



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY OPERATING PROCEDURES MANUAL		
CHAPTER 234	SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS (SAR)	
	Effective: 10/05/2023	Commissioner Approval: 
	Authorities: AS 18.60.120 - 175	
	Applicability: OFFICERS	
	Special Instructions:	

234.100 INTRODUCTION

The department establishes this policy to reflect the responsibility, authority, operational, and administrative procedures for search and rescue (SAR) activities within the State of Alaska.

234.300 SAR RESPONSIBILITY

A. *Statutory authority for search and rescue.* With the exception of land under control of the National Park System, overall statewide responsibility for incidents of search and rescue within the State of Alaska has been given to the Department of Public Safety, Alaska State Troopers (AST) pursuant to AS 18.60.120.

This responsibility may be delegated to organizations within the State of Alaska who, by their nature, are better equipped to engage in search and rescue activity in a given environment or are mandated through the National Search and Rescue Plan to provide specific SAR services to state and local agencies.

The department has the responsibility to enact regulations necessary to carry out the legislative mandates set forth in AS 18.60.120 through AS 18.60.175. Under these statutes the department is responsible for SAR efforts, provides for the coordination of various resources needed to ensure the search mission is handled in the most effective manner, and includes funding for SAR expenses as part of its annual budget. The AST Statewide SAR Coordinator has the final authority and responsibility for producing the required reports, supporting the development and maintenance of local and statewide SAR resources, monitoring operations and coordinating all SAR functions.

Other state agencies and local governments have no legislative mandate to conduct search and rescue activity, yet many perform this service as a practical matter. Local law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and certain state agencies are often the first contacted when a person becomes the subject of a search and rescue.

The extent of local governments' responsibility relating to the health and safety of their citizens is perceived as their authority to mount local search and rescue operations.

B. *Delegation of SAR responsibility.* Certain agencies have been delegated authority to conduct search and rescue operations pursuant to Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the department.

1. In navigable waterways, the United States Coast Guard Rescue Coordination Center has the primary responsibility for search efforts.

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2. In the event of a search and rescue for missing or downed aircraft, the Alaska Air National Guard Rescue Coordination Center has primary responsibility.
3. In any area under control of the National Park Service (NPS), the NPS has primary responsibility.
4. The AST retain primary responsibility for search in the event of a ground-based search and rescue not otherwise delegated by MOU.

234.310 SAR COORDINATORS

- A. *Statewide SAR Coordinator.*** The Statewide Search and Rescue Coordinator has statewide responsibility for all search and rescue activities controlled by the department pursuant to AS 18.60.120.
- B. *Detachment SAR Coordinator.*** The Detachment SAR Coordinator has responsibility for all SAR activity that occurs within the detachment to which they are assigned.
- C. *Incident Commander.*** The Detachment SAR Coordinator may assign an individual who is not a department employee to act on his behalf at the scene of any SAR incident. This individual will be the Incident Commander, and is under the direct command of the Detachment SAR Coordinator or his designee.

234.320 PRE-PLANNING FOR SAR RESPONSE

All Detachments and Posts shall develop and maintain a SAR Pre-Plan. All Detachment SAR Pre-Plans shall be kept at the affected posts and at the office of the Statewide SAR Coordinator. Detachment SAR Coordinators are responsible for maintaining up-to-date information in Pre-Plans established for their area. If practical, this pre-plan will contain the following information:

1. Purpose and Objectives	13. Clues
2. Priority of Missions	14. Communications
3. Notification Procedures	15. Briefing / Debriefing Procedures
4. Relative Urgency Guidelines	16. Medical Considerations
5. Investigative Procedures	17. Fatalities
6. Strategy	18. Rescue / Evacuation Procedures
7. Tactics	19. Mission Suspension / De-escalation Procedures
8. Priorities for Resource Allocation	20. Documentation / Report Requirements
9. Emergent Authorities & Responsibilities	21. Critique Procedures
10. Call-out Procedures	22. Special Problems
11. Functional Organization (ICS)	23. Appendices

234.330 RESPONSE TO FIRST NOTICE OF SAR INCIDENT

A. A SAR is an emergency. A search and rescue operation is an emergency. Actions shall be taken immediately to ensure timely response to the search incident. Any search effort shall be performed in the safest manner possible with a sense of "controlled urgency". The Detachment SAR Coordinator or his designee shall ensure there is proper coordination of resources from first notice to the completion of the search mission regardless of outcome. AST personnel shall assume the role as search coordinator and encourage the development and training of SAR resources within their operational area. These personnel will, when possible, be provided training specific to their search mission requirements.

1. An ARMS incident report is required for all SARs.
2. All SARs require a notification to the Statewide SAR coordinator and the on-call SAR coordinator.

B. Immediate notice to responsible agency. Upon notification by any source of a missing person(s) to the Department of Public Safety, an assessment shall be made to determine the agency central to the coordination effort as detailed in Section 234.300 B. The First Notice information shall then be provided to this agency in the most expeditious manner. The SAR Pre-Plan established for involved post shall dictate actions resulting from the first notice.

C. Notification to consulate if foreign national. If the subject of the SAR is a foreign national, their nation's consulate should be notified. Consulates may have resources to assist with finding relatives, contacting them, and keeping them informed where language and cultural issues may exist.

D. Rescue efforts to begin immediately. Efforts to find a lost person shall be taken up immediately upon first notice. This shall include initial investigation to validate the potential search, notification of proper department personnel to include Commissioner, Director, Commander, and Statewide SAR Coordinator, and the utilization of the SAR Pre-Plan for that location.

234.340 INVESTIGATION OF UNRESOLVED MISSING PERSONS CASES

In the event a SAR where an individual is not located, appropriate investigative steps shall be taken in all cases of reported missing persons, which are not resolved in a timely manner. These shall include the gathering of information and records that can be used as aids in identifying the missing person at a later date. Refer to OPM 211.310 C for required unresolved missing persons cases investigative steps.

234.350 USE OF PRIVATE AIRCRAFT FOR SAR

The use of private aircraft in search and rescue will be coordinated through the local Civil Air Patrol or directly by the AST. If private aircraft are needed to support a search and rescue

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operation, and none are available through the Civil Air Patrol, then charter aircraft will be used. Deviation from this policy will be considered only in extreme emergencies.