



Charleston County Sheriff's Office Policy and Procedures Manual

Sheriff Carl Ritchie

16-12

UNDERWATER RECOVERY TEAM

- ☐ NEW
- ☒ REVISED
- ☒ REVIEWED

ACA Standards Reference:
CALEA Standards Reference: 17.5.1, 17.5.2, 33.6.1
NCCHC Standards Reference:
SCLEA Standards Reference:
SC Minimum Standards:

This policy dated 4/16/2025 replaces prior policies cited above and supersedes all previously issued directives.

I. Purpose:

To establish guidelines, procedures and criteria for the safe operation of all divers, dive equipment and vessels utilized by the Underwater Recovery Team (URT) while providing services and protection to the citizens of Charleston County in a law enforcement capacity.

II. Policy:

It will be the policy of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office Underwater Recovery Team to respond to any call for assistance throughout the County of Charleston or any jurisdiction as ordered by the Sheriff or designee. The team will assist with the recovery of any article or body submerged in water when requested or needed.

III. Definitions:

A. For purposes of this procedure, the word "deputy" applies to all agency employees with a certification classification of Class I, Class II, Class III, or Reserve Deputy, as defined by the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy.

The following terms are used interchangeably; however, they carry guidance to specific employees based on usage of the term:

1. Deputy, deputies, deputy sheriff, detention deputy, sworn employee, uniformed sworn employee, sworn administrative employee, and
2. civilian, non-sworn employee.

B. *Employee*: When used without further clarification, the term employee is inclusive of all agency members (sworn and non-sworn).

C. *Underwater Recovery Team (URT)*: Name utilized by the Charleston County Sheriff's Office Dive Team formed to respond to incidents involving the recovery of any items underwater (e.g., vehicles, weapons, bodies, evidence, etc.).

D. *URT Leader*: Person in charge of the URT.

E. *Safety Diver*: Members of the URT responsible for emergency response to any diver in need of assistance in any water situation. This diver will remain in appropriate dive gear during the entire operation until advised to stand down.

- F. *Contact Diver:* Any member of the URT during an underwater recovery operation that is assigned to dive in an attempt to locate an object or person.
- G. *Tender:* A member of the URT being utilized in an above water capacity. This role is a vital part of any dive operation. This member is responsible for assisting in preparing divers prior to entering the water, as well as assisting in boat operations or preparing equipment needed for the completion of any mission (e.g., ropes, tow chains, search lines, etc.). The Tender will also be responsible for the safety of the diver and will coordinate the type of search to be conducted (e.g., Pendulum, etc.).
- H. *Scribe:* Scribe is responsible for the report keeping of the dive itself which will consist of time entering the water, PSI, water conditions/temperature and any and all documentation of the individual dive being conducted including the URT dive report. The task of Scribe may also be performed in conjunction with other tasks as the mission needs dictate.

The member(s) may also be tasked in helping with searches in the water. Tasks will include searches of bridges, piers, wharfs, boats, or docks that can be done by swimming on the surface of the water. The member(s) may also be tasked with swimming items out to a diver, or as rescue swimmers if deemed appropriate by the URT leader, or designee.

- I. *Surface Communications:* The member assigned to Surface Communications is to conduct surface communication via the team through water communication system (wireless or wired). The member tasked with Surface Communication is to focus primarily on that task and shall not leave it unmanned while divers are in the water. The Surface Communication role relays information from divers in the water to the member supervising the dive operation. This task may be performed in conjunction with other tasks (such as Scribe), but shall be the primary task of the member assigned to it.
- H. *Dive:* A dive is considered started when a diver enters the water and ends when the diver leaves the water. If a diver re-enters the water, it is considered another dive and will be logged as such.
- I. *Dive Operation:* A dive operation will consist of the entire operation needed to complete the task at hand. Each member may be required to dive more than once during any operation.

IV. Procedure:

A. Team Member Selection Process:

1. Assignment to the URT is a collateral duty, with team members being drawn from other components of the Sheriff's Office. To be considered eligible to participate in the URT selection process, sworn personnel will:
 - a. have a minimum of 18 months law enforcement service, (post release from field training and/or as specified in the intra-agency vacancy announcement) with the Sheriff's Office or equivalent law enforcement experience;
 - b. not be in a probationary employment status; and,
 - c. are able to perform basic swimming abilities along with a working knowledge of water safety related activities.
2. Assignment to the URT is voluntary. Vacancies will be announced via intra-agency memoranda to all sworn personnel. Personnel will be required to submit a memo requesting consideration for the vacant position as outlined in Sheriff's Office Procedure, [Policy 4-15 Intra-Agency Vacancies](#), stating eligibility as outlined above. The applicant's immediate supervisor will also forward a memorandum of endorsement outlining the candidate's strengths and weaknesses and identify any other concerns which may hinder the applicant's participation with the URT, to include off-duty assignments, educational commitments, collateral duty, or any other obligations that would restrict availability for call out purposes.

B. Member Responsibility:

1. Members of the URT must realize that this team requires serious commitment and members must assess their willingness to take the time to achieve and maintain a high level of proficiency.
2. Members of the URT are subject to call-out twenty-four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week and could be subject to dive in difficult weather, harmful environments such as algae filled, snake, and alligator infested lakes and ponds, and/or hazardous material type situations such as aircraft and vehicle submersions.

3. Physical endurance is extremely important for the dive team and during dive operations. Therefore, members of this unit are required to keep themselves in good physical condition. If a URT member can't keep themselves in a good physical endurance condition, it will be at the discretion of the URT team leader whether they want to keep the deputy on the team.

C. Team Training:

1. Dive members of the URT shall obtain a diving certification within six months of appointment to the unit through a nationally accredited training facility (i.e., Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI), Scuba Diving International (SDI), or other approved nationally accredited training facility). (Ref: CALEA 33.6.1 item a)
2. URT divers will obtain advanced certifications (e.g., full face mask, dry suit, etc.) through a nationally accredited training facility (i.e., Emergency Response Diving International (ERDI) or Scuba Diving International (SDI)). (Ref: CALEA 33.6.1 item b & c)
3. URT Tenders must obtain an ERDI Tender certification within six months of appointment to the unit.
4. URT divers must maintain their certification(s) and training as part of their URT member status. The URT Leader will ensure mandatory team training is conducted for a minimum of sixteen hours per month, unless, in the event of extenuating circumstances, such training is not feasible. A twelve-month training schedule will be distributed to URT members and their supervisors to minimize scheduling conflicts. All team members will participate in team training. Failure to obtain and maintain their training status could result in dismissal from the team.
5. Training files regarding each diver's certifications and documented dives, training reports and recurrent training will be maintained by the URT Leader. (Ref: CALEA 33.6.1 item a, b, & c)
6. URT members can voluntarily submit their recreational dives, which show diving activities to help keep their status current. Any member who has no active dives within a six-month period will have to complete a refresher course administered by a certified dive instructor.

7. Divers will be required to pass a swim proficiency test designed by the URT Leader and approved through the URT's chain-of-command. Documentation of all URT related certifications and training will be forwarded to the Sheriff's Office Training Unit.
(Ref: CALEA 33.6.1 items a, b, & c)

D. Underwater Recovery Team Operations:

1. To ensure the successful deployment of any dive team operation, the URT Leader will be responsible for ensuring that the proper amount of personnel and equipment are deployed and reach the incident location. However, it is possible that the on-scene supervisor of an incident or follow-up investigation could also be the URT Leader. In this event, the URT Leader will assume command of the scene, evaluate the dive mission and call personnel as needed to complete the operation.
2. The ultimate responsibility for safety rests with the individual diver. It is the judgment of each individual diver to dive or consult the URT Leader for an alternate diver. It is each diver's right to refuse a dive if the diver sees fit; however, if a pattern develops, the individual diver may be evaluated for mental and physical abilities as a diver.
3. If a diver neglects their call-out or scheduled training responsibility without justification, they may be subject to disciplinary action and/or dismissal from the URT.
4. The first priority of any dive mission is diver safety; therefore, any dive operation consisting of the Sheriff's Office URT will have a minimum of three divers. Two divers will be contact divers and one will be a safety diver. URT Leader may deviate from the three-diver concept and only in situations when the risk is extremely minimal.

E. Team Equipment:

1. All URT members will be issued necessary equipment and will be responsible for the cleanliness and maintenance of the equipment.

2. The necessary equipment issued will be as follows, with additional specialized equipment issued as needed:
 - a. mask & snorkel;
 - b. booties;
 - c. fins;
 - d. gloves;
 - e. dive knife;
 - f. BCD (Boyancy Compensation Device);
 - g. first stage with regulator and alternate air source;
 - h. dive light;
 - i. weight belt;
 - j. wet suit;
 - k. hood;
 - l. dry suit; and
 - m. dive computer.
3. URT equipment will be issued by the URT Leader or designee. No URT equipment will be altered without the authorization of the URT Leader or designee. Any service of equipment must be approved by the URT Leader. The assigned URT vehicle is the responsibility of the URT Leader.
(Ref: CALEA 17.5.1 items a & b and 17.5.2)

F. Team Uniforms:

1. Members assigned to the URT will be issued various clothing items conducive to the task at hand and identifying the individual as a member of the URT of the Charleston County Sheriff's Office.
2. Individual URT members are responsible for the daily maintenance of their issued clothing and the inspection of clothing for repair or replacement after each deployment. Any alteration of issued clothing or utilization of personalized clothing will only be authorized by the URT Leader.

G. Medical:

1. Once on scene of a major dive operation, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel will be notified to handle any injuries to personnel and to transport personnel to a medical facility should the need arise.
2. During the course of a normal dive or training operation, the URT Leader will coordinate with the on-scene supervisor and designate a first responder/medical coordinator for the team. The first responder/medical coordinator will be responsible for having the necessary equipment readily available for the treatment of injured personnel until the arrival of EMS personnel.
3. During the course of a normal training operation, the URT Leader will have discretion whether or not to have EMS at training or in a stand-by status.