Arizona Sheriffs' Association &
Arizona Emergency Services Association

In Recognition of Extraordinary Contributions to the Search & Rescue Mission

Development of Inland Search Management (ISM) Manual and Curriculum
July 25, 2012

These individuals are recognized for developing the Inland Search Management (ISM) Manual and Curriculum for Arizona Search & Rescue Coordinators. This recognition is awarded jointly by the Arizona Sheriffs’ Association and the Arizona Emergency Services Association.

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Background

On November 15, 1958, three Boys Scouts, ages 12, 13, and 16, became lost in the Santa Rita Mountains south of Tucson, AZ. While their weekend hike began in pleasant weather, an extraordinary winter storm dropped several feet of snow in southern Arizona’s mountains. While the boys were hopelessly lost, a disorganized, ineffective search effort emerged. Early on, as many as 750 searchers participated on a given day. Within two weeks, most had lost hope of the boys’ survival and quit the search effort. On December 4, a small team of determined searchers found the boys, deceased on the steep slopes of Temporal Gulch.

In an average year, 900 Search and Rescue (SAR) missions are conducted in the state of Arizona. About ¾ of these missions involve searches for persons lost in the remote reaches of the state. Typically, the overdue subject is lost, disoriented, stranded, injured, or deceased.

An outsider may assume that saturating an area with large numbers of air and ground searchers, lined up shoulder-to-shoulder will lead to a successful outcome. Nothing could be further from the truth. In contrast, successful search missions require a sophisticated approach to deploy resources in an effective manner. All too often, someone’s life depends upon the skill of an insightful, well trained search manager.
Since the Santa Rita Mountain tragedy, Arizona’s SAR capability has improved dramatically. Today’s SAR teams are aided by state-of-the-art personal equipment, navigation aids, personnel detection technology, and highly refined search management practices. In the 21st Century, it’s not uncommon for an Arizona Sheriff’s SAR Coordinator to have several years of experience including several hundred SAR missions. This experience is enhanced by training and decades of lessons learned.

Search Management Training

In the early 1970s, the Managing the Search Function (MSF) course was developed by SAR experts from throughout North America. This week long course was critical in the development of search managers. By 1996, the MSF Course was refined into the Managing the Lost Person Incident (MLPI) course with a second edition published ten years later.

While the MLPI Course had not been revised since 2006, Arizona’s SAR Coordinators recognized the urgent need for up-to-date training materials reflecting current search methods, evolving technologies, and the unique challenges of Arizona’s lost person incidents. Furthermore, the MLPI course was delivered through a Power Point lecture with minimal mentor/student interaction. Clearly, our SAR Coordinators needed an updated curriculum that maximized learning potential through productive teaching methods while using the latest SAR technology.

The ISM Manual & Curriculum

In April 2010, the Arizona Sheriffs’ SAR Coordinators’ Association commissioned the development of the Inland Search Management (ISM) Manual and 40 hour curriculum. This was achieved through the partnership of six Sheriffs’ SAR Coordinators from five Arizona Sheriffs’ Departments and a retired University of Arizona Professor of Mathematics. The SAR Coordinators were assigned chapters to write while Dr. Lovelock edited the work into a unified style. Over a year later, the 370 page ISM Manual was complete and the development of training curriculum began. In August 2011, the first course was delivered to 20 Sheriffs’ SAR Coordinators in Phoenix, AZ. In April 2012, the second course was held in Flagstaff. The third is tentatively scheduled for Tucson in December 2012. This course passes the rigorous requirements of the Arizona Police Officers’ Standards and Training (AZ POST).

Much of the ISM Manual content has been known for decades - knowledge gained mostly by experience. Previously, some of it was passed down in books, some in classrooms, and some by word-of-mouth. The ISM Manual gathers that knowledge in one place, giving credit wherever possible. It also incorporates the use of the latest SAR technology with up-to-date material found nowhere else. Consequently, there is more in this manual than can be covered in a 5-day course. Course participants are expected to study the manual out of class and then use it as a reference during a search incident.

While earlier search management courses provided valuable content, these were Power Point lectures soliciting little student interaction. Consequently, learning potential wasn’t maximized.
In contrast, the ISM Course is delivered in a manner that embraces global search management insight in a format emphasizing student/teacher interaction and learning yield.

Successful completion of the ISM curriculum requires the student's engagement in the classroom and after hours. Classroom work is supplemented with after-class reading assignments and tested by quizzes administered the following morning. Successful completion of the ISM Course is dependent upon a cumulative score of 70% in four quizzes, six table top exercises (TTX) and the use of SAR technology.

The six TTXs simulate four Operational Periods for the same search. Students are divided into six teams of three to four people under the guidance of a coach. The coach grades individual student's performance based upon their contributions to the TTX. The Incident Command System (ICS) is used throughout and Incident Commander (IC) skills are reinforced through a transition of command briefings. Each student fills the role of IC at least once.

It's important to understand that the ISM Manual is a living document, regularly updated as fresh insights emerge. After one ISM course ends, the manual and course are reviewed and updated with the latest information, so that the new edition can be printed in time for the next course. Truly, the ISM Course is a model for training public safety personnel and achieving high learning yield.

**Conclusion**

Through the development of the ISM Manual and Curriculum, SAR Coordinators are provided quality training that translates into successful SAR missions. SAR missions executed at the highest level of competence increase an individual's likelihood of survival.

It is a privilege to work in an endeavor that saves lives and reduces human suffering. While the personal rewards are great, SAR is a consuming commitment requiring a lifestyle of long, unusual hours and personal sacrifice. The seven individuals receiving this award not only step up to this commitment but they also strive to refine the effectiveness of SAR operations. Their dedication to Inland Search Management is a reflection of performance at the highest levels of professional achievement and commitment.