

**SAN DIEGO POLICE DEPARTMENT
PROCEDURE**

DATE: JUNE 1, 2021
NUMBER: 8.18 – CRITICAL INCIDENTS
SUBJECT: RIVER RESCUE PROCEDURES
RELATED POLICY: [8.18](#)
ORIGINATING DIVISION: SUPPORT OPERATIONS
NEW PROCEDURE:
PROCEDURAL CHANGE: **NO CHANGES**
SUPERSEDES: DP 8.18 – 08/07/2018

I. PURPOSE

This Department procedure establishes guidelines for river rescues.

II. SCOPE

This procedure applies to all members of the Department.

III. BACKGROUND

River rescues can be especially dangerous. Water velocity, undercurrent, debris, and other physical factors can couple with the rescuer's swimming ability, fatigue, and "determination" to place the inexperienced rescuer in a life-threatening situation.

IV. DEFINITION

River Rescue - any rescue of persons or property threatened, surrounded, or entrapped by stationary or moving water.

V. PROCEDURES

A. River Rescue Team

1. The Lifeguard Division of the Fire-Rescue Department has a 16-member River Rescue Team.
 - a. The lifeguards assigned to the team are expert swimmers and have received extensive training in performing river rescues.
 - b. The River Rescue Team has the expertise and the specialized equipment necessary to affect this type of rescue.
2. River rescues, particularly those requiring the rescuer to enter the water, are extremely hazardous.
 - a. Proper and safe performance of such rescues requires the specialized training and equipment available to the River Rescue Team.
 - b. City policy requires that the River Rescue Team be called whenever an in-water rescue is to be made.
 - c. Other safety personnel, including police officers, are generally prohibited from making in-water rescues unless there is an immediate threat to the life of the victim, and the rescue can be performed with minimal risk to the officer.

B. River Rescue Procedures

1. When an inland water emergency occurs, the request for emergency service will be referred by Police Communications personnel to Lifeguard Communications at (619) 221-8800. The River Rescue Team is available on a call-back basis at all times.
2. The Lifeguard Division will dispatch the appropriate units to the scene.
 - a. The River Rescue Team will communicate with other safety personnel on Zone “INT (#13)”- Mode 10 “SDMA30”, Zone “LFG(#19)”- Mode 1 “LG Disp 1”, Zone “LFG”- Mode 16 “RIV TAC”
 - b. Lifeguard units will also monitor the appropriate SDPD frequencies, if requested.
3. During any river rescue incident, the senior San Diego Fire-Rescue Department member, if present, will assume overall command of the scene.

- a. The senior River Rescue Team member present will be responsible for overseeing the in-water rescue and for determining the procedures necessary to accomplish the rescue.
 - b. These two senior officers will also ensure that there is coordination and cooperation among all personnel at the scene.
4. Once the Fire-Rescue Department and Lifeguard units have arrived at the scene and assumed their responsibilities, police officers present will generally limit their involvement in the rescue effort to any necessary crowd and traffic control.