



## DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY POLICIES & PROCEDURES



Subject: <b>Search and Rescue Plan</b>		Policy Number: <b>SAR: 08</b>
Revision Number: <b>01</b>	Effective Date: <b>2/24/2026</b>	Original Issue Date: <b>09/14/2015</b>

### 1) PURPOSE

- a) In accordance with the Search and Rescue (SAR) Act as set forth in NMSA 1978, § 24-15A-1, et seq., it is the purpose of this Plan to effectuate the Legislative intent and authorization embodied in the SAR Act in the manner set forth in the terms and conditions of this Plan. This Plan puts into practice the Governor's Executive Order stating that the National Incident Management System (NIMS) Incident Command System (ICS) is the state standard. Accordingly, all SAR incidents in the state of New Mexico must be managed by the Incident Command System, thus providing the most comprehensive life-saving effort possible from those entities involved.

### 2) POLICY

- a) It is the policy of the Department of Public Safety to manage all SAR incidents using the Incident Command System (ICS).

### 3) APPLICABILITY

- a) This policy is applicable to all New Mexico Search and Rescue (SAR) responders.

### 4) REFERENCES

- a) NMSA 1978, § 24-15A-1, et seq.
- b) NMAC 10.24 Search and Rescue

### 5) DEFINITIONS

In addition to the definitions set forth in the SAR Act, NMSA 1978, § 24-15A-1, et seq., in section I, the following terms are defined:

- a) **Agency Administrator** - The Chief of the New Mexico State Police. The Chief may appoint an Agency Administrator Designee (AAD) for search and rescue matters.



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- b) **Area Commander** - A Field Coordinator, with the approval of the Chief, who oversees the management of single or multiple incidents. The Area Commander will keep the Agency Administrator Designee, or his/her designee, informed on major incident(s) developments during the operational phase of a SAR incident.
- c) **Air Operations Branch Director (AOBD)** - Person tasked with management at the organizational level having functional responsibility for air operations of the incident. The AOBD reports to his/her respective Section Chief.
- d) **Cumulative Probability of Success (CPOS)** - A measure of overall search effectiveness.
- e) **Incident Command System (ICS)** - A standardized on-scene emergency management construct specifically designed to provide for the adoption of an integrated organizational structure that reflects the complexity and demands of single or multiple incidents, without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries. ICS is the combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure, designed to aid in the management of resources during incidents. It is used for all types of emergencies and is applicable to small as well as large and complex incidents. ICS is used by various jurisdictions and functional agencies, both public and private, to organize field-level incident management operations.
- f) **Incident Commander** - The title within the Incident Command System given to the Field Coordinator who is officially assigned a SAR incident.
- g) **Incident Number** - The official number designation assigned to each properly initiated mission.
- h) **Incident Report** - The document(s) which are specified by the New Mexico Department of Public Safety to document a SAR incident. Incident reports shall be maintained by the Agency Administrator as prescribed by state law or rule.
- i) **SAR Mission Initiator** - A SAR trained uniform officer or SAR Field Coordinator or the SAR Resource Officer tasked to investigate possible SAR incidents.
- j) **SAR Emergency** - An incident requiring urgent SAR assistance
- k) **SAR Person or SAR Volunteer** - A person who volunteers time and equipment to aid in SAR incidents or other emergencies.



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- l) **SAR Resource Directory** - A publication by the SAR Resource Officer that includes resources that may be utilized on SAR incidents. It will be reviewed and updated periodically, as needed.
  - m) **SAR Resource Officer** - The official located within the Department of Public Safety responsible for coordinating SAR resources and administering the State SAR Plan.
  - n) **SAR Review Board** - A policy advisory committee to be known as the “State Search and Rescue Review Board”, whose duty it is to evaluate the operation of the New Mexico Search and Rescue Plan; evaluate problems of specific missions; and make Findings of fact and recommendations to the chief, director and other appropriate authorities.
  - o) **SAR Review Board Chairman** - A member of the general public, appointed by the Governor of New Mexico to act as chairman of the board, who shall vote on SAR matters only in the case of a tie.
  - p) **Section Chief** - A person who has the responsibility for a major functional area of the incident, e.g., operations, planning, logistics, and finance/administration. The Section Chief reports directly to the Incident Commander.
  - q) **Standard of Care** - The actions that a reasonable person with similar training and knowledge would perform during the management and operations of locating, caring for, and removing a subject from a hazardous environment.
  - r) **State Police District** - Those geographic areas defined by the New Mexico State Police (NMSP) as state police districts.
  - s) **Tribe or Tribal** - Includes federally recognized Indian nations, tribes and pueblos.
  - t) **Unified Command** - A structure used when multiple agencies or jurisdictions share responsibility for an incident, allowing them to coordinate a response while maintaining their own jurisdictional and functional responsibilities.
- 6) OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES**
- a) **ORGANIZATION**

The New Mexico SAR Plan, hereinafter referred to as the State SAR Plan, incorporates operations within a total incident effort that includes search, rescue, and recovery of injured or lost subjects. The state SAR organization consists of:

    - i) The New Mexico Department of Public Safety (NMDPS or DPS), which incorporates a network of Mission Initiators and Field Coordinators;



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- ii) the state SAR Resource Officer;
- iii) the state SAR Review Board; and
- iv) those persons or entities reasonably necessary to resolve a SAR incident.

### **b) AGREEMENTS AND MEMORANDUMS OF UNDERSTANDING**

The Plan incorporates agreements which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- i) a Memorandum of Agreement between the New Mexico Department of Public Safety/State Police Division and the Commander, Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC) Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida and
- ii) other Memorandum of Agreements between federal, tribal, state, county or municipality entities regarding Search and Rescue operations and management within the State of New Mexico

All Memorandums of Agreement or Understanding between the State of New Mexico, New Mexico Department of Public Safety, New Mexico State Police and other entities will be maintained and stored by the NMDPS and the specific entities.

### **c) SEARCH AND RESCUE AUTHORITIES AND SEARCH AND RESCUE RESPONSIBILITIES**

- i) The New Mexico Department of Public Safety
  - (1) The NMDPS has the authority and responsibility for all SAR incidents in the State of New Mexico, pursuant to the New Mexico SAR Act, NMSA 1978, §24- 15A-1, et seq., the SAR agreement with the US Air Force Commander of the United States Northern Command, or as amended in support of the National SAR Plan, SAR agreements with the federal, state, and local entities, and Native American tribes within the state. All SAR incidents managed by the State of New Mexico shall conform to the State SAR Plan.
  - (2) The Chief of the NMSP or designee is defined as the Agency Administrator who shall have full authority for the administration and operation of SAR incidents and the SAR program.
    - (a) The authority for Incident Commanders to manage and operate on SAR incidents is delegated from the Agency Administrator. The delegation of authority may be full or partial depending on the decision of the Agency Administrator.



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- (b) Duties of the Agency Administrator may include but are not limited to:
- (i) Developing SAR incident policies, procedures, direction and priorities;
  - (ii) Ensuring complex analysis of SAR incidents is conducted;
  - (iii) Providing verbal or written delegation of authority to SAR Area Commanders and SAR Incident Commanders and updating or modifying delegation of authority when needed;
  - (iv) Conducting briefings;
  - (v) Coordinating between other agencies that have or may provide resources to a SAR incident; and
  - (vi) Removing or replacing SAR Incident Commanders or SAR responders during SAR incidents when there are violations of the SAR standard of care, DPS policies and procedures, or other actions that are not appropriate for the SAR incident.
- (3) The NMDPS/NMSP shall have SAR Mission Initiators whose primary duty is to investigate potential SAR situations.
- (a) the NMSP SAR Mission Initiator will be responsible for investigating potential SAR situations (not involving crashed, missing or overdue aircraft, Emergency Location Transmitter (ELT) or Personal Location Beacon (PLB)); and
  - (b) If a SAR mission is deemed advisable, the Plan shall be put into effect by NMSP SAR Mission Initiator by assigning an Incident Number to the on-duty Field Coordinator.
  - (c) At the discretion of the state police district supervisor, a NMSP Mission Initiator uniformed officer may be requested to act as a liaison between field operations and the state police district.
  - (d) At the discretion of the state police district supervisor, the NMSP Mission Initiator uniformed officer may become the SAR Initial Response Incident Commander in the absence of a certified Field Coordinator and will become responsible for the duties and actions established for Incident Commanders by this Plan and DPS policies and procedures until relieved by a certified SAR Field Coordinator.
  - (e) When the SAR Mission Initiator is a SAR Field Coordinator, and deems the incident a SAR emergency, the SAR Field Coordinator may assume the Initial Response Incident Commander for the incident.



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- (4) The NMDPS shall have state police districts, emergency communication centers (i.e. dispatch centers) and state police headquarters adhere to the following:
- (a) State Police Districts will:
    - (i) Provide a Search and Rescue trained Mission Initiator uniformed officer upon request.
  - (b) The NMSP Emergency Communications Centers will:
    - (i) maintain a current roster supplied by the state SAR Resource Officer of Field Coordinators, Area Commanders, and a current copy of the State SAR Plan.
    - (ii) Upon notification of a possible SAR situation (one not involving crashed or missing [or overdue] Aircraft, ELTs, or PLBs), will immediately notify the on-call SAR Field Coordinator to perform as the NMSP SAR Mission Initiator. At the request of the SAR Mission Initiator, the Communication Center will issue an Incident Number;
      - 1. If the on-call SAR Field Coordinator is not available, then the Communication Center will request a uniformed NMSP officer to assume the duties of the SAR Mission Initiator. The Communication Center will also notify the on-call SAR Area Commander or the SAR Resource Officer of the potential SAR situation and the unavailability of the on-call SAR Field Coordinator.
    - (iii) Upon notification of any SAR incident involving a crashed, missing (or overdue) aircraft, ELT, or PLB, the Communication Center shall contact the On-Call Area Commander and then may dispatch a uniformed NMSP officer to investigate and will, as soon as feasible the NMSP officer shall provide updates to the communications center, the communications center shall relay all updated information about the incident to the on-call SAR Area Commander or the SAR Resource Officer
    - (iv) Upon issuing an Incident Number, the NMSP Communication Center, as soon as possible, will send a SAR Opening notification via email with information about the incident to State Police Headquarters as well as the state police districts command staff that could be involved in the SAR incident and the SAR Resource Officer; they shall cc their communications



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center email distribution group as well so updates can be sent by anyone else working in the center.

(v) The NMSP communications center shall send a SAR Closing notification when notified by the Field Coordinator or Area Commander advises all SAR personnel are out of the field and the SAR is closed.

(c) New Mexico State Police Headquarters will:

(i) maintain a current duty roster of Field Coordinators and Area Commanders via the state SAR Resource Officer.

(ii) Headquarters will alert other state police districts, at the request of the Area Commander, where there may be a possibility that the missing (or overdue) aircraft, ELT or PLB may be located. The District may notify their on-call Field Coordinator to alert them to be on standby for the incident if needed.

(5) The NMDPS will train a cadre of Field Coordinators to act as SAR Incident Commanders. Their duties are listed below.

(a) When a Field Coordinator accepts the assignment of a SAR incident, he/she will become the Incident Commander for that SAR incident and is responsible for conducting the mission by initiating, alerting, assigning, and directing all SAR resources participating in the incident until incident suspension or termination or until properly relieved by another certified Incident Commander.

(b) An Incident Commander will establish an Incident Base (IB) as well as an Incident Command Post (ICP) which will be the principal base of field operations. An Incident Base will be established at an accessible area within reasonable proximity to the primary search or rescue area where resources can be staged, assigned, dispatched and where there is adequate communication to a state police district office, Area Commander, and other out-of-area Mission participants.

(c) An Incident Commander or Area Commander shall updated the NMSP Communications Center every hour (when they have communications) so they may send a SAR Opening notification update.



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- (d) An Incident Commander in consultation with the Area Commander and the Agency Administrator Designee can suspend or terminate a SAR incident, in the following circumstances:
- (i) Suspension of a SAR incident - A SAR incident may be suspended by the Incident Commander after consulting with the Area Commander and the Agency Administrator Designee when:
    - 1. Appropriate resources have been utilized in the search effort, all probable areas have been searched with a reasonable cumulative Probability of Success (CPOS) factor, and there are no new clues or leads to be investigated, which in the opinion of the Incident Commander, with concurrence of the Area Commander and the Agency Administrator Designee representing the New Mexico Department of Public Safety, warrant no further search activity; or
    - 2. physical constraints, including natural phenomenon, no longer reasonably permit the opportunity for continuing the incident in a safe manner for SAR personnel.
  - (ii) Termination of a SAR incident - A state SAR Incident will be terminated by the Incident Commander in consultation with the Area Commander and the Agency Administrator Designee when:
    - 1. communications have been received from the Incident Commander that the subject(s) have been located and/or rescued, and all personnel assigned the incident have had reasonable time to return home or workplace, via the most direct route;
    - 2. it is determined that the incident operations should not be further conducted in the state of New Mexico;
    - 3. there is notification that an incident was initiated erroneously; or
    - 4. there is notification that the incident is no longer a SAR incident as defined by the State SAR Plan.
- (e) All written reports and related correspondence concerning a SAR incident will be forwarded to the New Mexico Department of Public Safety, to the attention of the state SAR Resource Officer within fifteen (15) days after the date of suspension or termination of the SAR incident.



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- (f) Missing aircraft, ELT and PLB incidents, and use of aircraft
  - (i) The assigned Area Commander and Incident Commander on all aircraft, ELT or PLB incidents must have met "air" SAR training standards developed by the SAR Resource Officer.
  - (ii) If the use of more than one (1) air resource is contemplated the Incident Commander must assign an Air Operations Branch Director who shall have operational control of all air resources assigned to the incident pursuant to ICS management guidelines.
- (g) Water incidents
  - (i) If a SAR Field Coordinator is asked to be the Incident Commander on an incident that may involve a possible drowning, he/she will notify state police headquarters and request the State Police Dive Team Commander or his designee to contact the SAR Incident Commander as soon as possible. When contacted, the SAR Incident Commander will request that one of the dive team members, if one is not already on scene, respond to the Incident Base as soon as feasible.
  - (ii) When the State Police Dive Team representative arrives at the Incident Base, or if on scene when the SAR Incident Commander arrives, the State Police Dive Team Leader will be the Branch Director for all activity on or underwater.
  - (iii) If it is determined that the State Police Dive Team Leader needs Volunteer SAR resources for utilization on or under water, they will be requested through the SAR Incident Commander and assigned to the State Police Dive Team Leader.
- (h) For radio communications purposes, the call sign to be used on all SAR incidents will be the incident name, or other designator, added to the term "Base". There can only be one (1) "Base" per SAR incident. During multiple SAR incidents the Area Commander will initiate a Communications Plan utilizing non-conflictive radio frequencies or other methods to avoid confusion between the incidents.
- (i) Unless relieved by another Field Coordinator, the Field Coordinator acting as the Incident Commander or a member of the Unified Command will remain at the Incident Base until the incident has been suspended or terminated.



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- (j) The Field coordinator shall manage the SAR incident in accordance with the ICS system and SAR training provided by the New Mexico Department of Public Safety under this Plan and all SAR policies and procedures as established by the Department of Public Safety.
- (k) Prior to deactivating, the Incident Commander shall ensure all SAR resources under his or her command have been checked out at the Incident Base in person, by telephone or radio.
- (l) If acting as the Incident Commander when an Incident was suspended or terminated, the Field Coordinator will be considered the Field Coordinator of record and will submit an Incident Report to the SAR Resource Officer within fifteen (15) days of the suspension or termination date of the incident.
- (m) If acting as an Incident Commander, other than when the incident was suspended or terminated, he/she will turn over any and all information concerning the incident, written or recorded, to the new Incident Commander, as soon as possible, after their activation as an Incident Commander was terminated.
- (n) If a Field Coordinator has been designated by the Chief as an "Area Commander", he/she has the additional responsibility to:
  - (i) assign a Field Coordinator, who has met air SAR training standards to be the Incident Commander when notified of an air incident by state police headquarters;
  - (ii) locate and assign Field Coordinators to a SAR incident if the local state police district office cannot locate a local Field Coordinator;
  - (iii) the SAR incident is considered by the Area Commander to be of a magnitude that requires a more experienced or trained Field Coordinator, or if the Incident Commander is violating the Standard of Care;
  - (iv) suspend and terminate SAR incidents in consultation with the Incident Commander and the Agency Administrator Designee; and/or
  - (v) when necessary perform resource de-confliction and resolution during multiple, simultaneous SAR missions.
- (o) Incident Commanders shall be responsible for all other duties that may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this Plan.



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- (6) The New Mexico State Police will be the final authority and will resolve all disputes during the operational phase of the SAR incident.
- (7) All personnel matters involving any person operating under this plan will be resolved by and at the discretion of the Chief of the New Mexico State Police.

### ii) State of New Mexico

- (1) SAR Persons, SAR Volunteers, and Field Coordinators who qualify under the definition section of this Plan or the SAR Act will become a temporary "public employee" as defined in the Tort Claims Act, NMSA 1978, § 41-4-1, et seq., without compensation.
- (2) Temporary status ceases upon suspension or termination of the incident, or if a SAR Person, SAR Volunteer, or Field Coordinator is no longer assigned to the incident by the Incident Commander or the Incident Commander's staff or chooses to no longer volunteer their services to the SAR incident. SAR Persons, SAR Volunteers and Field Coordinators are NOT considered state employees other than for purposes of the Tort Claims Act.

### iii) SAR Person or SAR Volunteer

- (1) A SAR volunteer's, or person's, offer of services or equipment may or may not be accepted by the Incident Commander in charge of the SAR incident.
- (2) If accepted, the SAR volunteer must check in to the incident, take direction from the Incident Commander as to his/her participation during the incident, and check out of the incident when the volunteer or person's services are no longer needed, or the volunteer or person chooses not to remain a SAR Volunteer or SAR Person as defined under this Plan.

## d) SYSTEM OF CERTIFICATION

### i) Mission Initiator

- (1) A Mission Initiator must:
  - (a) meet criteria established by the Chief of the New Mexico State Police; and
  - (b) receive training on the responsibilities of the position.

### ii) Certified Field Coordinator:

- (1) To be a Certified Field Coordinator an applicant must:
  - (a) file an application with the New Mexico Department of Public Safety;



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- (2) successfully complete a SAR management course and other criteria as required by the New Mexico Department of Public Safety; and
  - (3) receive final approval for certification from the SAR Review Board and the Chief.
- iii) Certified SAR Volunteer:
- (1) To become a Certified SAR Volunteer an applicant must:
    - (a) fill out a questionnaire and/or application supplied by the SAR Resource Officer; and
    - (b) meet criteria established by the Chief of the New Mexico State Police.
- iv) Certified SAR ICS General Staff personnel:
- (1) An applicant wishing to become certified as a member of the ICS General Staff must:
    - (a) fill out a questionnaire supplied by the SAR Resource Officer; and
    - (b) meet criteria established by the Chief of the New Mexico State Police.
- e) SYSTEM OF RESOURCE RECOGNITION**
- i) The SAR Review Board may recognize those SAR resources that have:
    - (1) requested recognition by the SAR Review Board;
    - (2) completed an information questionnaire provided by the SAR Resource Officer for the SAR Review Board's review; and
    - (3) met the minimum requirements for a Recognized SAR Resource as established by the SAR Review Board and the Chief of the State Police.
  - ii) After being recognized, a letter of recognition will be provided to the SAR Resource Officer signed by the SAR Review Board Chairperson and the Chief of the New Mexico State Police. Information on the resource's capabilities and how to activate the resource will be included in the next printing of the state SAR Resource Directory.
- f) NON-NMDPS AGENCIES AND ENTITIES**
- i) Tribal Lands
    - (1) If a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) exists between NMDPS and the Tribal authority, the MOA shall take precedence on the SAR operation.
    - (2) If a MOA does not exist, then:
      - (a) Due to the sovereign nation status of Tribal Lands in the State of New Mexico, NMDPS understands:



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- (i) NMDPS does not have any jurisdiction responsibilities on Tribal lands regarding Search and Rescue and when requested by the Tribal authorities, NMDPS is responding as guest of the Tribe.
  - (ii) NMDPS will send resources when requested by the Tribal authorities, to include a certified Incident Commander.
  - (iii) The SAR Incident Commander, unless granted by the Tribal authorities, will not assume a management role regarding the incident but will maintain authority over the NMDPS SAR responders.
  - (iv) SAR Incident Commanders shall recommend when possible, combining of NMDPS SAR personnel and tribal personnel on search task forces and tribal personnel hold the position of Task Force Leaders.
- ii) Non-NMDPS Agencies
- (1) If a Memorandum of Agreement exists between NMDPS and any other Agency that sends resources to a SAR incident, the MOA shall take precedence on the operation.
  - (2) If no Memorandum of Agreement exists between NMDPS and other Agency that have responded to or are responding to the incident, the SAR Incident Commander shall attempt to enter a Unified Command with the Agency's (ies') Incident Commander(s).
- g) SEARCH AND RESCUE VOLUNTEERS**
- i) All SAR persons and SAR volunteers as specified in this Plan, are participating on a strictly voluntary basis and that the state of New Mexico, the New Mexico Department of Public Safety, the New Mexico State Police, and the SAR Review Board and /or their employees, agents and insurers are not responsible for injuries to said participants except to the extent for which insurance is provided. It is further recognized that those persons are subject to certain limited coverage pursuant to the New Mexico Tort Claims Act, NMSA 1978 § 41-4-1, et seq.
  - ii) It is hereby recognized that those persons, including all SAR persons and SAR volunteers, participating at the direction of the Incident Commander in a properly initiated SAR incident are considered a temporary "public employee", as defined in the Tort Claims Act, NMSA 1978, § 41-4-1, et seq., without compensation. This temporary status ceases upon suspension or termination of the SAR incident. The "scope of duties" as defined in the Tort Claims Act are those duties set forth in the SAR ACT,



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Plan, or Standard Operating Procedures and Directives issued by the Chief of the New Mexico State Police.

**7) ATTACHMENTS**

**8) APPROVAL**

APPROVED BY:

DPS Cabinet Secretary

DATE: 2-24-26

