

Joint AEMA / SAR Alberta Standards Committee SAR Consultations December 2008

Six (6) joint AEMA / SAR Alberta Standards Committee SAR Consultation sessions were scheduled in early December with good participation. Background was provided on both the AEMA Fire & Emergency Services Training Initiative (FESTI) as well as the work of the SAR Alberta Standards Committee. Participants were asked the following questions:

- 1) Introduction question (as noted)
- 2) What are the current STRENGTHS of SAR training?
- 3) What are the current WEAKNESSES with respect to SAR training?
- 4) What can be done to IMPROVE search and rescue training?
- 5) How can SAR Alberta support you in training, operations and administration?

The AEMA Fire & Emergency Services Training Initiative FESTI and SAR Alberta update are not included.

Each meeting was attended by Spence Sample (AEMA Special Projects Manager – FESTI), Cindy Heselton (SAR Alberta Standards Committee Chair) and Fred Tyrrell (AEMA Stakeholder Relations Manager).

Consultation Notes:

Calgary SAR Consultation – November 21, 2008

Participant Affiliations – Calgary SAR, STARS, Cochrane SAR, Rocky Mountain Adventure Medicine, Inc, Calgary Police Service, Alberta Cave Rescue Organization

Introductions – Why do you want to see improvements in SAR (in general)?

- What we do is important, don't get the recognition we deserve from government
- Always room for improvements
- So everyone is aware of what resources are available
- Always a struggle to see each group trying to get "in" with the tasking agencies, hopefully everyone will start working together
- Haven't set hard standards, need to meet standards and have to do courses, requires time, money and expertise
- SAR operates in a non-standard environment
- Bring things together, don't duplicate work
- More support administratively
- \$\$\$\$

Strengths

- Cooperation; joint involvement
- Lots of interaction with all sectors (different groups)
- High level of commitment to learn (compared to others involved)
- Passion brought all the time
 - By instructors who “live” it
- Informal learning shared by other participants is also important
- Any recognized institution can instruct
 - i.e. even volunteers
- Scope of training is not defined
- Certification vs. Casual learning
- Current Training Core Functions
 - Search technique
 - Missing people, evidence
 - Navigation
 - Rural/urban
 - Water/cave
 - Air
 - Disaster response
 - Support roles to other emergency agencies
- Define service – then training
- Different services from different groups in different areas
- Structure (i.e. Search Managers) can represent strengths/service
- Training not always valued/accepted by tasking agencies
- Liability (associated with training) can be a weakness
 - Lack of definition of core roles
 - Potential for conflict between different agencies (i.e. fire)
- In-house course development and delivery
- Grant courses result in standard training across province
 - Repetitive courses do not allow “progression” in training
 - Poor link (regarding change) with AEMA
 - Process of defining standard that must be met by training program. (Can be exceeded)
- Currently dependent on who is running the group
- Volunteer delivery can be effective
- Position of training coordinator
- Organization structure
 - Consistent
 - Training committee, or only 1 person
- Number of hours of training is very cost effective (\$/hr is low)
- Peer evaluation shows effectiveness of training
- Dedication, hours given

What Isn't Working?

- No requirement for renewal certification other than operational ability
- Inconsistent compliance i.e. using exam for SAR basic
- Recording
- Keeping
- No Provincial mechanism to monitor
- No inter-personal cross-recognition
- Each group is its own entity
 - i.e. uniform/ID/training
- Communication regarding standards, etc to each member/organization
- Difficulty in finding/getting instructors
 - Especially volunteer instructors
- Training venues
- Liability issues raised by landholders
- No measure to measure efficiency against
 - No standards
 - Variance in complying
- Not enough callouts to keep interest met
- Course too long. Too Expensive (SAR basic)
- Sole supplier of train the trainer (who defines the product)
- Real tie between training needed (i.e. level, content) and program (i.e. what's available)
- Repetitiveness of same course vs. opportunities to expand knowledge
 - Self-serving need vs. providing new service
- Specialties
 - High angle
 - Long line (heli)
 - Mountain
 - Vehicle
 - Dogs
 - Tracking
 - HUSAR
 - Air
 - Cave
 - Swift water
 - Dive teams
 - ATV
 - Avalanche
 - Mountain bikes
- Reciprocal agreements: BC/AB
- Private company agreement
- Access to training funding
- Review of grant program
- Relationship between municipality and SAR
- Relationship with tasking body

- i.e. does rookie liaison know
- Relationship with Fire

Improve

1. Access to Money
2. Joint exercises (multi-teams on provincial basis)
3. Bank of qualified instructors (see #1)
4. Validity of SAR accepted by other agencies
5. Reduce bureaucracy
6. Access to other non-monetary training items (i.e. facilities)
7. Cross-training between disciplines
8. Broaden current course offerings (i.e. Medical examiner body parts)

SAR Alberta

1. Increase communication to groups
 - a. i.e. what training where
2. Increase consistency
 - a. Minimize change created by each new leader/group
3. Common approach to common elements
 - a. Insurance
4. Continue to liaise with Alberta Government
5. Same with tasking Agencies
6. Strive to create/encourage standard organizational structures

Lethbridge SAR Consultation – November 22, 2008

Participant Affiliations – Canadian Search Dog Association, Lethbridge SAR, Vulcan SAR, South-Eastern Alberta SAR, Pincher Creek SAR, Regional AEMA

Introductions – What ONE thing would you do to improve SAR training?

- Consistent training basics across province
- Minimum training requirements
- Easier access to training, who the trainers are
- SAR Alberta to be enabled with teeth instead of gums
- Standard set of training for all of Alberta
- Same
- Not having to choose training from select few list for funding
- Standards, notices, make it easier
- More access to train dogs in place
- Resource materials, capable instructors, \$\$\$\$
- Monitoring system to make sure that the standards are met
- More specific standards
- Ensure that we get buy in from tasking agencies in the development of standards

Strengths

- People want it
- Depth of experience to draw from/on (expertise)
- Local groups train to the need
- Groups have a detailed understanding of local situation
 - Abilities/gaps
- Individuals/groups willing to share
- Instructors helped to keep their standards up
 - Fees paid for their training
 - Use them (in search, in training)
- High percentage of members who instruct
- Informal (non-certified) resource people used.
- Strong mentorship (mostly informal)
- Repetitive recruiting program
- Government grants to municipality for training doesn't define municipality/SAR working relationship
- Training creates credibility with tasking agencies
 - Other forms of support i.e. access to facilities
- Training supports organization expectations re: "professionalism"
- Theory often the same for all SAR, training delivery varies.
- Local groups can exceed "standards" used as a general baseline
- Ability to adapt to changes in delivery flexibility

- Go out of province to conferences and training, then bring it home
- Co-instructing with instruction from different groups
- 10 years ago when SAR started, coordination of training was essential, increase training coordination
- Some reciprocity results (mobility)
- Credentialing allows Ind. To be sent out
- Task agencies “defined” “recommended” training area i.e. RCMP > All SAR have 1st aid
- Results (of good training)
 - Tasking agencies are comfortable
 - Skill/ability grows
 - Task agency members chose to volunteer
 - Build relationships equals enhanced understanding, More calls
- Variance from standard (i.e. accepting excuse for lower level) erodes credibility
 - Strength: We don’t allow this!

Weaknesses

- Tasking agency liaison role/performance
 - When should they/do they call
 - Reliance on them for funding (budget limitations)
- Training wasted if team not used
- Tasking agency often don’t know what we can do
- Apathy if not used
- Not enough/not deep enough/don’t see benefit
 - Process vs. product
- Training content (i.e. 1st aid) not at right level to meet need
- Allocation of time misses priorities
- Volunteer’s time not respected
- Mismatch between expectation and reality
- Training isn’t callout; retention issue
- Individuals needs/wants (i.e. outdoor activity) Does not equal training delivery (i.e. classroom)
- Venue with right setup for training needs in right location
- Personal cost of travel to training
- Instructor costs of delivery
 - Ability of team to pay
 - “Free” facility does not equal “good” facility
 - Liability
- Access/Availability
- Lack of generic presentation items i.e. training kit

B.C. Pep Model

- Often teams focus on SAR training areas, not on admin areas (i.e. OHS)
- “Centralized”
 - Defined by whom, where
 - Costs (time, family impact)

- No appropriate OHS categories for SAR
- New groups get frustrated at lack of answers...
- Need for detailed SAR curriculum
 - i.e. timeliness, lesson plans
- Erosion of content delivery
 - No quality assurance
 - Nobody to do it
- No instructor groups
- Coordination of training relying on volunteers is subject to vulnerabilities
- As team experience extends from rookies to vets, critical numbers for any course at any level is harder to achieve
- Limited willingness to travel
- Grant restriction requiring minimum number we can't achieve
- Poor communication/coordination of training ops.
- So many choices, so little time. So many response types, so much training needed
 - Need for realistic expectations
 - Use of AEMA field staff

Improvements

1. Use of government services
 - a. i.e. AEMA field staff to disseminate training schedule
2. Video course delivery, share with other instructors
 - a. Best practice approach
3. Paid SAR Alberta training coordinators
4. Video-conferencing
5. SAR Basics as self-taught modules (online, other)
6. Central depository
 - a. Lesson plans, etc
7. Track individual training records provincially (SAR AB)

SAR Alberta

- See above
- Provincial support where volunteer burnout has been a barrier
- Coordinator position, working closely with AEMA
- Recruitment program
- Role in training grant program
 - Record keeping
 - "common" administrative tasks
 - Eliminate municipalities
- Maintain current lists of deployable members. (Done!)
- Drive need to have TASKING AGENCY Senior Managers etc. maintain competencies or simple fill I/C role
- Issue certificates in a timely fashion
- Develop tasking tracker, task number, protocol
- TASKING AGENCY Calls one SAR number, deploys.

Red Deer SAR Consultation - November 27, 2008

Participant Affiliations – Red Deer SAR, Wetaskiwin SAR, Canadian Search Dog Association, AEMA Regional

Introductions – What do you hope to achieve?

- SAR supported by government way better than it is
- Be called out at the beginning of an incident – no waiting
- Training, standards, costs covered
- Better communications between all volunteer groups
- Our team runs efficiently, can always use \$\$\$
- Funding
- Specialized equipment & training from province
- Infusion of cash, equipment, radios, frequencies
- Funding, standards
- Increase in trust and support from tasking agencies, use us earlier instead of last resort (dogsar)
- Better coordination and recognition
- With AEMA assistance, higher profile, able to get in the loop a lot sooner

Strengths

- No government interference when responding
 - Able to select specializations needed locally (i.e. SWR)
- Dedication, initiative
- SAR Basic skills course is desirable level (i.e. standard)
- Volunteers must meet training requirements
- Recognition given by tasking agency to “trained” group
- RCMP defined some original training courses, processes
- Networking between SAR groups (North American SAR)
- Recruits:
 - Awareness
 - Knows what to do
 - look at things different
- Formal training progression plan
 - Developmental
 - Research based
 - Experienced leader
 - Levels based on training/experience
- Individual sent to other’s courses
- Each team has specialized services and training to match

Weaknesses

- Costs
- No standard between teams
- Not up to snuff

- Training, gear, people, communication
- Variance between groups
- Those who vary too far from standard destroy credibility of all
- ER/Train the trainer course flawed
- Tasking agencies don't care
- Instructor examines
- Seats often filled too fast; not all can get in
- Gap after basic training = members quit
- Too many callouts
 - Burnout
- No callouts
 - Frustration
- Funding too limited to get into diverse training
- Finding our own place to train
- <Texas A&M Disaster City>
- Quit because of stress, politics, not training
- Want it for free; but don't show up
- Instructors aren't available
 - "quality" ones are scarce
 - No support training for instructor
 - i.e. how to teach
- No instructional technique course
- Hours required too onerous
- Most instructors are not paid
- Ind. Held back from course he wanted
- Instructor ready; no students show
 - Signed up but not paid
- Instruct teachers but should demonstrate skill first
- Lack of instruction development and monitoring and evaluation
 - Support
- Minimum standards for GSAR does nothing to motivate further development but rescue side has development benchmarks they must hit or start over (enforced)

Improving

- Write (find/adopt) an advanced course (before SAR basics)
- Explained desirable integration process
- Evolve new from current
- Accept training levels with courses taken in any order to achieve it vs. each course in order
- Shared training record database accessible on scene (provincial)
- More financial support
 - Instructor training
 - Expenses
 - Training kit for each course (central storage)
- Provincial certification process
 - Record
 - Stamped certificate

- Competency, not attendance
- Grandfathering
- Inter-provincial mobility transfer
- Appropriate controls on spontaneous volunteers
- Individual insurance, liability coverage, WCB, etc coverage for inst. For group
- Reduce individuals costs
- Know members needs – meet them
- Evaluate stepping stone impact

SAR Alberta

- Enforce training requirements; meet standards
- Follow-up competency demonstration and testing
- Ongoing communication regarding existence of policies
- Database
 - Training
 - Emergency #s (call out person)
- Provide a paid accountant
 - Audits
 - Year ends
- Central insurance
- Help with grants
- Help with funds for operating costs

Participants - 14

Participant Affiliations: Canadian Search Dog Association, Parkland SAR, Search and Rescue Dog Association of Alberta, SAR Alberta

Introductions – What one thing would you like to see done with respect to SAR training?

- Consistency in training
- More involvement with tasking agency
- Claim training on income tax
- Meet OHS requirements
- Locations designated as training areas
- Know what alternate training is available
- Consistency, train to what you need
- Funding, coordination, list of what's available, sponsored provincial exercises
- Tasking agencies more knowledgeable of who we are and what we do
- Emergency management training college
- More certification in GSAR, recognizable
- One course vs multiple sessions spread out (similar to EMS)
- Search managers to know how to deploy and use dogs in a consistent manner
- AEMA to have hired someone knowledgeable and experienced in SAR

Strengths

- Standards must be met
- Defined by experts and RCMP
- Annual testing
- Taken out of ops if failed
- Train 3.4 times per week
- Philosophy: train to exceed standard
 - “you're only limited by your imagination”
- Train for all weather all times
- Allow for individual specialization within group discipline
- Intermixing occurs at regional activities
 - Different specialties understand each other
- Some standard training courses for all exist
- Employers support their staff as SAR volunteers
- Motivated
 - To train, to help
 - To respond
 - Not as a job
- Individual volunteers hold to high(er) standard, commitment
- Self reliance within SAR in Alberta because government DIDN'T pay for anything
 - Needs not wants

- Show up self sustained
- Ability to provide full spectrum of SAR services compared to others
 - i.e. Sask search manager
- Role/capability of TASKING AGENCY varies
- Police ourselves to maintain ops. Efficiency, credibility
- Link to Univ.
 - Cadaver training

Weaknesses

- Trainers can be out of date
- Standards do not exist in all areas of need
 - In absence “experts” speak
 - i.e. evidence handling each RCMP advises
- Let instructors develop content
- Compliance issues
 - Standard – creep
 - Do it the way the TASKING AGENCY Of the day says
- No requirement for repeating, hours, etc.
- SAR Alberta policies ether not known or not followed
- Lack of documentation
- Fear that high requirements will scare volunteers off
- Canadian content must be there
- Info exchange strives to find improvements (not “us vs. them”)
- SAR training development in Alberta using related experts
 - Our people become better instructors
- Dog group pretest candidate before allowing him/her to be tested by RCMP
- These sessions are held frequently with little change
- Members progress in training = progress in level of responsibility in search
- There is great variance in everything
- Recruiting tactics affect training, training affects recruiting
- We move ind. To where training is available
- Legislation (i.e. WCB/OHS, working alone) is not taught. No code of practice in SAR

Improvements

1. Increased involvement with tasking agencies to understand, know, appreciate and use.
2. Better P.R. and heightened awareness
3. SAR should work collectively to define services, structure, standards and take it to Tasking Agencies
4. Improve understanding of each SAR specialty by each other SAR group
5. Formalize
 - a. Agreements
6. More regional exercises (for all)
7. Find political motivator to “motivate” TASKING AGENCY to call us out
8. Training must be based on need not want

- a. Database
- 9. Monitor what other services (i.e. Fire) are moving into SAR
- 10. We need a Champion!
- 11. Train the media

SAR Alberta

- Have paid admin to support local groups
- Information source, referral to resources
- SAR Alberta needs to be accountable to... (external body) i.e. Government
 - Build in member accountabilities to support SAR Alberta
 - SAR B.C <-> PEP: 2 Options
- Centralize offering of training
 - Take over grant
 - Schedule
 - Set up
 - Track
- Develop and enforce scope(s) of practice by governing board, on which SAR Alberta sits. i.e. Alberta College of Paramedics
- Provide facilities (for free)
- Coordinate (for free)
- Facilitate life long involvement ops, past operation stage (i.e. leadership)

Cold Lake SAR Consultation – November 29, 2008

Participant Affiliations – Calling Lake SAR, Cold Lake SAR, 4 Wing GSAR, Little Divide SAR, Cold Lake RCMP, St. Paul SAR

Introductions – Name one thing that you would change with respect to SAR training.

- Standardization and certifications
- There is good leadership, keeping in touch – standard across the board
- Figure out what needs to be done, who do you notify, start-up list for new groups to follow, checklist, reduce isolation
- Funding for training
- Access to SAR Alberta information, nothing published, no centralized source of information
- Concerned that we're asking too much of members who are volunteers, stay basic, if it gets too complicated, people will drop out
- Link between statistics, needs analysis, long term sustainable projects
- Tasked by the system as opposed to players in the system

Strengths

- Funding is available
- Groups self-determine priorities
 - Based on local need

- Coordination of participation in specialized courses
- A ton of instructors for basic courses
 - If we can find them
- One central storage site
- High motivation to take training
- Strong community support
 - Funds, training and meeting spaces
- Tasking Agencies support when SAR needs are met
- Add leadership training to small team levels (i.e. 3 teams)
- SAR can go to Tasking Agencies to orient members regarding abilities, services, expectations of when to call
- All teams in region work together
- Core members want advancement training
- Courses have theory and operational components
- SAR basics is an overview of courses later
- Analyze why some courses are mandatory
 - Understanding or competency
- Ability to lead spontaneous volunteers
 - Don't let "system" crease unnecessary barriers to speedy response (paralysis by qualification)
- Team leaders know their people, their skills and abilities
- Identity card, log book, database help limit liability
- Inventory of "outside" training held by individual members
- Some current practices are filling the gap
 - Survival strategy has worked
- SEARCH and rescue

Weaknesses

- Access SAR Alberta site that contains instructor list (wiki)
 - Lack of use, adding info
 - Site not current
- Tasking Agencies don't always know training; capabilities, capacities
- Rookies sometimes don't know the good or bad of their training, application
 - Experience pays off
- Training must lead to experiential ops
 - Mock searches
 - Real thing
 - Retention issue
- Training must be delivered at level of need
 - i.e. leadership hit (only) high level; no entry level course
- Delivery of standard course varies
 - by instructor
 - by time
 - by funds available

- SAR basics is an overview of courses later, maybe those hours should go directly to (intense) training
- Team leaders know their people, their skills and abilities but don't know this about other SAR groups members
- Old procedures (i.e. SAR Alberta Identity card) not kept current)
- Inventory of "outside" training held by individual members
- Perception that higher training exposes you to higher liability
- Dichotomy of structures under legislation
 - i.e. military in peacetime vs. in action theatre
- Lack of awareness of "givens"
 - i.e. protection when tasked
- Cross checking of course content to ensure standard is met
- Lack of funding for training
 - i.e. safety courses
- Same current practices are filling the gap but there is wide variation between groups
 - Hodge pod
- SEARCH and rescue
- Tasking Agencies are providing their own search managers more frequently, more often than incident commander
- Access to high-end course instructors
 - Personal bias (i.e. wont come north)
 - Cost
 - Tie to one company
 - Grant restrictions
- Hard to know where to get money
- No guide to planning the delivery of a course

What Else

1. Develop levels of training standards to match
2. Develop ID cards that convey training and experience
3. Make current central database
4. Develop transferability protocols
5. improve interoperability between agencies
6. Standard equipment
 - a. Kits
 - b. Caches
 - c. Upgrades
7. Eliminate out of pocket costs for SAR involvement (instructors)
8. Provincial body sets up high level training courses that are too much for local group to organize
9. Review grand program

Reinforce message regarding 1st Responder Radio Network

SAR Alberta

1. 24-7 Support hotline
2. Central depository of government information, passed on to groups
3. Hold all radio licenses
4. Data bases
5. Improved navigation on website
6. Hosting website for all groups
7. Fulltime administrative support
8. Encourage standard reporting
 - a. Stats

Grande Prairie SAR Consultation – November 29, 2008

Participant Affiliations – Grande Prairie Technical SAR, Valleyview SAR

Introduction – What do you want to see result from this process?

- We're a new group, we need clear direction
- Very excited about this initiative
- We are skilled, improve perception of what volunteers are and can do

Strengths

- Medical co-responders (Peace Country Health MCR)
 - ALS/BLS
 - Medical protocols/MD
 - Scared some members - bar pretty high
 - May evolve into MOU; RCMP not sure liability would be covered by them
- Relationship with municipality
 - Family - knows who, what, why
 - Presented to Protective Services Committee
 - Have assisted Fire Dept' with swift water rescue
- Regional Pilot area
- Joined up - 100% of communications Done by Hams! (Average here = 50%)
- Landing zone training given by STARS
- Members. Bring skill sets i.e. Bush craft/survival
- Different roles for dif. Members and dif. Abilities
- Want to be recognized by system
 - Don't become empire builders
- Documented files give accurate stats
- Successes - i.e. Smith rescue
- Internal SAR contact helped find instructors
- Networking
- Members. Pay up front, reimbursed later if they stay

Weaknesses

- Perception of what volunteers are, can do
- Professionalism
- Dispatch time
- New groups don't know where to go, what to ask
- Having to spend govt. grant within their deadlines
 - Municipal attention
- Approvals were not for courses requested
 - (Us! Minister)
- Membership dues charged
- Demonstration of skill accepted as criteria i.e... Throw a diamond hitch on the pack horse - skilled rider
- Need for grandfathering process

- Same fundamentals for GSAR; specific (and possibly different) training at specialty service level
- Geography
- Duplication of service provision by different agencies in the same area
- Politics
- Funding/cost impact

WHAT ELSE

1. Member retention issues
2. Costs for PR takes \$ away from training
3. Databases (i.e. Instructor list) on website

SAR Alberta

1. Reach out to new groups, proactively, to tell them what they can do
2. Clarify roles and responsibilities expectations
 - a. Better communication, in-person contact
3. SAR Alberta Annual event
 - a. Right weekend, right location
 - b. Subsidies
4. Ongoing communication from exec. Level
5. SARSCENE attendance