

Alamosa Volunteer Search And Rescue

**Official Policies and Procedures
2017**

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Note: It is the responsibility of each AVSAR member to be knowledgeable of AVSAR official policies and procedures. Failure to comply with AVSAR official policies and procedures may result in formal disciplinary procedure.

These AVSAR official policies and procedures were reviewed by the Alamosa County Sheriff's Office and the AVSAR Executive Committee and approved by a two-thirds vote of the AVSAR body at the November 15, 2016 AVSAR meeting. The manual replaces all previous official policies and procedures.

Preface:

This manual was developed primarily to guide and aid AVSAR leadership in Search and Rescue (SAR) effectiveness, so to begin, a quick note on general SAR leadership (paraphrased from the Principles of Leadership in the Army's Ranger Handbook).

Leadership is the most essential element in SAR operations. Leadership provides purpose, direction and motivation during SAR trainings and on SAR missions. The leaders determine the degree of SAR effectiveness. **Principles of leadership include BE, KNOW and DO.**

BE technically and tactically proficient. Possess professional character traits—courage, commitment, candor, competence, humility and integrity.

KNOW the led, the leaders, the situation and communications. Know yourself, your strength and weaknesses, and seek self-improvement. Know your team and look out for their well-being. Train them for the rigors of SAR, take care of their needs, and discipline and reward them.

DO seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions. Do make sound and timely decisions. Do set the example. Do keep your subordinates informed. Develop a sense of responsibility in subordinates. Ensure the task is understood, supervised and accomplished. Build your team. Employ your team in accordance with its capabilities—as a leader you are responsible to recognize your team’s capabilities and limitations and employ them accordingly.

Section 1: Membership

1 A. Membership Qualifications, Application and Categories

Membership is open to all individuals 18 years of age or older regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin or handicap. Members do not have to be residents of Alamosa County.

New members will complete an official application, attend a monthly meeting, be interviewed by the executive committee and will pass a criminal background check before being granted probationary membership.

Upon becoming a member of AVSAR, new members will receive a copy of the bylaws, an official policies and procedures manual, a membership identification card and he or she will be given the opportunity to buy any official insignia, patches, stickers, uniforms and or emblems if available. (Each member will be given a shirt, hat and patch. Shirts will be returned upon resignation.)

Membership categories will include probationary members, active members and reserve members. New members will be considered probationary for a period of one year after the executive committee approves their inception into AVSAR. A probationary member may miss no more than two meetings during this time (regular and training meetings inclusive) to qualify for active membership. If a probationary member misses three meetings during his or her initial one year period following inception, that member will remain probationary until he or she attends all meetings except two in a twelve month period. The probation period may be extended at the discretion of the executive committee.

Members who have successfully completed their probationary period may continue their membership as an active member, with the stipulation that they do not have more than five unexcused absences from regular and training meetings during a twelve month period. An active member may only be excused from a regular meeting by an executive committee member present at the meeting.

If an active member misses more than five meetings (regular or training) during a twelve month period, that member automatically becomes a reserve member. Any reserve member, who attends all regular and training meetings, without missing five during a twelve month period, automatically becomes an active member.

1 B. Disciplinary Procedure

The executive committee will hear any complaints and after interviewing all parties involved, hand out discipline as needed. This may involve, but is not limited to, probation or removal as a member of AVSAR. Grounds for disciplinary procedure include: (a) failure of a member to comply with AVSAR policies; (b) actions which jeopardize the life or safety of any person; (c) illegal or unethical behaviors which may seriously affect the reputation of AVSAR; or (d) any other good cause.

Section 2: Meetings and Elections

2 A. Meeting Dates and Places

AVSAR will hold meetings on the fourth Tuesday of every month at the Alamosa County Sheriff’s Office unless otherwise stated and announced to members. An annual schedule of meeting dates and places should be made available in January for the following twelve months.

2 B. Meeting Guidelines

AVSAR will have as many meetings as are necessary to carry on a successful program. A minimum of eleven regular meetings and eleven training meetings is recommended. The executive committee may call additional special meetings as deemed necessary. A minimum of one executive committee meeting (in December or January) to plan the annual agenda of training meetings is recommended.

Regarding the conduct of regular meetings and rules of order, Robert's Rules of Order shall govern all AVSAR meetings. Regular meetings shall be presided over by the President, or in his or her absence, the Vice President, Executive Secretary, Treasurer or Member at Large, in turn. In the absence of all these persons, a presiding officer shall be chosen by a majority of the voting members present at the meeting.

Order of business at regular meetings:

- a. Attendance record/sign in sheet
- b. Call to order
- c. Introduction of guests
- d. Approval of prior minutes
- e. Treasurer's report
- f. Correspondence
- g. Committee reports
- h. Announcements
- i. Old business
- j. New business
- k. Announcement of next training
- l. Announcement of next meeting
- m. After meeting training

Open meetings: All AVSAR regular and training meetings shall be open to all members. Closed meetings may be called only upon motion made and approved in a roll call vote by a least two-thirds of the members present and voting, and then only if it is for one of the following purposes: (a) conferences with legal counsel that are the subject of pending or imminent administrative or court action; (b) matters required to be kept confidential by law; or (c) the investigation of charges or complaints of any member or officer, but only upon the request of the member or officer under consideration.

2 C. Elections of Officers

The elected officers of this organization shall consist of the President, Vice President, Executive Secretary, Treasurer and Member at Large. Only active members may be nominated or elected to serve as officers. (Exception to this rule is if there are no active members willing or experienced enough to take on a position.) The election of officers will occur once a year at the November meeting.

2 D. Voting

A quorum for the conduct of business shall be a majority of those attending. Each member shall be entitled to one vote on each matter submitted to a vote of the members at any meeting at which he or she is present. A two-thirds majority vote for approval of all members attending the meeting will be required for the following: an amendment to the bylaws, an amendment to the official policies and procedures manual, to change the official AVSAR insignia or logo or to end a debate. A majority vote for approval of all members attending the meeting will be required for the following: to adjourn a meeting with unfinished business, to make a motion, to make an amendment to motion, to open a debate or postpone a debate until a definite time.

2 E. Awards and Recognition

A suggested list of annual awards to be given at the end of the year includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- a. Outstanding Contribution
- b. Outstanding Achievement
- c. Service in Time: 1, 3, 5, 10, 15, 20 years, etc. are acceptable
- d. Outstanding Member
- e. Conspicuous Bravery
- f. Life Saving Award (only received once by a member)
- g. Death or Injury in the Course of Duty
- h. Tasteful Humorous Category
- i. Callouts Responded To
- j. Trainings Attended

Section 3: Administration

3 A. Duties of Officers

Immediately upon being elected, officers will assume executive committee member responsibilities. At any time, if an officer is temporarily unable to assume responsibility for his or her duties, it is that officer's responsibility to delegate those duties to another officer or appropriate leading member.

The President will preside at all meetings and trainings. The President will officially represent AVSAR. The President will assume responsibility for the annual Colorado Department of Local Affairs grant application. The President will assume responsibility for an annual inventory of equipment and materials as well as overseeing that out-of-date equipment and materials are disposed of properly. The President has the authority to create committees and designate a chairperson for the committee who will report to the main body. The President will only designate active members as chairpersons on committees.

The Vice President is to take the place of the President in his or her absence. In the event the President leaves the organization, the Vice President will take the place of the President and a special election will take place to elect a new Vice President. The Vice President will assume responsibility for long range strategic planning.

The Executive Secretary will keep the minutes of all meetings and submit them for approval at the next regular meeting. If the Executive Secretary is unable to attend a meeting he or she must delegate another member to carry-out the duties of Executive Secretary. The Executive Secretary will maintain up to date records for bylaws, policies and procedures, call-outs, an inventory of team equipment, documentation of current and previous years' trainings and operations, documentation of AVSAR statistics (including number of meetings, member trainings, public talks, public relations events, hours for activities, number of people, number of incidents, type of incident, etc.), documentation relating to accreditation, mailings, and any other necessary documentation for successful operation such as publications, newsletters, etc.

The Treasurer will keep all financial records, maintain tax exempt status and submit a financial report at all regular meetings. The Treasurer will submit an official annual financial report. If the Treasurer is unable to attend a meeting, he or she must see that a report is given to another individual on the executive committee.

The Member at Large will serve as a tie breaking vote in the event the executive committee is deadlocked during a vote that requires a majority decision.

The five officers that are elected will serve as the executive committee.

3 B. Removal of Officers

An officer may be removed and a special election may be petitioned by a two-thirds vote of the members present at any regular meeting for the following reasons only: (a) resignation; (b) incapacitation; (c) non-performances or loss of active member status; or (d) wrongful conduct, such that the reputation of AVSAR is seriously affected.

Should an officer resign or be removed from his or her position, a replacement will be voted into the vacancy by the membership within two regular meetings (see AVSAR Bylaws Article IV, Section 4 regarding the replacement of the President).

Section 4: Committees

4 A. Executive Committees

The executive committee will assume responsibility for the following: maintaining up to date bylaws and the official policies and procedures manual, maintaining a training schedule for the current year.

Executive committee members will assume leadership roles or will delegate leadership roles in the following circumstances: meetings, trainings, real-world operations, media relations and any other circumstances in which leadership is necessary.

4 B. Membership Committees

The President has the authority to create committees and designate a chairperson for the committee who will report to main body. The President will only designate active members as chairpersons on committees.

It is recommended that the following committees be created (although committees may be formed that are not listed here): awards and recognition, membership recruiting and retention, medical, publications and insignia, fundraising, equipment and training.

If recommended committees are not formed, the executive committee will assume responsibility for these functions.

4 C. Reporting of Committees

At the monthly meeting, chairpersons of committees will report to the body what old and new business there is regarding his or her committee. If there is no business to report, the chair shall express this to the body.

Section 5: Finances

5 A. Budget

The Treasurer will assume overall responsibility for the annual AVSAR budget. Regarding AVSAR budget income, no part of the income of AVSAR shall benefit private individuals or members of AVSAR. Members of AVSAR shall not receive any compensation for their services.

The President will assume overall responsibility for the annual Colorado Department of Local Affairs grant application.

Private or business donations will be immediately recorded in the monthly Treasurer's report. Donators can choose to remain anonymous or may be listed as a sponsor of AVSAR in publications, websites, media releases, etc.

It is recommended that AVSAR organize fundraising events as much as for public relations opportunities as for income.

5 B. Authorized Expenses

By resolution of AVSAR, a fixed sum or expenses of attendance at meetings, trainings or other authorized events may be allowed.

In emergency field situations, executive committee members may make financial decisions as long as the amount does not exceed one thousand dollars. If at all possible, the executive committee members making the purchase shall gather all available members and conduct a quick field vote regarding the purchase. Executive committee members that cannot explain an emergency purchase to the AVSAR body and receive a majority vote at the next meeting will be personally responsible for the purchases and will be subject to disciplinary action if necessary. In cases in which financial decisions over one thousand dollars (\$1000.00) are needed, a vote will be brought to AVSAR. A majority vote will be necessary to approve a suggested purchase. All financial decisions must be included in the Treasurer's monthly report given to all members during the next regular meeting.

There will always be two authorized signers who must sign all AVSAR checks. Forgery of checks and embezzlement are grounds for immediate dismissal from AVSAR and all information will be forwarded to local law enforcement officials for prosecution.

5 C. Annual Financial Report

The Treasurer will assume responsibility for and prepare a monthly Treasurer's report to be present to the body at the monthly meeting and an official annual financial report to be presented to the body annually at a regular official meeting.

Section 6: Publications, Insignia, Logos, Equipment, Materials

6 A. Publications

The Executive Secretary will assume responsibility of publications and may choose to delegate these responsibilities to another individual or committee. It is recommended that AVSAR create publications for member recruitment, public awareness, fundraising, education, etc.

6 B. Insignia, Logo, Uniforms, Patches, Stickers and Emblems

AVSAR will develop and maintain an official insignia and logo for use on official AVSAR patches, uniforms, stickers, emblems, letterhead, websites, other correspondence, etc. Insignia will be made available to all AVSAR members at or near the cost of production (the first patch is always free). Insignia's importance cannot be overstated when recognition of official AVSAR members is necessary by other members, the public and or patient(s) in training or real-world mission environments. Insignia is also important regarding public relations and awareness, and it is a symbol of member commitment and camaraderie.

Insignia may be changed by a two-thirds majority vote at a regular meeting; however, changes to insignia and logos should be made at a minimum for consistency, public recognition and cost.

6 C. Membership Cards

AVSAR shall make available to all members a membership card. This card will be carried by AVSAR members during official trainings and operations for identification. Its most important use would be as a means of identifying AVSAR members to officials of other cooperating agencies when other insignia may not be satisfactory.

A membership card is also important as a symbol of member commitment and camaraderie.

6 D. Equipment and Materials

The President will assume responsibility for an annual inventory of equipment and materials as well as overseeing that out-of-date equipment and materials are disposed of properly.

Another officer should officially attest (in a documented manner) that the record of the inventory is correct, and that any disposition of equipment and materials is proper. For example, a safe new piece of equipment should not be taken off the inventory, and an old unsafe, out-of-date piece of equipment should not be kept on inventory or be given to an individual for continued use. When equipment or materials are disposed of, they should generally be destroyed so as to avoid the potential liability of someone digging them out of the trash.

For training purposes or any other reason, if an officer or member wishes to check-out a piece of inventory, he or she will make a written request of the President to temporarily check-out the equipment. The President will keep a record of equipment that members have checked-out. Because equipment checked-out could potentially be unavailable for trainings and missions, the President will very carefully consider the liability of checking-out equipment and how long it is allowed to be checked-out. It is the responsibility of the President to hold accountable members who have equipment checked-out. If the President fails to properly account for equipment that is checked-out, for example if he or she does not keep written records of check-outs, this is grounds for removal from office, disciplinary procedures, and or criminal prosecution.

Section 7: Search, Rescue and Recovery Procedures

Note that the following sub-sections of AVSAR Section 7 Procedures are to be used as guidelines and not standard operating procedures (SOP's). The command and procedures used in SAR operations should always be adaptable to individual incident needs, conditions, circumstances, etc.; however, the closer AVSAR leadership and members follow these suggested procedures, the more likely the success of the mission and the less likely there is to be issues of liability.

7 A. Interviewing and Intelligence Gathering

The initial interviewing and intelligence gathering regarding an incident will be the responsibility of the agency who took the original call. This information will be made available to AVSAR leadership through the Alamosa County Sheriff's Office. If direct contact with the original reporting individual is established, the Executive Secretary or his or her designee will assume responsibility for additional intelligence gathering. AVSAR leadership may dispatch or designate an interviewer to gather intelligence from individuals at medical centers, command posts, etc. as needed (unless otherwise advised by the Sheriff or Undersheriff). AVSAR leadership will develop and have available an official missing person questionnaire that may be used to supplement information already taken by law enforcement agencies.

7 B. Call Out and Initial Response

The Executive Secretary should have the most up-to-date call list, so he or she will be responsible for initiating an official call-out of all members. If the Executive Secretary is unable to assume this action, the ranking officer or designee will.

It is recommended that a single individual be responsible for this procedure, as calling trees have proven to be ineffective and are too often "broken" before everyone is successfully reached. (The Alamosa County Sheriff's Office at their discretion can set up a Code Red type call out through the Colorado State Patrol Dispatch if needed.)

Similar to volunteer fire department response, AVSAR members will be responding from many different locations to the command post or rally point. This staggered response will include the Sheriff's Incident Commander and or highest ranking and most experienced AVSAR members waiting an appropriate amount of time, (most likely an hour to two hours) to form the initial sign-in roster. Leadership will then formulate an appropriate mission plan. Of course, if qualified personnel show up earlier than an hour, and it is obvious that hasty team deployment is appropriate, leadership will deploy the appropriate personnel; however, if during the initial staggered response time, the response of personnel is too limited, or leadership decides AVSAR is incapable of a proper response to the incident, leadership should request outside agency assistance immediately (either from nearby counties' SAR teams or other emergency response agencies). If this situation occurs, leadership should request assistance without wasting time, or allowing ego to become involved. Ultimately leadership's primary responsibility is to ensure the safety of SAR personnel. Deploying unprepared or undermanned teams is dangerous and irresponsible. In a worst case scenario, unprepared or undermanned teams could become SAR victims themselves and thus split the resources of the SAR mission resulting in a lesser response to the original subject. If necessary, leadership should not hesitate to request assistance from other agencies.

For these reasons, after responding to the command post, members should be prepared for deployment, but also should be ready to be patient.

7 C. Maintaining a Personal Mission Log

It is suggested that all members called-out on an incident will maintain a personal mission log including details such as times, locations, conditions, potential or actual evidence notes, tracking notes, travel notes, activities, rest breaks, hand drawn maps, sketches, specific difficulties (communication problems, illness, injuries, etc.), hazards and ideas for further activity in the search area.

It is required that team leaders maintain a personal mission log including the above mentioned details.

7 D. Incident Command

For all official AVSAR missions, the Alamosa County Sheriff's Office Deputy designated by the Sheriff will act as the incident commander (IC) for the mission, unless the Sheriff or Undersheriff is on scene and then one of them will act as IC. If this responsibility is delegated to AVSAR, the ranking executive committee member (ranking order being President, Vice President and Executive Secretary) or one of the executive committee's designees will be responsible for incident command. The initial commander will ultimately be responsible for the safety of all mission's personnel and command decisions made during the mission.

If an IC finds it is necessary to leave the command post (either to enter the field or to leave the mission), he or she will designate/pass along the IC responsibilities to another qualified individual/next ranking or experienced member at the command post so that objective, consistent leadership and situational awareness is retained at the command post. Teams deployed into the field will be assigned leaders, but an IC should approach overall mission leadership with the perspective that he or she cannot effectively maintain objectivity/situational awareness/effective overall management of the mission from the field. The IC will act as the communication, command and control coordinator for all responding personnel, teams deployed into the field, family members of patients/bodies in the field, etc.

Similar to military policy dealing with unethical/illegal orders from officers, if for any reason, a member or team personnel do not agree with the IC or believe an IC is acting irresponsibly/illegally, he/she/they has/have the right to question and or refuse the order based on the principle that being an AVSAR member is voluntary and a member can chose to quit at any time. In this situation, if it is deemed at a future time that an IC was acting irresponsibly or illegally, he or she will be subject to disciplinary action; however, if a team member refuses what is later deemed a reasonable order, he or she is subject to future disciplinary action.

7 E. **Planning and Strategy**

The incident commander with the assistance of AVSAR leadership and or external specialists (including but not limited to AVSAR officers, team leaders, experienced members, avalanche specialists, other county SAR team officers/members, etc.) using all related intelligence including information about the lost subject, location or subject's vehicle, current and future weather conditions, available resources, etc., will do a basic, logical probability analysis of the most likely potential points or area location of the missing individual/party.

The incident commander will then decide whether to use hasty tactics or a loose grid search. Most often, a hasty search will be used.

If **hasty tactics** are used, the incident commander will choose two to four well-trained, self-sufficient, very mobile searchers. Hasty search assignments might include likely spots (trails, tracks, paths, roads, camps, abandoned vehicles, cabins, visual checks of technical climbing fences, hazardous areas and other features). The criterion for a hasty search is speed, as opposed to levels of coverage, and hasty teams have been known to literally run the trail. Hasty tactics work best when the lost individual or party is still responsive. Hasty team members should be very sensitive to observing any possible tracks and evidence. Techniques of hasty searches include a thorough check of the last known point or point last seen for clues (a.k.a. sign cutting or figuring out which direction the subject began traveling), following the known or suspected route, and checking all hazards, attractions, drainages, buildings, potential routes, or any other places where the subject or evidence is likely to be discovered.

If the incident commander decides to use a **loose grid search tactic** initially or following a hasty search, searchers will be assigned to teams of three to seven (lower numbers are generally more ideal for organized reasons). The objective of this type of search is to cover larger geographic areas with higher level of coverage at lower speeds than a hasty search. This type of search is a better tactic for potentially unresponsive individuals or parties. The loose grid team will be given a search line and then organize themselves on a base line (parallel to the search line) at intervals as wide as possible so that there isn't too much overlapping of search lanes. The team then travels simultaneously down the search line looking for evidence. It is best if the members of this type of team can maintain occasional visual and voice/radio contact with each other.

Later in the search, the incident commander may choose to use either a tight grid search or an evidence search in areas where there was a high level of clues or for any other reasons dictating levels of coverage.

For **tight grid searches**, generally the incident commander will reassign a loose grid search team to shorten their intervals on the base lines so that area coverage becomes 100 percent and there is visual overlap between searchers. Factors to consider when using a tight grid search include: this type of search can be extremely destructive to clues that are not detected (therefore this search should be used only as a last resort), it is a slow search taking a long period of time, a great deal of effort is required to coordinate and properly complete this type of search.

The last potential search method is an **evidence search**. This type of search is generally only done under the supervision of a law enforcement agency at a crime scene (a field where a murdered body was located, a location where a child was abducted, etc.). An evidence search is similar to a tight grid search except that the intervals between searchers is so short as that they overlap, so that the area being searched is actually being searched by a least two searchers. Factors to consider in this type of search include: time is not usually important, often there will be no second chance to find evidence, huge amounts of effort are necessary to concentrate high coverage for small areas looking for small objects (for example on hands and knees, shoulder to shoulder is a common tactic for this type of search).

7 F. **Helicopter Use**

If a search team finds the objective individual(s) and believes helicopter evacuation is reasonable, and or receives credible information that helicopter insertion and or evacuation is reasonable, the Sheriff, Undersheriff or his or her designee must approve the Flight for Life (FFL) callout.

7 G. **Handling Evidence**

When handling evidence, searchers should use common sense and keep the following guidelines in mind.

Experienced searchers will demonstrate the ability to interpret and process evidence properly as it is discovered. This means being sensitive to potential clues while applying hasty tactics, being able to interpret clues into meaningful intelligence about the location of the lost subject, and if need be, properly cataloging and securing evidence.

In cases involving subject disappearance, vehicle crashes, death or potential or actual criminal evidence, if possible take notes, sketch the scene, photograph, get contact information for corroborating witnesses, and retrieve and preserve collectible evidence. More precisely, before it is handled or disturbed, photograph the evidence from multiple perspectives (the four cardinal directions are best). If necessary use a tape measure to show scale. Use latex gloves when handling evidence. Handle evidence a little as possible and put collectible evidence in evidence bags. Write your full first and last names and the date and time on the bag. For more information, see the body recovery subsection.

7 H. **Check-In/Sign-In**

When the Sheriff's Office initiates a callout, members contacted and able to respond will safely and quickly rally at a command post located close to the mission insertion point. Unless given different specific instructions, members should respond with their seasonally appropriate "72 Hour SAR Ready Packs". Each member will locate the incident commander and sign the check-in list. At a minimum, this list should include the member's full name and time. Then members will standby until given briefings and or assignments.

7 I. **Briefings**

When leadership gives members briefings, if possible members should take notes for documentation and to assure communications accuracy.

If possible leadership will use the official AVSAR incident briefing checklist or include the following minimum information: situation status, subject information, clue considerations, subject's trip plans, terrain and hazards, current and forecasted weather, needed equipment, communication details, reporting details, transportation details, media policy, tactical assignments, chain-of-command overview, de-briefing procedures, safety instructions including what to do if a team member is injured, communication break-down, etc.

7 J. **Assignments**

The incident commander will give specific assignments to members as individuals and or as teams.

On missions, individuals' responsibilities include that all members of a team must have their own personal gear (72 hour SAR pack) and should not be dependent upon any other members for equipment. If a member responds to a mission unprepared, he or she will not be deployed into the field. This policy must be adhered to for the safety of the individual and teams being deployed. An IC or leader who deploys unprepared members is subject to disciplinary actions. Members who feign being prepared and risk other team members for sake of field deployment are subject to disciplinary action. All team members should be physically and mentally prepared to perform difficult operations for up to 24 hours. Honest assessment and communication of skills and or limitations should be immediately communicated to the IC or team leader prior to field deployment. Failure to do this shall result in future disciplinary action.

Prior to mission specific directions, the incident commander will assign each team a leader. The leader's primary responsibility is to ensure the safety of the team. In addition to this primary responsibility, the team leader will assume responsibility for or delegate the following: communications/radio operator, navigation/navigator, and a mission reporter who regularly documents the time, teams' positions and sections in a personal mission log. All members should know their current location; however, the navigator will be the individual with whom the other team members can check their locations. The leader will maintain situational awareness and assume overall responsibility for the team.

While in the field, team members should remain together for safety; however, in emergencies the team may need to split up. If separation of the team becomes necessary, situational needs should be taken into consideration and the safety of all members should be prioritized.

7 K. **Radio Communication Procedures**

Standard radio protocol will be used when radio communications are applied. Pre-mission briefings should include the minimum communication details: who will possess radios, how radios will be used (such as check-in times, intelligence updates, emergency signals, etc.), and how to set-up a patch network if necessary. In case of radio breakdowns, lack of radios, etc., a back-up system such as check-in locations and times, which team member will be a message runner in case the team needs to remain with a patient, etc., will be clear to team members before field deployment.

7 L. **Tracking**

The team leader will assume primary tracking responsibilities. A good tracker possesses patience, an inquisitive mind, honesty, perseverance, excellent observation skills, honed senses, endurance, determination and knowledge of the local environment.

The following tracking fundamentals should be used as guidelines: make sure that traffic is kept to a minimum in areas used for **sign cutting** (finding the subject's initial direction of travel), check for sign and tracks along trails and roads on the approach to the search area, try to have detailed subject profile, aggressively preserve found evidence (cordon off areas around known tracks, take photographs, draw sketches, etc.), pay close attention to choke points on routes where the subject has a very high probability of traveling through, if possible use containment tactics to shrink the potential search area, talk to everyone contacted within the search area and presume he or she is the subject until proven otherwise, actively look for clues continuously, call out the subject's name at regular intervals, and then stop and listen carefully for any response. Be aware that children will often hide when their name is called.

7 M. **Medical Policies**

At a minimum, all members should do their best to stay **Wilderness First Aid (WFA)** certified and strive to become **Wilderness First Responder (WFR)** certified at a time in the future, especially if they decide to become more medically involved on the team. If possible and before field deployment, each team should be assigned at least one person certified in basic first-aid or higher.

If at any time first-aid must be given to any individual, it will be the highest qualified individual on scene that will initially render aid. If qualifications/certifications are the same among potential caregivers, the most experienced individual should render aid to the best of his or her ability with the assistance of those on scene.

Keep in mind that Colorado is a "**Good Samaritan**" state in which laws protect any individual from liability who is rendering first-aid within his or her known abilities (as long as they do not receive payment for their services). This includes cases in which aid was given when the caregiver is not currently certified to do so (i.e. a paramedic whose license has expired should render aid to a patient with injuries within his or her experience without fear of liability).

Never be afraid to provide care for an injured person; however, be aware that individuals have had liability issues arise when he or she renders aid outside of his or her training and/or experience (i.e. a paramedic attempts a heart-transplant), or if an individual doesn't render aid when he or she could have (i.e. a military medic, who doesn't provide aid to a patient because he or she was afraid of the liability from providing "uncertified" civilian care). Advanced medical personnel can face civil liability consequences, as well as criminal charges for failure to provide aid.

Ultimately, in any situation in which medical policy becomes questionable, the most qualified individual on scene will make treatment decisions, and beyond this, each individual will decide for himself or herself to what degree to provide aid.

In situations in which confirmation of death may be necessary the following guidelines apply: have the most medically qualified team member initially approach and while trying not to disturb any potential evidence. The individual who approached initially will confirm death or begin treatment and request assistance. If death is confirmed, document the time, members involved and location. Begin body recovery procedures.

If there are no qualified medical personnel on the search team, have the most experienced member (usually team leader) approach and check the body for life signs (breathing and heartbeat). If the body shows life signs or is missing life signs but is still warm, begin treatment (CPR, treat for hypothermia, etc.). If the body has no life signs, is cold, or is obviously deceased, begin body recovery procedures.

7 N. **Body Recovery Procedures**

When death of an individual in the field is confirmed, secure the immediate area as a crime scene (whether or not a crime is assumed to have occurred). Evidence preservation should take priority over all else. As few people as necessary should enter the area. If there are witnesses, begin collecting contact information from them, and if witnesses have been seen taking videos or photographs of the body, confiscate the cameras or cell phones as official evidence. Notify the owners that the cameras and phones will be returned once the media containing evidence has been removed from them. If necessary, inform witnesses refusing to hand-over evidence, that the choice of withholding evidence is a crime and that they will be criminally charged. If necessary, photograph the witness refusing to hand-over evidence and/or photograph or document their description, vehicle license information, etc.

Once the scene and witnesses have been secured, if possible contact the incident commander, so that he or she may contact the Alamosa County Coroner's Office for dispatch. If the Coroner (or his or her designee), the Sheriff, Undersheriff (or his or her designee), or the incident commander directs the search team to begin evidence collection and body recovery procedures, use the following guidelines.

Take as many photographs as possible. Take photographs of any potential evidence items in the area. Take several photographs of each item from several overlapping directions (four at a minimum) so ideally the photographs cumulatively make a panoramic picture. In the case of having to take pictures of a cliff or steep face, take pictures up and down overlapping so all areas are documented. Take as many pictures of the body as possible getting a full panoramic set of the body and areas around it. Get close shots of injuries, the gun or object used for a suicide, bloody areas near the body, equipment showing signs of failure (cut rope, broken carabiner, etc.) and the face of the body. Draw a sketch of the area and if possible measure distances between the body and evidence with a tape measure or by pacing. Clearly document the location of the firearm in relation to the body in cases of firearm suicide. Use latex gloves when handling evidence. In the case of suicides by firearms, look for the empty cartridge, document it as with other evidence, and secure the firearm by removing the magazine or clearing the cylinder, emptying the action (clear the round from the chamber), and safety the firearm. Tag the firearm, mark whether it was found on the left or right of the victim (in relation to the victim), the date and time it was collected, and sign the tag with your full first and last name. Put **paper** bags around the body's hands and tape around wrists for CBI testing. On the bags around hands, write the date, time you taped the bags, and your full first and last name (no initials). **Do not use plastic bags.** All valuables around body go into evidence bags. All valuables on the body that may fall off during placement of body into the body bag; put in the body bag. Plastic evidence bags are for dry evidence only.

In cases when a body bag is unavailable, the use of plastic sheeting, large ponchos, or sleeping bags is appropriate. Just ensure that the method “rolls up” the body in a manner that it is secure. After the body has been removed from the scene, retake photographs of the scene and close ups of where the body was.

7 O. Debriefing Procedures

When teams complete field assignments and return to the command post, team leaders and members should communicate to the incident command and relevant and pertinent information about the assignment. They should then standby and prepare for further directions or assignments.

7 P. Check-Out/Sign-Out

Once directed to by the incident commander (usually because the mission is complete). Members will be demobilized and told to check-out. Members should officially check-out/sign-out (most simply documented by checking the check-out box and noting the time on the check-in/sign-in list).

SAR personnel should not hesitate to take a nap or request assistance or transportation to their intended destinations if they are too tired to drive home. Note that numerous injuries and deaths of SAR personnel have occurred when they have attempted to return home in fatigued states after rigorous operations.

7 Q. Media Communication Policies

Because the potential for incomplete, uninformed, inappropriate, and or embarrassment exists whenever SAR personnel communicate with the media, field personnel should direct all media questions and communication to the Sheriff’s Office Public Information Officer (PIO), the incident command, the Sheriff’s Office or in the event of a mutual aid call, their agency handling the callout. For no reason, should members do interviews or make official statements to a media representative.

If the incident commander delegates the responsibilities of the PIO to an AVSAR officer, he or she will follow proper press release/media communication protocol when responding to or informing the media. This protocol includes but is not limited to appearing in professional attire as to promote the professionalism of the team, not communicating the names of individuals involved until they or their families/representatives have given permission to do so (until permission is granted describe the missing subject by gender and age); ensuring that information disseminated has been verified and is true; not communicating any personal opinions, judgments, subjective statements or biased perspectives; sticking to facts related to the standard journalistic style (who-gender and age, what-presumed lost and currently SAR personnel are searching, where-in the such and such national forest in the area of the Blanca Massif Mountain Group/and where the subject is currently living, when-the call came in on date and time, why-subject was due back at home/call-in/trailhead at such and such time and date, and how-SAR personnel are using ground search teams, dog tracking teams, aircraft, etc.).

7 R. Mission Critique

Also known as an incident debriefing or after action review, the mission critique allows the team to review the overall mission’s success and failures. It gives personnel the opportunity not to repeat mistakes that were made and to highlight and reinforce things that were done right. The mission critique should be done as soon as possible after the mission. To help support the overall mission critique, mission personnel should prepare their own individual critiques including answering the following questions: what gear did I need that I did not have, how long did it take for me to mobilize and how could I do it better next time, what particular skills do I need to work on, how can I improve myself, what procedures really helped me complete my assignments, and what skills did I possess that I used for completion of my assignments?

Section 8: Training

The AVSAR executive committee should plan and outline an annual training schedule that includes teaching/reviewing the following skills to any interested members and the public. The schedule should be made available as early in the year as possible to facilitate members' advanced planning and attendance at trainings. When planning, the executive committee should remember to differentiate trainings to make it valuable to members of varying ability levels (for example more skilled members assume responsibility for training, less skilled members or trainings could be broken into different groups focusing on similar but different skills).

It is recommended that the Executive Secretary or a designee keep documentation of training curriculum so that it can be repeated in future trainings as consistently as possible. Consistency of training for all members will facilitate operational efficiency and success.

It is also recommended that the Executive Secretary or a designee keep documentation of given trainings and which members attended. If possible, members should be given an acknowledgement of training attendance in the form of a training certificate or letter of achievement.

The following subsections list the skills that should be offered annually:

8 A. Wilderness Survival

- a. 72 Hour SAR Pack
- b. Land Navigation

8 B. Wilderness Search, Rescue, Recovery Options

- a. Interviewing and Intelligence Gathering
- b. Call Out
- c. Maintaining a Personal Mission Log
- d. Incident Command
- e. Planning and Strategy
- f. Helicopter Use
- g. Handling Evidence
- h. Check-In
- i. Briefings
- j. Assignments
- k. Radio Communication Procedures
- l. Tracking
- m. Medical Policies
- n. Body Recovery Procedures
- o. Debriefing Procedures
- p. Check-out/Sign-out
- q. Media Communications Policies
- r. Mission Critique

8 C. Technical Rock

- a. Knots, Bends, Hitches
- b. Edge Restraint Systems
- c. Rappelling with Knot Pass
- d. Prusik Ascent with Knot Pass
- e. Individual Belay Techniques
- f. Rock Anchor Systems
- g. Pulley Systems
- h. Rescue Belays
- i. Main Line Lowering and Raising

- j. Attendant Skills
- k. Kootenay Highlines
- l. Fourth Class Lead Climbing

8 D. Snow and Ice

- a. Winter Survival Skills
- b. Glissading, Skiing and Snow Shoeing
- c. Litter Packaging and Transport in Winter
- d. Crampon and Ice Ax Competency
- e. Self-Belay and Self-Arrest
- f. Roped Team Travel
- g. Placing Snow and Ice Anchors
- h. Vertical Ice Climbing
- i. Avalanche Awareness, Searches, Rescues, Recoveries
 - 1. Snow Pit Analysis
 - 2. Searches, Recoveries
 - i. Beacons
 - ii. Probes

8 E. Medical and Treatment of Patients

- a. Litter Packaging
- b. Medical Treatment Policies
- c. Basic Medical Training
- d. Confirmation of Death Policy

8 F. Organizational

- a. Leadership
- b. Multi-Agency Cooperation
- c. Overall Safety
- d. Helicopter Use and Safety

8 G. Advanced Training Cadres

Whenever possible, AVSAR should request funding from grants to send members to advanced training opportunities such as the “Rigging for Rescue Seminar” or its equivalent. These members will assume responsibility for transferring these advanced skills to AVSAR members throughout the year following the training attendance. If a member who attends an advanced training opportunity stops attending meetings or fails to support the transfer of those skills to AVSAR members the year following his or her attendance at the training, he or she will not be allowed to attend future advance trainings and may be subject to disciplinary procedure.

Section 9: AVSAR Records and Documents

9 A. Forms Available Upon Request from AVSAR Executive Secretary

- a. Bylaws
- b. Official Policies and Procedures
- c. Call-Out List
- d. Application
- e. Monthly Meeting Minutes
- f. Monthly Treasurer’s Report

- g. Annual Financial Statement
- h. Executive Committee Meeting Minutes
- i. AVSAR Annual Statistics Report
- j. 72 Hour SAR Equipment List
- k. Missing Persons Questionnaire
- l. Check-In/Check-Out List
- m. Briefing and Debriefing Checklists
- n. Incident Report

9 B. **Forms Available Upon Request from AVSAR Treasurer**

- a. Articles of Incorporation
- b. Current 501 (c) Letter

Section 10: Search and Rescue Resources

10 A. **Books**

Fundamentals of Search and Rescue by the National Association for Search and Rescue
Mountaineering: Freedom of the Hills by The Mountaineers
Climbing Self Rescue by Tyson and Loomis
The Avalanche Handbook by McClung and Schaerer
Glacier Travel & Crevasses Rescue by Selters
Technical Rescue Riggers Guide by Lipke
International Mountain Rescue Handbook by MacInnes
Life On A Line by Merchant

10 B. **Websites**

AVSAR: www.avsar.us
Mountain Rescue Association: www.mra.org
USGS Maps Store: <http://www.usgs.gov/pubprod/>
Google Earth Program: <http://earth.google.com/>
Animated Knots: www.animatedknots.com
Colorado Avalanche Information Center: <http://avalanche.state.co.us/>
Sangre de Cristo Mountain Accidents: <http://www.listsofjohn.com/Accident/sangre.html>
Colorado Search and Rescue Board: <http://www.coloradosarboard.org/index.asp>
Teller County SAR: <http://www.tellercountysar.org/>.