

## Lesson 3

# ON-SCENE COORDINATOR

### Overview

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#### Introduction

A successful SAR mission requires well trained and experienced operators who are able to carry out the SMC's search plan. The success of the mission is dependent upon the OSC's knowledge of what needs to be done, and their ability to communicate those needs both up and down the chain of command.

Normally, an OSC will be designated when two or more SRUs are involved in a SAR mission. An Auxiliarist typically will not be asked to perform these duties, but there may be times when requested to act as an OSC. When only one SRU is assigned to a mission it will perform the duties of the OSC.

While the SMC has several tools available to help develop the optimum search plan using computer based drift calculations, along with search planning protocols; the SMC's best plan is still open to modification. It is the OSC's responsibility to assist in ensuring the search plan is carried out properly by evaluating and, if necessary, making recommendations to the SMC to alter the plan.

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#### Objectives

After completing this lesson, you should be able to:

- **IDENTIFY** the criteria to determine an OSC
  - **PERFORM** the duties of the On-Scene Coordinator (OSC)
  - **STATE** the minimum frequency of SITREPs.
  - **IMPLEMENT** the Search Action Plan (SAP)
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#### References

The information in this lesson can be found in the following references:

1. Coast Guard Addendum, Sec. 3.9.2.3, H.6.2.4, C.1, H.8
  2. National SAR Supplement, Sec. 1.17
  3. IAMSAR Manual, Vol. III, Sec. 3
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## Determine an On-Scene Coordinator

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### Selecting an OSC

When two or more SAR units are working together on the same mission, there is sometimes an advantage if one person is assigned to coordinate the activities of all participating units. The SMC designates the OSC, who may be the person in charge of a SRU, ship or aircraft participating in a search, or someone at another nearby facility in a position to handle OSC duties.

The person in charge of the first SAR facility to arrive at the scene will normally assume the function of OSC until the SMC directs that the person be relieved. Conceivably, the OSC may have to assume SMC duties and actually plan the search if the OSC becomes aware of a distress situation directly and communications cannot be established with an RCC.

The OSC should be the most capable person available, taking into consideration SAR training, communications capabilities, and the length of time that the unit can stay in the search area. Frequent changes in the OSC should be avoided.

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### OSC Authority

An OSC conducts the SAR mission on scene using SAR facilities made available by the SMC, and should safely carry out the search or rescue action plan. If the SMC does not provide a sufficient action plan, the OSC must develop a plan and notify the SMC. The OSC retains OSC responsibilities from the time of designation until relieved or mission completion.

Frequent changes in OSC assignment are not desirable. Any individual arriving on scene that is senior to the OSC should normally not assume those duties without SMC concurrence. If the senior person concludes that such a change is important to mission success or if the OSC requests to be relieved for good reason and the SMC concur, a change may take place. The relieved OSC should report the relief to the SMC.

An OSC has full operational authority of the SMC, and together coordinate all SAR facilities on scene. The parent unit retains operational control of a facility en route to and from the scene. If a unit must withdraw a facility from a mission, it should advise the SMC as early as possible to permit suitable reliefs to be dispatched to maintain adequate on-scene resources.

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## OSC Duties

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### OSC Duties

Duties which the SMC may assign to the OSC, depending on needs and qualification, include any of the following:

- Coordinate operations of all SAR facilities on-scene.
- Receive the search action plan or rescue plan from the SMC or plan the search or rescue operation, if no plan is otherwise available.
- Modify the search action or rescue action plan as the situation on scene dictates, keeping the SMC advised.
- Coordinate on-scene communications.
  - SMC normally selects SAR-dedicated frequencies for use on scene and informs the OSC or SAR facilities. (Comms Plan)
    - OSC maintains communications with all SRUs and SMC
    - a primary and secondary frequency should be assigned for on scene communications.
- Monitor the performance of other participating facilities.
- Ensure operations are conducted safely, paying particular attention to maintaining safe separations among all facilities both surface and air.
- Make periodic situation reports (SITREPs) to the SMC. SITREPs should include but not be limited to:
  - weather and sea conditions
  - the results of search to date
  - any actions taken
  - any future plans or recommendations.
- Maintain a detailed record of the operation:
  - on-scene arrival and departure times of SAR facilities
  - areas searched
  - track spacing used
  - sightings and leads reported
  - actions taken
  - results obtained.
- Advise the SMC to release facilities no longer required.
- Report the number and names of survivors to the SMC.
- Provide the SMC with the names and designations of facilities with survivors aboard SC Duties
- Request additional SMC assistance when necessary

## OSC Duties

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### SAR Operation Risks

Safe and effective SAR operations depend on coordinated teamwork and sound risk assessment.

Saving distressed persons, and the safety of assisting personnel, should both be of concern to the OSC.

The leaders (captain, pilot-in-command, or OSC) must ensure that personnel perform properly as a team with a common mission.

- Mishaps often follow a chain of errors that can start with mistakes made during SAR planning and lead to poor decisions during operations.
- Team safety is supported by:
  - proficiency in keeping everyone informed
  - matching resource capabilities to tasks
  - detecting and avoiding errors early
  - following standard procedures
  - adjusting to non-standard activities.

The risks inherent in any SAR response must be considered against the chances for success and the safety of SAR personnel.

### Practical Concerns

Some practical concerns for assessing the situation include:

- is the distressed craft in immediate danger of causing harm or placing the rescue facility in jeopardy?
  - can the rescue facility handle the weather conditions?
  - has the distressed craft given enough information to prepare the assisting vessel to aid in the rescue?
  - can the assisting facility realistically be of assistance?
  - if recovery of a large number of survivors is a factor:
    - can the rescue facility accommodate them in regards to food, shelter, clothing, living space?
    - will the craft performing the rescue be stable with the survivors on-board?
  - if helicopter operations are a factor:
    - is the vessel's construction suitable for a vessel-aircraft joint operation?
    - does the rescue facility have enough crew members available to assist?
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## **Implement a Search Action Plan**

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### **Search Action Plans**

The OSC should obtain a search action plan from the SMC as soon as possible. Normally, search planning is performed using trained personnel, advanced search planning techniques, and information about the incident or distressed craft not normally available to the OSC. However, the OSC may still need to plan a search under some circumstances. Search operations should commence as soon as facilities are available at the scene. If a search plan has not been provided by the SMC, the OSC should do the planning until an SMC assumes the search planning function.

Modify search plans based on changes in the on-scene situation, such as:

- arrival of additional assisting facilities
- receipt of additional information
- changes in weather, visibility, lighting conditions, etc.

The OSC should keep the SMC informed at regular intervals and whenever the situation has changed.

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## Situational Reports (SITREP)

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### **Situational Reports SITREPS**

The OSC uses SITREPs to keep the SMC informed of on-scene mission progress and conditions, and addresses SITREPs to the SMC unless otherwise directed. Search facilities use SITREPs to keep the OSC informed.

- the SMC uses SITREPs to keep superiors, other RCCs, and any other interested agencies informed
- where pollution or threat of pollution exists from the vessel or aircraft casualty, the agency tasked with environmental protection should be an information addressee on all SITREPs
- provide earliest notice of an emergency (short form)
- pass urgent essential details when requesting assistance (short form)
- pass amplifying or updating information during SAR operations (full form).

Initial SITREPs should be transmitted as soon as details of an incident become clear enough to indicate SAR involvement.

- SITREPs should not be delayed unnecessarily for confirmation of all details
- further SITREPs should be issued as soon as other relevant information is obtained
- information already passed should not be repeated
- during prolonged operations, “no change” SITREPs should be issued at regular intervals to reassure recipients that nothing has been missed
- when the incident is concluded, a “final” SITREP should be issued as confirmation.
- shall be submitted at least once daily

Specific Coast Guard guidance on the SITREP is found in Section 3.9.2 and Appendix C.2 of the CG Addendum.

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