

Introduction to Dispatch

October 11, 2000

Dispatching Theory

The dispatcher serves as a conduit between the search and the rest of the world. Safe, efficient and effective searches depend upon the dispatch function running smoothly. When dispatch runs well, no one notices. The search community is kept well apprised of the development of the search and Base receives all of the available resources that it needs. When the dispatch function runs poorly, Base is aware of its shortcomings and the ASRC is poorly represented.

The most valuable training for successful dispatch is experience. Good dispatchers are aware of the wealth of details, conventions and expectations of Search and Rescue. This document works to help orient the new dispatcher to the BRMRG dispatch area and dispatch expectations, but it cannot substitute for apprenticeship and experience.

Dispatching Goals

1) **At all times, maintain searcher safety.**

The most important job of the dispatcher is to ensure effective communication throughout the search. In doing so the dispatcher helps to maintain the safety of searches en route, on scene, and homeward bound.

2) **Keep track of searchers en route to the scene, on scene, and en route home.**

It is critical that the dispatcher keep the Availabilities Board accurate and neat at all times. The availabilities board allows the dispatcher to keep track of people in the field, and know the resources that will be available to base.

3) **Keep complete and accurate documentation, including Dispatch Log, Daily Incident Reports, Incident Summary and End of Search Checklist**

Documentation is important in getting a sense of the history of a search, recording important information in case of a white-board mishap, and, of course, for legal reasons. Most documents can be found in the Dispatch Binder.

4) **Determine the availabilities of BRMRG members.**

Dispatch is responsible for trying to get base the personnel resources it needs to run an effective search. Dispatchers should try to get availabilities through pages, email, and personal phone calls.

5) **Determine the availabilities of other ASRC groups.**

The BRMRG dispatcher also serves as the conference dispatcher for the ASRC. Therefore the dispatcher is also responsible for getting availabilities from other groups and recording those availabilities on the Board. The dispatcher also needs to keep track of teams en route, on scene and homeward bound from other groups.

6) **Determine the equipment, personnel, and other needs of Base and work to meet those needs.**

Dispatchers need to understand what resources Base needs, and if the dispatcher doesn't know, they need to call and find out. Meeting those needs means getting appropriate personnel and sending them with the appropriate resources, as well as performing or delegating any other errands Base needs run.

7) Ensure that there are dispatchers and Dispatch Supervisors signed up for future shifts.

Dispatchers need to ensure that someone is available to replace them, and they should also try to fill future shifts. All dispatchers must also have a designated dispatch supervisor. Ideally, each shift is at least 3 hours, and longer shifts produce better dispatching continuity.

Specific Dispatching Skills

Before Becoming a Dispatcher Officer

Everyone needs a certain level of training before becoming a dispatcher.

- CQ or ADC permission

The CQ Workshop includes important basic information about vocabulary, search procedures, and callout procedures that all dispatchers need to know.

- Locker Orientation

All dispatchers need to be thoroughly familiar with the equipment in the locker and the various sign out procedures.

- Dispatch Training and one shift of apprenticeship

Before dispatching alone, all dispatchers must demonstrate a thorough understanding of the skills and knowledge in the training standards, and spend at least one full shift (at least 3 hours) working with a trained dispatcher. After dispatching one shift alone, passing the Dispatch Officer Test, and receiving ADC approval, the Dispatch Trainee will be promoted to DO.

Virginia Search and Rescue Background

- Virginia Department of Emergency Management

The Virginia Department of Emergency Services (DEM) is the agency responsible for running Virginia's inland SAR as well as alerting resources of requests from other states. Two of their most important resources are the State SAR Coordinator (Winnie Pennington in 1998) and the various SAR Duty Officers (SARDO). Under some circumstances DEM or Base may send their communications through the dispatcher instead of dealing directly, so the dispatcher should be aware of whom DEM is.

- Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference

The Appalachian Search and Rescue Conference is comprised of nine groups:

Allegheny Mountain Rescue Group (AMRG)- Pennsylvania

Blue Ridge Mountain Rescue Group (BRMRG)- Charlottesville

Mountain Area Rescue Group (MARG)- West Virginia

Maryland Search and Rescue (MSAR)- Maryland

Potomac Valley Rescue Group (PVRG)- College Park

Piedmont Search and Rescue (PSAR)- Richmond (part of TSAR 9/97)

Shenandoah Mountain Rescue Group (SMRG)- Northern VA/DC/MD

Southwestern Virginia Mountain Rescue Group (SWVaMRG)- Blacksburg

Tidewater Search and Rescue (TSAR) – Tidewater

Dispatchers must get availabilities for all groups in the ASRC. This includes *activating* AMRG and MARG by calling MEDSTAT and the Preston 911 Center respectively.

(This information along with contact information for all groups is in the Dispatch Binder and on the desktop.)

- Other State SAR Resources
In the Dispatch Binder there is an orange booklet called the Search and Rescue Resource Guide that is an overview of all the other resources available in the state.

Knowing When to Contact the Dispatch Supervisor

Do not hesitate to call the DS. They are there to help new dispatchers.

- If unfamiliar problem arises
- If a second search begins
- If the Press calls
- Anytime you feel uncomfortable about the situation in dispatch

Bathroom or Other Short Emergency Protocol

- Take both phones off hook
If a dispatcher needs to go to the bathroom, or on some other extremely short emergency, he should take both phones off the hook. Don't waste time, your job is important.

Working Knowledge of Pagers

- Pager Use (including using pagers, and sending pages)
To effectively dispatch, one needs to be able to read, understand, and send pages. To that end the BRMRG Pager Use guide is included below:

Working Knowledge of Pager Codes

- 0XX- Sending a Personal Page (see pager use)
- 000- Disregarding improper pages (use when you have sent an incorrect page.)
- 09X- Sending a Group Page (see pager use)
- 100- Significance of 100 page, significance of 100 page during a search (100 pages imply that someone is calling us out for a search. During a search, this may mean a second search could be forthcoming.)
- 101- Significance of 101 page (This means that an AO is handling the 100 page)
- 102- Significance of the 102 page (Used by an AO to get an IC for a search)
- 103- Using the 103 page to get an ACA (Certain conditions, including multiple searches, and disagreements among IS staff mandate calling an Area Command Authority (one of 3 designated IC's). If the dispatcher is asked to find the ACA they should use the 103 page.)
- 105- Significance of the 105 page (Use the 105 page whenever dispatch's phone number changes.)
- 106- Using the 106 page to contact a DS (Use the 106 page to find someone to be the dispatch supervisor. If you want your DS to call, send a personal page.)
- 111-333- Significance of these 6 pages, Using the 3XX pages to get appropriate availabilities (See Pager Use)
- 441-3- Significance of these 3 pages (See Pager Use)

- 444- Using the 444 to bring back teams en route (If the subject is found or search is suspended while teams are en route, use the 444 to recall them.)
- 445- Using the 445 to communicate the suspension of a search (If a search is suspended for any reason, use this page.)
- 551- Using the 551 to contact Base (If you need someone from Base to call, use this page.)
- 552- Significance of the 552 (If the dispatcher receives this page, they should call the appropriate number.)
- 553- Using the 553 to contact teams en route (This page is used to get phone calls from teams en route. It is often used when directions change.)
- 554- Using the 554 to contact GDO's (often to get availabilities) (The 554 page gets GDO's to call dispatch. This page is useful for getting more availabilities around the ASRC.)
- 600- Using the 600 to contact the BOD (see pager use)
- 650- Significance of the 650 (This page is often sent in conjunction with the 102 page. Anyone who is available to help open dispatch and get teams en route should report to the locker. If a dispatcher needs someone to take over, this page should be used.)
- 7XX- Sending a personal page (See pager use)
- 888- Using the 888 to close dispatch (When the entire End of Search Checklist has been completed, use this page to officially close dispatch)
- 999- Significance of the 999 (see pager use)

Dispatch Trainee Checklist Name _____

DO or DS please Initial this sheet when the DT has demonstrated competency in the following areas.:

I. Dispatching Goals _____

II. Dispatching Skills and Knowledge

- 1) Becoming a Dispatch Trainee _____
- 2) Virginia SAR Background _____
- 3) Taking Over Dispatch _____
- 4) Working Knowledge of Computers _____
- 5) Working Knowledge of Phones _____
- 6) Working Knowledge of Answering Machine and Voice Mail _____
- 7) Working Knowledge of Pagers _____
- 8) Working Knowledge of Pager Codes _____
- 9) Working Knowledge of Availability Board _____
- 10) Working Knowledge of GDO Board _____
- 11) Working Knowledge of Paper work _____
- 12) Appropriate times to Call the DS _____
- 13) Describe Bathroom Protocol _____
- 14) Closing Dispatch _____

III. Apprenticeship- All dispatchers are encouraged to come to the locker during searches to apprentice and have a DO or DS teach the Skills and Knowledge and then check for competency. DT's may use all available resources during competency checks. No more than two DT's may apprentice during one shift.

Dispatcher Officer or Supervisor:

Please Initial when DT has apprenticed for a full three hour dispatch shift _____

IV. Dispatching- After apprenticing for a full shift and demonstrating competency in all 14 Skill and Knowledge areas, a DT may dispatch under the close observation of a DS. The DS must be notified when a DT takes over dispatch, be available to come to the locker promptly, the DT and DS must make contact every hour.

Dispatch Supervisor

Please initial when DT has satisfactorily dispatched for a full three hour shift _____

V. Testing- After having apprenticed, demonstrated competency and dispatched for a full shift a DT is ready for DO testing which consists of a written test, competency check and practical testing scenarios

ADC or Approved ADC Tester Init. _____

Final ADC Promotion Initial _____