

Swiftwater Rescue and Flood Search and Rescue Responses

313.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidance for operating at a swiftwater or flood search and rescue incident.

313.2 POLICY

It is the policy of the Fresno County Fire Protection District to utilize the Incident Command System (ICS) for managing swiftwater or flood search and rescue incidents. Since the Fresno County Sheriff's Office is the authority having jurisdiction for swiftwater rescue and flood search and rescue responses in Fresno County, District members will typically operate in a unified command ICS structure when a Fresno County Sheriff's Office representative is on scene and has joined the unified incident command.

313.3 PROCEDURE

Upon notification of a potential water rescue incident, District members and Emergency Command Center personnel are authorized to order and should dispatch or request the appropriate specialized water rescue resources immediately. Ordering of resources should not be delayed pending the verification of a water rescue situation or the confirmation that a victim has been seen or located.

Rescuers conducting search and rescue operations around flood waters, and particularly around swiftly moving water, are confronted with a unique set of challenges and face risks not encountered in other types of rescue operations. Operating in a swiftwater environment requires specialized knowledge, training and equipment to ensure the safety of both rescuers and victims. Tools, equipment and procedures routinely used in other types of rescue situations may not be appropriate when confronting a swiftwater rescue and may even exacerbate the situation and increase risks to the safety of rescue personnel.

District members should apply the following guidelines when responding to swiftwater or flood search and rescue incidents:

- (a) Ensure District-approved procedures are followed to perform the rescue.
- (b) Members should follow the District's Swiftwater Rescue and Flood Search and Rescue Procedures.
- (c) Members should wear a personal floatation device (PFD) and not wear structural firefighting personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g., turnouts, bunker gear, bunker boots) or wildland fire PPE when responding to, or participating in, a swiftwater or flood search and rescue incident.

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- (d) Only properly trained members currently certified for in-water rescues should approach or enter any body of water, whether still or moving, and only when sufficient equipment and trained personnel are available to safely conduct the operation.
- (e) Non-certified, not currently certified, non-equipped or under-equipped members may utilize ropes, throw-bag ropes, rescue rings, floatation devices or other appropriate equipment to attempt water rescues, as long as the attempt does not require the member to enter the water in any way.
- (f) District members should use extreme caution when parking or positioning fire apparatus alongside swiftly moving water and should remain vigilant for any signs of erosion or changing conditions that could threaten apparatus or personnel at the incident.