



# ANN ARBOR FIRE DEPARTMENT

## Standard Operating Procedures - 6.04 Water Rescue



### WATER RESCUE

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Effective: August 27, 2021  
Scheduled Review: August 27, 2024  
Approved: Fire Chief Mike Kennedy

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#### I. PURPOSE

To establish a standard and safe approach for conducting water rescue operations. The objective is to carry out a successful rescue operation, which poses the least amount of risk to the personnel involved.

#### II. RESPONSE

In the event of a reported water rescue or drowning:

- A. Single company response shall be sent to a drowning reported at a swimming pool.
- B. For any reported person or animal ice / water rescue incident in open water, e.g., lake, pond, or river.
  - i. Still alarm assignment shall respond.
  - ii. One person from Station 5 or the nearest available unit, shall drive the water rescue vehicle and tow package to the nearest launch site closest to the reported water incident.
  - iii. Depending on dispatch information, the initial incident commander (IC) may notify the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office Dive Team (WCSO) and / or the Washtenaw County Swift Water Technical Rescue Team (WCSW) prior to arrival of resources.
- C. Operations level water rescue involves shore-based or boat-based rescue, with personnel wearing personal flotation devices (PFD) in the hot zone.
- D. Technician level water rescue involves rescuers swimming in water to perform surface and subsurface rescues. Only personnel who are trained and equipped to operate at this level should attempt these actions.

#### III. INITIAL ACTIONS

- A. Communicate visible patient(s) location(s) to responding units and maintain visual contact until the victim(s) is rescued.
- B. Establish a unified incident command system incorporating the various agencies and departments, while performing/staffing appropriate ICS functions.
- C. For non-visible victim(s), attempt to prevent witnesses from leaving the scene, keep them separated, and interview them for victim location information.
- D. Begin triangulation of non-visible victim's last-seen location.
- E. Utilize on scene resources, such as aerials, bridges, buildings, etc., to perform a visual survey of the search area.
- F. All personnel operating in the hot zone will wear PFDs.

#### IV. WATER CRAFT OPERATIONS

- A. Utilize appropriate PFDs and thermal protection.
- B. Maintain communication on the assigned incident channel.
- C. Respond to the reported patient location and attempt a surface water rescue if appropriate.
- D. Mark last-seen location; if patient is no longer visible.



# ANN ARBOR FIRE DEPARTMENT

## Standard Operating Procedures - 6.04 Water Rescue



- E. Start a search pattern from the last-seen location.
- F. Pick up WCSW or WCSO members and support rescue/dive operations as directed.

### V. OPEN WATER ACTIONS

- A. Operations: AAFD personnel that have had operational level water rescue training should be able to conduct self-rescue, reach, or throw (within 60 feet of shore or boat) operations. If the victim(s) cannot be reached by these methods, the IC should consider stopping the operation until WCSW and/or WCSO members arrive. After the WCSW or WCSO arrive, the IC will provide a situation report. The IC should consider re-assigning the Rescue Group to an officer from the WCSW.
- B. Technician: AAFD personnel that have had technician level water rescue training can deploy when the victim is unresponsive or in panic; multiple victims in water; or the victim(s) is further than sixty (60) feet from shore.
- C. WCSO can initiate dive operations at their discretion, if the risk/benefit analysis indicates that there is a probability of rescuing a viable patient and there is a reliable last-seen location. Both the fire and police supervisor/commander should physically co-locate, if possible, and remain together until the incident transitions to a recovery.
- D. Recovery: Once the IC(s) determine that the incident has transitioned from a rescue to a recovery; the established AAFD unified incident command system should transition to the respective lead law enforcement agency of scene.

### VI. ICE RESCUE ACTIONS

- A. Each rescuer shall be dressed in an ice rescue suit. The rescuer is to be secured to the water rescue rope with a locking carabineer attached to the ice rescue suit on one end and the other end attached to a secure anchor point with a non-locking carabineer. A stubai carabineer shall be attached to the water rescue rope, six (6) feet from the rescuer's chest. This equipment provides buoyancy, exposure protection and reduces the chance of injury to the rescuers. The ice rescue suit harness worn by the rescuer provides the rescuer with a lifeline as well as providing a proper method for the line tenders to pull the rescuer and victim to safety with the water rescue rope.
- B. Line tenders shall be equipped with warm clothing, gloves, boots, and hats. Each line tender shall wear a PFD and a pair of ice crampons. This will provide the line tender with buoyancy and stable footing on the ice.
- C. Self-rescue: The first unit on the scene shall attempt to talk the victim into self-rescue. This method works well when the victim is close to shore, responsive and is not showing any signs of hypothermia.
- D. Reach: If the victim is in early stages of hypothermia but is able to understand instructions and hold on, the following rescue methods may be used to retrieve the victim. This can be accomplished by: rescue pole, pike pole, or water rescue throw line (75 feet).
- E. Go: If self-rescue or reach options are not feasible, then a rescue team shall have to go retrieve the victim using the following procedures:
  - i. When the rescuer places a hand on top of their head, that is the "okay" signal and the pull team shall start pulling. If during the pull the rescuer again places a hand on top of their head, the pull team shall cease immediately until the rescuer again signals okay by placing a hand on top of their head.
  - ii. A second rescuer shall be dressed in the proper equipment and ready to respond in the event the primary rescuer has trouble.



# ANN ARBOR FIRE DEPARTMENT

## Standard Operating Procedures - 6.04 Water Rescue



- iii. If a victim goes beneath the ice cap, the rescuer shall not enter the hole where the victim was last seen.
- iv. The rescuer shall approach the holes and do a visual check for the victim.
  - v. If the victim is seen, a rescue attempt shall be made.
  - vi. If the rescuer is unable to locate the victim, the rescuer shall exit the area.
  - vii. An area of "safe ice" in the immediate area must be located so the WCSO divers can work in close proximity to the last known location of the victim.
- F. WCSO can initiate dive operations at their discretion if the risk/benefit analysis indicates that there is a probability of rescuing a viable patient and there is a reliable last-seen location. Both the fire and police supervisor/commander should physically co-locate, if possible, and remain together until the incident transitions to a recovery.
- G. Recovery: Once unified incident command determines the incident has transitioned from a rescue to a recovery, the established AAFD unified incident command system should transition to the respective lead law enforcement agency of scene.