

Southern Illinois Regional EMS System

B-27 EMERGENCY WATERCRAFT OPERATIONS

Purpose:

- To define the safe operation of the EMS watercraft.

Protocol:

- This protocol defines the operational guidelines for the use of the water rescue boat when conducting emergency medical treatment and transport.

Personal Flotation Device (PFD) Use:

- The greatest risk to rescue personnel is that of drowning. The only adequate protection is by wearing a properly fitting, USCG approved type III (or better) PFD.
- EMS personnel shall wear an approved PFD at all times while:
 - Riding in or on any watercraft while moving under power.
 - Engaged in any emergency response on or near the water.
 - Engaged in any operation in the water.
 - In any situation where the member is at risk for falling into the water.
- Personnel are expected to know their own swimming ability, limitations, and take appropriate measures to ensure their own safety, as well as the safety of any potential victims.

Additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):

- EMS personnel are expected to evaluate each situation and utilize an appropriate level of personal protection to ensure the safety of each individual member. In addition to approved PFD, this may include head protection, thermal protection, gloves, foot protection and safety lines. If an appropriate protection level cannot be achieved with the available resources, additional resources should be requested and alternative operational measures should be employed until an acceptable protection level can be attained.

Approved Watercraft:

- EMS personnel may operate only from watercraft which is approved and licensed as a Special Emergency Medical Services Vehicle (SEMSV) by the Illinois Department of Public Health.

Appropriate Staffing of the SEMSV:

- Each watercraft crew member assigned to the watercraft shall be approved by the Medical Director. A list of all approved crew members will be supplied to the Illinois Department of Public Health.
- The watercraft will be staffed with at least 2 Illinois licensed and EMS System approved Emergency Medical Technicians and a vehicle operator.
 - One of the EMTs must be licensed at the level of Paramedic or PHRN.
- Each watercraft crew member will provide to the System documentation of completion of training that includes, but is not limited to:
 - Advanced Cardiac Life Support
 - Traumatic Emergencies
 - Pediatric Emergencies
 - Psychiatric emergencies
 - Crisis intervention

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- Infection Control
- Advanced surgical and airway management techniques
- Environmental emergencies
- Radio communications
- Rescue and survival techniques.
- Record keeping.
- Legal aspects.
- Certification in Advanced Life Saving by the American Red Cross.
- Completion of a boat safety course conducted pursuant to Section 5-18 of the Boat Registration and Safety Act.
- Any additional watercraft members shall provide documentation of completion of training that includes, but is not limited to:
 - General Patient Care.
 - Watercraft emergencies.
 - Completion of a boat safety course conducted pursuant to Section 5-18 of the Boat Registration and Safety Act.
 - EMS System and SEMSV Program Communications.
 - Use of all patient care equipment.
 - Rescue and Survival Techniques.
 - Certification in Advanced Life Saving by the American Red Cross.
- Watercraft operators shall be at least 21 years of age and shall meet the following requirements:
 - Certification in Advanced Life Saving by the American Red Cross.
 - Completion of a boat safety course pursuant to Section 5-18 of the Boat Registration and Safety Act.

EMS/Rescue Operations:

- When responding to EMS or rescue incidents, EMS personnel will ensure that required EMS equipment is loaded onto the craft prior to departing the dock.
- EMS personnel operating from watercraft should enter the water (such as to perform a rescue) only as a last resort.
- Crews should consider less dangerous interventions methods first:
 - Reach
 - Throw
 - Then go
- Entry into the water should only be considered if it could be accomplished safely and effectively.
- If water entry is deemed the best option, personnel are expected to utilize an appropriate level of personal protection that will ensure their safety.
 - If an adequate personal protection level is unavailable, alternative (non-entry) methods should be employed.
- EMS personnel will not enter the water unless trained and equipped to perform the expected tasks.
- Adequate backup personnel should be readily available whenever possible.

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- Only the minimum number of personnel needed to safely perform “in-water” rescue/recovery tasks should be utilized.
- Exposure time in the water should be minimized as much as possible.
- Personnel operating in the water should be closely monitored for possible complications.
- Operations during cold weather indicate that personnel that enter the water will need to be evaluated as potential hypothermic patients.
- If unable to complete the required tasks:
 - EMS personnel should move to a safe location (out of the water) to regroup.
 - Additional resources should be requested to address the specific type of emergency.

Initial Scene Size Up:

- Determine if the incident is a rescue or recovery.
- Consider the following factors:
 - Access to water
 - Proximity to shore
 - Number of victims
 - Weather conditions - air and water temperature
 - Technical Rescue Team - Dive Team assistance needed
 - Additional Resources
- Rescue options from watercraft should be considered and executed from low risk to high risk:
 - Reach: The first method of water rescue is to reach the victim with an object such as a pole, backboard, ladder, etc.:
 - Either the victim can pull themselves, or be pulled to safety.
 - Throw: If reach is not possible, then throw an item that will float such as a PFD, throw ring, or a rope bag to the victim.
 - The device thrown should be attached to a rope to facilitate rescue.
 - Go: The last resort is to enter the water and swim to the victim.

Subsurface Operations:

- EMS personnel will operate below the surface only when properly trained and equipped to do so.
- “Breath hold” dives by untrained individuals are dangerous, ineffective, and should not be attempted.