Team is a small, highly mobile and well trained team of searchers that will use man trackers and one or two dogs to check areas most likely to produce clues, conduct interviews with the reporting party and select the location for the command center..
5. A search plan is developed by the Coordinator, Search Manager and IC planning section. The operations section of IC assigns team members, brief teams on search areas and deploys the teams to their designated search areas.
6. The teams search their assigned areas and report any clues. At the conclusion of an assignment, the search team is debriefed by the operations section as to any clues or findings. This information is communicated to the planning section for use in planning further search activities.

7. The Coordinator/ Incident Command Team will prepare for incoming SAR resources and organize the search base to handle those resources.
8. If successful, the lost subject is transported back to the search base or hospital as needed.
9. The SAR teams are recalled to the search base for debriefing and then released.