

This guideline provides North Zone Agencies procedures for working at incidents involving victim(s) submerged in bodies of water.

Submerged victim(s) (Code X):

The United States Lifesaving Association defines a Code X as a victim(s) submerged below the surface of the water. The use of code X was derived from a rescuer signaling to shore by crossing both arms over his head. This indicated that the victim the rescuer intended to rescue has submerged below the surface.

A Code X can occur in the ocean which is typical for most lifeguard agencies. However, a Code X can occur in any body of water where visibility, current, access, depth, and natural or manmade obstacles present challenges for rescuers.

Typical locations for Code X/Submerged victim(s) are the ocean, lagoons, lakes, ponds, poorly maintained pools, and reservoirs.

For missing or submerged victim(s) in the swift water environment, please refer to EOM 508.04.

DEFINITIONS:

Rescue Mode or Emergency Search: The period of time when rescue personnel and equipment are heavily committed in an effort to recover a victim who can be successfully resuscitated. This period is typically for one hour but can be extended or retracted depending on the circumstances.

Recovery Mode: The period of time in which rescue personnel and equipment are used to locate and recover a victim(s) who has no chance of survival.

Datum: The last point seen of the victim(s). A datum is used to mark the point of the victim's last known or seen location. Optimally, a marker buoy is best to indicate this area. If one is not available, utilize landmarks for a reference and place an obvious indicator on the shore such a traffic cone as a reference.

Dive Master: The designated dive team member who, under the direction of the IC, Operations Section Chief or Dive Group Supervisor, is in command of the dive site and dive personnel.

Dive Group Supervisor: At the discretion of the IC, a Dive Group Supervisor can be assigned to plan, coordinate, communicate, all dive functions. The DGS reports to the IC or Operations Section Chief if one is established.

Line Search: A coordinated search by a group of rescuers designed to search a specific area. In water searches can be conducted in a variety of methods depending on water

conditions such as surf, surge, and current in addition to available resources, personnel and training. Search area and types of search shall be determined by the IC or his/her designee.

PRE-ARRIVAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Pre-arrival considerations will vary greatly depending on the circumstances and location of the incident. In general, incidents occurring or initiated by lifeguard agencies will require different considerations than those where the fire department is likely to be first due.

If a response is initiated by lifeguards or lifeguards are dispatched concurrently, and it is anticipated that they will be first on scene to initiate a Code X, fire agencies must prepare to assume or assign the following roles:

- IC
- Safety
- Operations
- PIO
- Air Operations
- EMS section
- Staging*
- Decontamination
- Other support roles as needed

*Considerable thought should go into the location of and how many staging areas should be assigned. Boating, dive operations, logistical needs may require more than one staging area.

If it is anticipated that fire agencies are going to be first on scene to an incident dispatched as a water or ocean rescue, fire agencies should consider the following pre-arrival questions:

- Are lifeguards responding and if not, are they anticipated to be needed?
- Do I have the equipment, trained personnel, and a back-up plan to perform an initial rescue safely?

SIZE-UP OF A CODE X (Submerged Victim):

The following questions should be answered while responding or immediately after arrival to effectively size-up what has already happened:

- How many victims are there?
- When and where were they last seen?
- What was the condition on the victim(s)? Injured, intoxicated, description?
- What has been done so far to rescue the victim(s)?
- What are the existing and potential hazards on site?
 - Access, obstacles, traffic, crowds
 - Water conditions, depth, temperature, current, clarity
 - Weather conditions
 - Environmental hazards
- Eliminate or identify all hazards.
 - Remove bystanders from the water
- Establish Scene Management
 - Identify an ICP
 - Establish personnel accountability
 - Designate a safety officer
 - Designate divisions and groups
- Request additional resources
 - Additional alarms
 - Anticipated dive, boat or aquatic needs including support
 - Technical experts
 - Law enforcement (particularly for investigation and scene security)
 - Air support (reconnaissance)
 - Public works
 - County Health and/or HIRT response

INITIAL ACTIONS:

Significant risk assessment should be considered prior to first responders are performing any rescue efforts. At the forefront of this assessment should be whether or not sufficiently trained and equipped personnel as well as a backup plan exists to perform an operation based on the conditions and known hazards.

Secondly, first responders must consider whether or not the victim(s) is salvageable. This will assist in determining whether the operations are typical of rescue mode or recovery mode, and thus, determine the level of risk the rescuers are willing to take.

Lastly, if the IC decides that in-water operations are not possible, the responders should consider the following options in addition to those listed in the Size-up:

- Remove bystanders from the water and/or the area of the search
- Identify the location
- Interview any bystanders
- Consider sweeping the shore line utilizing tools such as a pike pole
- Find a high spot if possible to assist in locating the victim

WATER OPERATIONS:

These incidents will usually involve numerous lifeguards, harbor patrol, and other aquatic specialties to perform the following broad areas:

- Surface Search: Usually accomplished with multiple lifeguards utilizing fins, snorkel and mask; searching as a team in a predetermined pattern inside the surf line or in areas closer to shore allowing them to dive from surface to bottom.
- Dive Search: Searches involving divers requires significant planning, personnel, support, and safety considerations. In general, if assigned, a Dive Group Supervisor will be responsible for all activities. A Dive Master shall be assigned. The Dive Master is responsible for personnel at the dive site. In addition, Dive Master is responsible for accountability, site control, vessels entering, exiting or staging at the site. The Dive Master shall be responsible for the safety of members unless otherwise assigned.

Safety divers shall be assigned to immediately assist in the event of a problem. Safety divers must be in a location and prepared for rapid deployment.

Support crew should be considered to perform line tending, recording, ferrying equipment, and other logistical needs.

Each Dive team shall have a leader and, at a minimum, dive utilizing the “buddy system”.

A variety of search patterns can be utilized depending on water conditions, current, hazards, and personnel. The DM, DGS and IC/Ops will determine the safest most effective search pattern.

— Boat Operations: Generally speaking, boat operations shall be broken down into three categories:

- Personal Water Craft
- Non-motorized vessels
- Motorized vessels
 - o Involved in a surface search
 - o Supporting surface search operations.
 - o Operating at a dive site or in support of dive operations.

It is important to note that the capabilities of boats vary. IC’s should rely on aquatic agencies to assist in determining the type of boat(s) needed. Considerations should include access, size of waterway, tactical objectives, water conditions, etc.

DECONTAMINATION:

Unless sufficient facilities exist at the site or at staging, members and equipment exposed to water that is contaminated or believed to be contaminated, shall be decontaminated as soon as reasonably possible. Members exposed shall report the possible exposure in accordance with their agencies policy. IC’s should consider water quality testing by county health officials.