TOLEDO FIRE & RESCUE DEPARTMENT

C-106 Water Rescue - First Responder Standard Operating Procedure

Emergency Manual

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Policy/Procedure

Water emergencies develop in many ways. They may include boating accidents, swimming accidents, suicides, or other emergencies. The dynamic nature of these incidents creates unique and extremely dangerous problems for untrained first responders attempting victim rescue. Proper training is essential to effective, safe, Water rescues.

Water incidents can be broken down into two broad categories, emergency and non-emergency.

1. Emergency Water incidents are those where human life is in danger. These could include actively drowning persons; victims submerged for less than one hour, or capsized boat victims, among others.

1. Per Departmental policy, the normal response to Emergency Black Water incidents will be:
    1. Engine 5 and Truck 5
    2. The Water Rescue Unit
    3. Life Squad 1, if available, or the closest available Life Squad
    4. A Life Squad dedicated to the Water Rescue Team
    5. The First Responding Unit in whose district the incident has occurred
    6. A Chief Officer
    7. Unit 136, if available

2. First responding personnel shall make every attempt at securing the scene to prevent further accidents. This may include keeping spectators back from the water. Law Enforcement officers can be utilized for this if needed. Fire lines shall be set up for most operations. Turnout gear shall not be worn while operating near water unless the nature of the emergency requires its protection. All fire personnel shall utilize available flotation devices while operating in the vicinity of rivers, lakes, ponds, or other dangerous waterways.

3. If a victim is observed, first responders shall attempt to make voice contact and assure the victim(s) that help is on the way. Many times victims can be talked to safety and this should be the first attempt at a rescue. Crews shall attempt to throw a rope or flotation device to the victim. It may also be possible to reach the victim with a pike pole or other long object.

4. First responders shall enter Black Water to assist visible victims only, and only after donning a floatation vest tethered to a rope line secured by additional crews.

5. If a victim becomes submerged prior to the arrival of the Water Rescue Unit, fire personnel shall attempt to triangulate the victim’s last known location and obtain the most accurate information possible regarding the incident. Command shall request all witnesses remain at the scene until they can be questioned and released by the Dive Master.

6. If, following the arrival of first responders, a victim is witnessed to slip below the surface, crews untrained in water rescue techniques shall not be ordered or expected to enter Water to affect a rescue, but shall be expected to perform to the limit of their training and ability to alter the outcome of the incident.

2. Non emergency Water incidents would include locating and recovering drowned victims one (1) hour or longer into the incident, locating and recovering vehicles or evidence for law enforcement agencies, identification and removal of water hazards, training dives, and any other routine tasks as determined by the Chief Officer in command and the Dive Master on duty. Stand by for river activities would also come under this heading.

1. In all of the incidents listed above, consideration for the safety and well being of all divers and surface support personnel shall be the primary concern. Many of these incidents make good training opportunities, however, safety shall never be compromised.

2. As these incidents are non emergency in nature, the number of divers and surface support personnel utilized shall meet or exceed all recommended Water Rescue Team protocols. A Dive Master and a Chief Officer shall supervise all operations.

See Also:

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