

## **Western Reserve Joint Fire District**

### **ICE / COLD WATER RESCUE POLICY**

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#### **PURPOSE:**

Patients who have fallen through ice or into frigid water must be rescued within minutes if they are to survive. Firefighters and rescue personnel must be properly equipped and trained to perform surface ice rescues in a safe and timely manner. Failure to train and follow proper techniques during an emergency may result in the death of both the patient and the rescuer. This operational guideline is designed to outline the equipment, personnel, and proper techniques and procedures to follow when conducting a surface ice or frigid water rescue.

#### **POLICY:**

Upon receipt of an alarm for a cold water or ice rescue emergency, the department will respond with all available resources, including personnel, cold water rescue suits, water rescue rope, rescue slings, personal flotation devices and the rescue sled.

1. The senior officer or member on the scene will establish Incident Command (IC). The incident commander on the scene is responsible for the following actions.
  - (a) Determine the number of victims, their condition and their last know location if they cannot be seen from shore.
  - (b) Notify dispatch of the location of the command post and who is acting as the Incident Commander.
  - (c) Request mutual-aid if needed and specifically request that Mahoning County Sheriff dive team be dispatched to the scene if victim has gone sub surface.
  - (d) Ensure that an adequate number of ALS ambulances have been dispatched to the scene.
  - (e) Request police to handle crowd and traffic control if necessary and to interview any on scene witnesses.
  
2. Safety of all personnel responding to and operating at the scene of an ice rescue is paramount. Safety procedures will include but not be limited to the following:
  - (a) Animal rescues are at the discretion of the Incident Commander and should only be attempted if the safety of the rescuers can be assured.
  - (b) Only personnel trained in cold water and ice rescue shall participate in the rescue attempt.

- (c) Both a primary and backup rescue team approach should be utilized. Both the primary and backup personnel shall be equipped with cold water rescue and/or immersion suits. Each team shall consist of four people, two in suits and two line tenders.
  - (d) All personnel working on shore within 15 feet of the water should be equipped with a type III USCG approved personal flotation device.
  - (e) Tether lines shall be attached to the front D ring harness of the Ice Rescue Suit of all personnel engaged in GO or CONTACT rescues. Appropriate shore crew will control tether lines and ensure that ropes, carabineers, and zippers are good to go.
  - (f) If a rescue sled is used during a rescue, a tether line with a minimum tensile strength of 2000 lbs. shall be affixed to it.
  - (g) Primary and back up rescuers should be equipped with ice awls for their own use or for use by the victim.
  - (h) Each person involved in the rescue operation should have a back up person available to take over if needed.
  - (i) Rest and medical monitoring of all personnel in a warm vehicle or shelter should be provided at regular intervals. The EMS team leader or safety officer will declare any rescuer unfit to continue and will notify the IC.
  - (j) Adequate lighting and flashlights capable of hands-free operation should be available for night operations.
3. Initial response of fire & rescue personnel will include the vehicle carrying the ice rescue equipment followed by at least one vehicle for lighting and support functions. Additionally, an ambulance shall respond to all ice rescue calls.
4. An effective ice rescue can occur with as little two rescuers. However, it is preferred that whenever possible a minimum of 10 (ten) personnel be utilized to allow for optimum safety. The personnel participating in an ice rescue attempt shall be as follows:

INCIDENT COMMANDER  
SAFETY OFFICER  
PRIMARY RESCUER / LINE TENDER  
SECONDARY RESCUER / LINE TENDER  
TWO MAN BACK UP TEAM  
TWO MAN SHORE CREW

5. At no time will any team member attempt a "go or contact rescue" without proper back up, a cold water suit and line tender.
6. Prior to initiating a "go or contact rescue", the rescuer shall assess personnel, equipment, the number of victims and their condition, the ice conditions, and

access options. Since survival time after immersion in ice water is short, and since the ability of hypothermic patients to aid in his/her own rescue is significantly diminished, a "go or contact rescue" shall be initiated as quickly as possible. Delaying a "go or contact rescue" while waiting for the victim to self rescue him/her self will only delay rescue and possibly lead to death of the victim. Efforts must be geared towards initiating a "go or contact rescue" as quickly as possible before a victim slips under the water or ice surface.

7. As soon as possible, communication with the victim(s) shall be initiated. It is important to keep communicating with victim throughout the rescue attempt. Immediately determine the number of victims by questioning the victim.
8. If a victim slips beneath the water or ice surface, denote the location where they were last seen and immediately dispatch divers to that location to initiate a search.
9. Always handle hypothermic patients with extreme care. Failure to do so may precipitate potentially lethal cardiac arrhythmias. Begin re-warming of the patient as soon as possible after rescue. Re-warm the patient's by placing heat packs placed under the arm pits and groin. Avoid re-warming extremities. If a patient presents in cardiac arrest and no pulse is present after checking for 30 seconds, initiate CPR. Continue CPR until the patient is re-warmed and a physician orders CPR terminated. Hypothermic patients have been known to survive prolonged periods of cold water immersion. Transport all patients to an appropriate medical facility as quickly and as gently as possible.