



GENERAL ORDER

Loudoun County Sheriff's Office

Chapter: Operations

Section: 409.6

Subject: Specialized Units

Topic: Underwater Search and Evidence Recovery

Enacted: 07/30/2015

Last Review: 08/28/2025

Review: 08/01/2027

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this General Order is to establish the policies and guidelines for the Underwater Search and Evidence Recovery Team (USERT).

II. POLICY

It is the policy of the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office to maintain a select unit of trained and equipped personnel to aid in the search for, and rescue of victims of water-related accidents and to assist in the search and recovery of evidentiary items secreted in bodies of water.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Staffing

1. USERT staffing falls within two categories: Diver and Tender.
 - a. Divers: USERT diver staffing shall be compromised of a minimum of four divers, with a current allocation of ten positions. The maximum number of divers shall be determined by the Sheriff or designee.
 - b. Tenders: USERT tender staffing is currently authorized for two positions. The maximum number of tenders shall be determined by the Sheriff or their designee.

B. Selection

1. USERT positions are Deputy Sheriffs who have a permanent duty assignment, who volunteer for this part-time, additional duty. The following criteria will be used when selecting personnel to the USERT positions:
 - a. Deputy Sheriffs with a minimum of one year of experience as a Deputy Sheriff.
 - b. Physically fit.
 - c. Ability to cope with responsibilities and display confidence.

- d. Possess the ability to respond well under pressure and in a mature, professional manner.
 - e. Preference will be given to those divers who possess an “open water” certification from a recognized instructional institution (i.e., PADI, NASDS, NAUI, YMCA, etc.)
- 2. Upon selection, new team members shall enter a probationary period of one year during which they shall be required to:
 - a. Attend all scheduled team training events and team activations.
 - i. Consideration will be given to absences for military leave, documented sick leave, and pre-arranged annual leave.
 - b. Obtain all additional certifications required.
 - 3. The Sheriff or his/her designee shall select the USERT Commander. The selection decision shall encompass the individual's level of experience, leadership and supervisory abilities, and other areas as the Sheriff or his/her designee deems appropriate.

C. Duties and Responsibilities

1. Divers

- a. The Diver position is responsible for supporting dive operations in the following manner:
 - i. Conduct systematic, thorough, and complete search techniques in both maritime and land environments.
 - ii. Assist with deployment and operation of USERT vehicles (truck and boat) to support mission requirements.
 - iii. Assist with operation and maintenance of all team equipment and gear.
 - iv. Assist fellow divers with equipment rigging and pre/post dive checks.
 - v. Assist with repair maintenance and management of dive equipment.
 - vi. Complete additional duties and assignments as directed by the Team leader to support team functions and operational capabilities.

2. Tenders

- a. The Tender position is responsible for supporting diver personnel and dive operations in the following manner:
 - i. Deploy and operate USERT vehicles (truck and boat) to support mission requirements.
 - ii. Operate and maintain air resources (filling and maintenance of scuba tanks and cascade air fill system) used in dive operations.
 - iii. Assist divers with equipment rigging and pre/post dive checks.
 - iv. Repair, maintain and manage all associated dive gear to include service intervals and scheduling.
 - v. Control dive scene and assist with dive/site sketch documentation.
 - vi. Additional duties and assignments as directed by the Team leader to support team functions and operational capabilities.

D. Training

1. Team training events shall be conducted, at a minimum, once per month. Team members are expected to make a reasonable and prudent effort to attend each training event.
 - a. Consideration of absences due to pre-approved annual leave, documented sick leave, military leave, and similar such instances shall be provided at the discretion of the team commander.
 - b. Upon a team member's second consecutive absence from a training event the team member will be transitioned into an administrative role.
 - i. The team member will be removed from the administrative assignment immediately upon successful completion of a skills review to be conducted by the team commander.
 - c. Upon a team member's third consecutive absence from a training event, membership in the USERT shall be rescinded and re-assignment to the team will take place through the selection process.
2. Given the inherent danger present in public safety diving, continued training and refining of skills is not only expected of each team member but required. Team members shall obtain the following certifications as soon as they are able:

- a. Divers:
 - i. Advanced Open Water
 - ii. Rescue Diver
 - iii. DAN O2 Provider
 - iv. Underwater Criminal Investigator
 - v. Master Underwater Criminal Investigator
 - vi. Ice Diving
 - vii. Boat Operator Course
 - viii. Additional certifications are highly encouraged and may be approved at the discretion of the Operational Support Division (OSD) Commander.
- b. Tenders:
 - i. DAN O2 Provider
 - ii. ERDI Tender Course
 - iii. Boat Operator Course
 - iv. ERDI Hazmat Course
 - v. Additional certifications are highly encouraged and may be approved at the discretion of the Operational Support Division (OSD) Commander.

D. Responsibilities of the USERT Commander

- 2. To ensure that the team is adequately trained and equipped, the USERT Commander shall:
 - b. Ensure that all equipment is maintained in good working order and in a state of readiness.
 - c. Maintain a current list of all available equipment that will be inventoried each quarter.
 - d. Ensure that all required inspections, such as the Department of Transportation hydrostatic testing and visual interior inspections, shall be

maintained as required and documented.

- e. Ensure that a current emergency call-out list is maintained and distributed to the Emergency Communications Center (ECC) and to all members of the team.
- f. Coordinate and schedule training for all team members in order to maintain a level of continual preparedness to accomplish objectives.
- g. Ensure that all team members receive that amount of training necessary to accomplish the objectives of the unit.
- h. Inform all team members of any specialized schools and appropriate training seminars that are available.
- i. Schedule and coordinate periodic team meetings to provide informal training and to take care of administrative matters.
- j. Schedule and coordinate simulated exercises so that all team members are proficient at the various tasks to be performed by the team.
- k. Maintain records of all instruction received by the unit to include the name of the instructor who provides the training and nature of the training. The Training Section will maintain copies of all USERT training records.

E. Response Procedures

- 2. When the USERT is called into service, the team will serve as a collateral team under the command of OSD and will be under the supervision of their respective supervisors and the Sheriff.
- 3. The ECC shall notify the Team Commander, who shall notify the OSD Assistant Division Commander.
- 4. The Team Commander shall advise the ECC to implement the notification of all or part of the USERT members.
- 5. All USERT members who are contacted shall respond to the response notifications.
- 6. Upon USERT activation, the Team Commander or his designee shall determine a meeting location and notify the ECC.
- 7. The final decision to commit divers to the water shall be based upon scene

conditions and other available information. This decision shall be made by the Sheriff or his/her designee, or in his/her absence, the Team Commander.