

MESA POLICE Department Policy Manual	Water Rescues	DPM 2.8.115 Effective (New) 03/21/2023
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1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to direct Mesa Police Department (MPD) members in the event of a water rescue.

2. DEFINITIONS

Personal Floatation Device (PFD): A United States Coast Guard approved wearable or throwable device as prescribed by the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) [33 CFR § 175.13](#).

Water Rescue: Any incident involving an attempted removal of drowning victim(s) from a body of water, other than a swimming pool. This shall include lakes, ponds, canals, washes, rivers, or any other body of water, whether still or moving.

3. GENERAL

Water rescue incidents can result from a variety of circumstances. These incidents often require the assistance of the Mesa Fire & Medical Department (MFMD) and present significant safety concerns related to entering a body of water. Management of these incidents requires special training, considerations, and is based on a variety of unique factors specific to each incident.

3.1 General Considerations

- A. When responding to a drowning or water rescue incident, members should use their training and equipment assigned to them (e.g., rescue throw bags, PFD, etc.) and may improvise the use of other equipment in order to attempt to safely rescue drowning victims.
- B. Deployment of any rescue equipment should be completed only in accordance with Department approved training.
- C. Members should consider all potential factors and hazards to any rescuer(s) and victim(s) before deciding to enter the water in an attempt to conduct a water rescue. Some, but not all, considerations are:
 1. Swimming competency of the member.
 2. Any relevant water survival training.
 3. Availability of PFD.
 4. Size of the victim.
 5. Distance of the victim(s) from the shoreline or location of the member.
 6. Whether the member has information the victim is attempting to evade police contact or is likely to be combative during rescue attempts.
 7. Time of day, lighting, and weather conditions.

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8. Specific conditions of the water (i.e., moving, depth, visibility, temperature, etc.).
 9. Any additional known or unknown hazards in the water.
 10. Time delay for additional resources.
 11. Any other safety hazards or considerations (i.e., inability to safely secure removed police equipment, presence of potentially hostile bystanders, etc.).
- D. The decision to enter the water to affect a rescue will only be made by the individual member on scene who will be entering the water and should be based on the member's ability to safely perform a rescue.

3.2 Communications Responsibilities

- A. Upon receiving a report of a water rescue incident or possible drowning, the call taker will transfer the call to the MFMD, who will be responsible for primary response. The call taker will stay on the line to ensure information is routed to dispatchers/responding units.
- B. Dispatchers will:
 1. Dispatch appropriate units for a co-response with the MFMD.
 2. Ensure a patrol supervisor acknowledges the call and responds if a drowning occurs.

3.3 Member Responsibilities

- A. Members responding to a water rescue incident will notify communications of the incident if the information was not previously known.
- B. Members should advise dispatch of the use of any assigned equipment when attempting a water rescue.
- C. Officers shall notify dispatch on the radio prior to entering the water in order to attempt a water rescue.

3.4 Supervisor Responsibilities

- A. Supervisors will respond to the scene of any water rescue incident or any water rescue incident which results in a death in accordance with [DPM 3.1.115 Death Investigations](#).
- B. If a drowning occurs, the supervisor will coordinate the response of investigative personnel and will ensure notifications are made in accordance with [DPM 2.6.30 Major Incident Notifications](#).
- C. A lieutenant or commander will respond to the scene in order to assist with coordinating investigative assets and notification efforts.

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4. PROCEDURES

4.1 Procedures

- A. Rescue options which may be considered include the following. They are ranked in order from lowest risk to highest risk:
 1. Reaching for the drowning victim without entering the water to affect a rescue.
 - a. This is the recommended course of action.
 - b. This may include by hand or with a tool (e.g., telescoping pole, stick, etc.) if the victim is seen and visible to the officer.
 2. Throwing a rescue throw bag or other object which can be used to pull the victim to a safe rescue location.
 3. Using a reaching or throwable personal floatation device.
 4. Entering the water to attempt a rescue.
 - a. This presents the greatest risk of danger to the officer.
 - b. Anytime a member enters the water it may present a drowning risk to both the member and the victim(s).
 - c. If a member decides to enter the water, it is highly recommended that the member remove any items or equipment which may impede their ability to swim (i.e., radio, body armor, duty belt, etc.).
- B. If a victim falls below the water surface, an officer should be tasked with keeping track of the last location the drowning victim was seen above the surface.
 1. If water is flowing, the direction and degree of flow should be communicated (i.e., rapidly flowing south from the bridge).
 2. This information should be relayed via radio as soon as practical in order to have accurate conditions and time of occurrence.
- C. Members may dissuade or prevent bystanders from entering the water in cases where the officer believes allowing the person to enter the water may harm the person, create an additional safety hazard, or interfere with rescue efforts.

REFERENCES

- [33 CFR § 175.13](#)
- [DPM 2.6.30 Major Incident Notifications](#)
- [DPM 3.1.115 Death Investigations](#)