

# ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT

Policies and Procedures  
Operations  
Special Operations

4.2.6.5 Swift Water Rescue

Date Revised: March 2009

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## Purpose

Water rescue operations present a significant danger to fire department personnel. The safe and effective management of these types of operations requires basic to very specialized considerations. This procedure identifies some of the considerations that must be included in managing these types of incidents.

## Policy

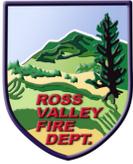
It shall be the policy of the Ross Valley Fire Department not to allow fire department personnel to enter swift moving water. It will also be Department policy to wear proper safety equipment, including personal flotation devices (P.F.D.) when working within ten feet of moving water. Do not wear structural firefighting turnouts or waders near moving water.

## Procedures

Due to the potential danger of these types of incidents, it is imperative that the first arriving company officer establishes Incident Command. After establishing command, the I.C. must secure the immediate area and assure that no more citizens enter the water. The I.C. must assess the situation then make a decision whether to operate in the rescue or recovery mode. If operating in the rescue mode, the I.C. should activate the Swift Water Rescue Team and consider all of the potential hazards to rescuers and victims.

When operating in the rescue mode, a quick assessment of the hazards associated with the water must be made (water speed, temperature, hydraulics, debris, log-jam strainers and possible contamination). If the victim can be seen, the I.C. should determine if the victim is in immediate life-threatening danger or is relatively safe and secure for the moment.

Rescue options will be will be considered and executed in order from low risk to high risk. “**Reach-Throw-Row-Go-Helo**” shall be the proper order of execution to affect a rescue. If possible, **Reach** the victim with whatever means possible (pike pole or a large stick). If the victim is too far out in the water to reach something, **Throw** would be the next option available. **Throw** the victim a throw rope bag. The victim should grab the rope, but not tie it around himself/herself, and the rescuer will pendulum belay victim to shore. If the victim cannot be reached by means of **Reach** or **Throw**, the I.C. should consider waiting for the Swift Water



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Rescue Team for a technical rescue effort.

If the water rescue operation turns into a long technical operation the I.C. should consider the need for the following groups during swift water rescue operations:

**UPSTREAM GROUP:** This group consists of personnel whose responsibility would be to watch and advise the IC of any hazards or debris that may be floating down stream and hinder rescue operations.

**DOWNSTREAM GROUP:** This group consists of personnel whose responsibility would be to be prepared to rescue victims and rescuers that may be swept down stream. All personnel in this group should have a throw rope bag in hand.

**RIVER RIGHT/LEFT GROUP:** Personnel assigned to this group will be on the opposite bank that the operation is being conducted from. Personnel assigned to this group will be responsible for rigging the opposite end of a rope rescue system being set up.

**MEDICAL GROUP:** Personnel assigned to this group will be responsible for providing BLS/ALS treatment to victims removed from the water.