



CHATHAM COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

SOP # OPS-038

EFFECTIVE: 06/07/22

UNDERWATER SEARCH & RECOVERY TEAM

REVISION DATE: 02/27/25

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to establish procedures for incidents that require a response from the Underwater Search & Recovery Team.

POLICY:

The Chatham County Police Department is dedicated to the safety of all citizens as well as the health and well-being of every employee. Our mission is to preserve and save lives and protect property by isolating incidents that require a response from the Underwater Search & Recovery Team (USRT) and cooperating with other emergency services. The Chatham County Police Department is committed to this mission by safely utilizing personnel and resources as needed. Appropriately trained personnel will be dispatched and respond as directed by each incident which requires a response from the Underwater Search & Recovery Team.

PROCEDURE:

I. ADMINISTRATION

A. Composition

1. The Underwater Search & Recovery Team, while an organized component, is a collateral duty assignment. The team operates when their special services are needed and during designated training dates. The members of the team are assigned to various other divisions of the department for their regular duties.
2. The team is commanded by a Sergeant, who answers to the Marine Patrol Commander and the East Chatham Precinct Commander in matters concerning the Underwater Search & Recovery Team. Otherwise, the team members fall within the chain of command of the unit to which they are assigned.
3. The East Chatham Precinct Commander and the Marine Patrol Commander will set the number of Team members.

B. Qualifications

1. Participation on the Underwater Search & Recovery Team mandates the following requirements

- (a) Divers must be experienced swimmers and comfortable in varying water conditions.
- (b) Obtain an Open Water SCUBA Diver certification from a recognized agency (ex. NAUI, PADI, SSI).
- (c) Successfully completed the IADRS Watermanship Test.
- (d) All divers will complete a SCUBA skills review and IADRS Watermanship Test annually to remain an active member of USRT.
- (e) All Divers must be employed by the Chatham County Emergency Services.
- (f) Team Members must agree to be on call as needed.

C. Responsibilities of the Dive Team Segeant include:

- 1. Determining the number of divers needed for an operation.
- 2. Making sure the proper personnel are notified as to operational situations.
- 3. Developing and implementing a plan of operation.
- 4. Manage all aspects of scene not directly related to dive operations (ex. other personnel, other agencies, media).
- 5. If not acting as Dive Supervisor, designate the most experienced diver as Dive Supervisor for operation.
- 6. Maintaining and completing a dive team log after each dive.
- 7. Ensuring all air tanks are refilled for later use.
- 8. Properly maintaining diving equipment and maintaining an inventory of equipment that must be available for each dive.
- 9. Ensuring each on-call member can be reached.
- 10. Providing the Communications Unit with an on-call list for the Underwater Search & Recovery Team.

D. Responsibilities of Dive Supervisor include:

- 1. Most experienced diver will act as Dive Supervisor.
- 2. Ensure medical personnel are on standby if necessary.
- 3. Remain on the scene at all times.
- 4. Maintain control of dive operations.
- 5. Report to Team Commander.

E. Responsibilities of Team Members include:

- 1. Maintaining all departmental issued equipment in working conditions.
- 2. Cleaning all issued equipment immediately after each dive.
- 3. Attending all training dives and classes unless properly excused.

4. Ensuring they can be reached while on call for the team.
5. Know how to operate all equipment connected with dive operations.
6. Practicing professionalism and proper safety techniques.
7. Immediately report all damaged or lost equipment during an Underwater Search & Recovery Team operation to be replaced by the Department.

II. Operations

A. Component Function

1. The Underwater Search & Recovery Team will provide expert support for law enforcement search and recovery operations.
2. The Underwater Search & Recovery Team is responsible for the following duties:
 - (a) Performing underwater search & recovery of victim(s) of water mishaps.
 - (b) Performing underwater search & recovery of criminal evidence.
 - (c) Performing underwater search & recovery of stolen property.
 - (d) Performing underwater search sweeps for VIP Protection and high-risk targets.

B. Pre-arranged Search.

1. Divers will meet at a pre-arranged command post at the discretion of the Commander of the Underwater Search & Recovery Team

C. Emergency Operations

1. Divers will proceed directly to the scene.
2. No Diver will enter the water until a clear plan of action has been established.
3. Divers will at all times operate within the depth and time limits for underwater activities as set out in the Standard No Decompression Tables.
4. Divers will not exceed the depth of 99 feet.
5. Divers will have the final call if they will complete a dive.
6. The Dive Supervisor will make the final decision on whether or not to dive, given the circumstances and situation.

D. Diving Accidents

1. The Team Commander or the Dive Supervisor will be notified as soon as possible of an accident involving a member of the Underwater Search & Recovery Team.
2. Injured divers who receive or require on-scene emergency aid shall be transported to the nearest medical facility for treatment, if necessary. Accident/Injury details shall be recorded and given to the Dive Supervisor.

E. Personal Safety

1. Personal Safety is a priority at all times.

2. Divers will not enter open water without a safety diver present.
 3. Divers will utilize a tending line unless conditions do not allow.
 4. Divers will not enter the training pool without a safety diver or lifeguard present.
 5. Divers will not dive beyond their certified level.
- F. Operation Approval
1. The Underwater Search & Recovery team must not participate in operations outside of Chatham County without chain of command approval.

III. AFTER ACTION REPORTS

- A. The Underwater Search & Recovery Team will ensure that all supplemental reports are completed for each mission indicating their involvement.
- B. Within 24 hours of completing an assignment, the Underwater Search & Recovery Team Commander will complete an after-action report, which will be forwarded up the chain of command.
 1. This report will include a summary of the mission, personnel involved, amount of time involved, and any training issues that were recognized

BY ORDER OF:

Electronically Signed in PowerDMS on 02/27/2025

Julie Tolbert
Interim Chief of Police