

The U.S. National Search and Rescue School - Inland

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Abstract

The Inland Search and Rescue (SAR) Planning Course is a 5-day course for experienced SAR decision makers and planners taught free of charge across the United States. It presents a broad understanding of inland search theory and its application for air and ground searches for missing persons and aircraft with a focus on wilderness and rural area searches. The course consists of classroom instruction and practical, tabletop exercises. Emphasis is on the planning necessary for effective area-type search planning during an extended search using Probability of Success (POS), rather than just a few elements of Probability of Containment (POC)/Probability of Area (POA), or Probability of Detection (POD), to predictively allocate limited resources to their best effect. An additional objective of the course is to strengthen the U.S. Federal Government's role in its support to civil SAR through education, including promoting the capabilities of the Rescue Coordination Centers (RCCs), and requesting and coordinating the use of other federal resources with the goal of saving lives.

Keywords: Inland SAR School

Introduction

The National SAR School first opened its doors in November 1966 at Governor's Island, New York as the premier maritime and land search and rescue school. For the past 50 years, the SAR School has been providing unparalleled search and rescue training to US Coast Guard, Department of Defense and other government and civilian organizations, as well as international members from over 148 nations. Since its inception, the school's mission has been: "To promote standardization and professionalism within the search and rescue community by providing comprehensive SAR training to selected Coast Guard, Air Force and other personnel."

In 1956, with the publishing of the first National Search and Rescue Plan, the US Coast Guard was designated the federal Search and Rescue (SAR) Coordinator responsible for search and rescue in the maritime regions. Likewise, the US Air Force was designated the federal SAR Coordinator responsible for search and rescue in the aeronautical (inland) regions. Since the inception of the Plan, both services have worked closely together developing procedures and techniques which have increased the efficiency of SAR operations.

Since 1966 the Coast Guard and Air Force have jointly operated the National SAR School, redefining programs as the needs of the services and SAR, in general, have evolved. Each service provides the expertise from its area of responsibility and shares in the instruction across lines of responsibility. However, there are differences between SAR in the Maritime and Inland search environments that go well beyond the obvious characteristics of the physical domains. The USCG has the lead as the designated SAR Coordinator in nearly every SAR situation in the maritime environment, including navigable waterways, and may standardize tactics, techniques, and procedures as they deem appropriate. Similarly, the movements of search objects (vessels, person in water (PIW), etc.) can, and have, been effectively modeled through computer simulations for any number of given conditions (sea states, currents, winds, survivability, visibility, etc.). For some time now, this has allowed maritime search planning to be modeled very quickly by planners entering variables into a computer program, which the USCG calls SAROPS.

Discussion

Until recent developments, nothing comparable to SAROPS has been available to inland search planners due to the complexities of modeling lost person behavior, inland topography and vegetation, and the lack of a single, unified inland SAR responsibility at a national level comparable to that of the US Coast Guard's authority within maritime SAR. Thanks to a project by the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency, and another enabled by a Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant from the Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Department, programs have been developed to begin using the advantages of computer modeling to more effectively search for missing people in the inland environment. However, even if these programs are a complete game-changer in saving lives, there is no obligation for the thousands of agencies responsible for search operations within the US to pay for access to this program, often with minuscule budgets for SAR. Additionally, there is no federal funding to sustain either of these programs for widespread national use. For the foreseeable future, a continued study of lost person behavior, and a free class offered by the Inland SAR School may be the only available option for search planners and incident commanders to apply the concepts of search theory to the inland environment.

In the inland environment, every U.S. state does SAR differently and independently, as is their right. Within most states, counties, cities, or tribal areas, authorities may conduct any number of search and/or rescue operations for missing persons or overdue aircraft quite differently than adjacent jurisdictions. Compounding the complexity of inland search operations for missing and overdue aircraft, is that search operations most often begin as a federal problem because of the multi-state nature inherent to many flight operations, and then depending on the situation, are handed off to local authorities.

The majority of inland SAR operations, those for individuals in distress, do not involve the federal government at any level unless the first notification comes through the federal government (often through beacons via satellite).

That is, however, unless the jurisdictional authority requests assistance from the Federal Government in the form of resources to include aircraft or other vehicles and sensors, forensics teams (Cellular, Weather, Radar, etc), or other coordination efforts through a Rescue Coordination Center.

The Air Force element of the National SAR School provides academic instruction on inland search planning and procedures to SAR professionals from all U.S. military branches, various U.S. government, state and local agencies, volunteer SAR organizations, as well as members of the international SAR community in order to make this process more efficient for all parties involved in the interest of saving lives.

The USAF provides two SAR Courses:

Inland SAR Planning Course (ISPC): The ISPC is a five (5) day resident and exportable course designed to teach advanced search theory and its application to land and air searches for missing persons and aircraft. The target audience is SAR leaders in federal, state, and local emergency services and law enforcement, as well as Civil Air Patrol, international, and volunteer SAR agencies -- those few people who are responsible for the planning and overall conduct of inland search missions.

Basic Inland SAR Course (BISC): The BISC is a two day (16 hour) exportable course designed to teach basic federal SAR architecture, resources and mission coordination with an introduction to search theory. This course directly leads the student into the ISPC. The course is designed as an entry level SAR management course for federal, state and local SAR responders.

Anyone involved with SAR, regardless of affiliation, may host or attend these classes on an availability basis. If you are interested, please find additional information on the Inland SAR School and our courses at: <http://www.forcecom.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/FORCECOM-UNITS/TraCen-Yorktown/Training/Maritime-Search-Rescue/Inland-SAR/>

Abbreviations

BISC	Basic Inland SAR Course
ISPC	Inland SAR Planning Course
POC	Probability of Containment
POD	Probability of Detection
POS	Probability of Success
RCC	Rescue Coordination Center
SBIR	Small Business Innovation Research
USAF	United States Air Force