

# **VOLUNTARY RESCUE SERVICE RECOGNITION**

## **A Voluntary Program for Rescue Services General Administration Guide**



**Bureau of Emergency Medical Services  
and  
Office of The State Fire Commissioner**

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## **FORWARD**

The Pennsylvania Voluntary Rescue Service Recognition (VRSR) Program was prepared by the Rescue Task Force of the Pennsylvania Emergency Health Services Council (PEHSC) under contract with the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Bureau of Emergency Medical Services (Bureau of EMS).

The first phase of the program is the implementation of the vehicle rescue section. The purpose of this program is to recognize those emergency services that can safely and efficiently perform rescue operations on the highways of Pennsylvania. The second phase of the VRSR is the Swiftwater/Flood Management component. This component is designed to establish standards for water rescue and flood evacuation services.

Future recognition will grow to include additional specialty rescue disciplines such as structural collapse rescue, confined space rescue, industrial rescue, rope rescue, commercial vehicle rescue, trench rescue wilderness rescue, subterranean rescue and dive rescue.

It is the intent of this program to recognized emergency service organizations in any one or more combinations of any or all disciplines included in the program. This document not only takes into account the equipment and rescue hardware requirements of specialty rescue, but includes minimum manpower, training and education requirements.

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## DEFINITIONS

<b>AHJ</b>	Authority Having Jurisdiction. The organization, office, individual or municipality responsible for approving equipment, an installation or a procedure.
<b>Ambulance Service</b>	An entity that regularly engages in the business or service of providing emergency medical care and transportation of patients within this Commonwealth. The term includes mobile advanced life support services that may or may not transport patients.
<b>Bureau of EMS</b>	The Bureau of Emergency Medical Services, Pennsylvania Department of Health.
<b>Department</b>	The Department of Health of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Bureau of Emergency Medical Services and the Office of the State Fire Commissioner (OSFC).
<b>Director</b>	The Director of the Bureau of Emergency Medical Services, Pennsylvania Department of Health, or his/her designee.
<b>EMT</b>	Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) An individual who is trained to provide emergency medical services and is certified as such by the Department in accordance with the current national standard curriculum for basic emergency medical technicians as set forth in the rules and regulations promulgated by the Department.
<b>Emergency Responder</b>	Includes Federal, State, local, and tribal emergency public safety, law enforcement, emergency response, emergency medical (including hospital emergency facilities), and related personnel, agencies, and authorities. See Section 2 (6), Homeland Security Act of 2002, Pub. L. 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135 (2002).
<b>EVOC</b>	An acronym standing for <b>E</b> mergency <b>V</b> ehicle <b>O</b> peration <b>C</b> ourse.

<b>Fire Commissioner</b>	See Office of The State Fire Commissioner
<b>First Responder</b>	An individual who is certified by the Department of Health as a First Responder.
<b>Health Professional</b>	A physician who has education and continuing education in ALS services and prehospital care or a Prehospital Registered Nurse.
<b>Incident Management System</b>	An organized system of roles, responsibilities, and standard operating procedures used to manage emergency operations, often referred to as incident command system (ICS)
<b>IFSAC</b>	IFSAC is the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress. IFSAC is a peer driven, self governing system that accredits both fire service certification programs and higher education fire-related degree programs.
<b>NIMS</b>	The National Incident Management System. NIMS provides a consistent nationwide template to enable Federal, State, local, and tribal governments and private-sector and nongovernmental organizations to work together effectively and efficiently to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from domestic incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity, including acts of catastrophic terrorism. The NIMS integrates existing best practices into a consistent, nationwide approach to domestic incident management that is applicable at all jurisdictional levels and across functional disciplines in an all-hazards context.
<b>NFPA</b>	The National Fire Protection Association
<b>NFPA 1006</b>	The Standard for Technical Rescuer Professional Qualifications
<b>NFPA 1670</b>	The Standard on Operations and Training for Technical Search and Rescue Incidents
<b>OSFC</b>	The current Office of the State Fire Commissioner was created, by legislation, within PEMA in 1995 when Governor Tom

Ridge signed Act 61 of 1995, The Fire Commissioner Act. The OFSC is responsible for the operation of Pennsylvania's emergency service training program, the Volunteer Loan Assistance Program (VLAP) that provides low-interest loans to volunteer fire and emergency services organizations, and the state's fire safety education program.

**Paramedic**

An individual who is trained to provide prehospital emergency medical treatment at an advanced level and certified as such by the Department of Health in accordance with the current EMT-paramedic national standard curriculum.

**PEHSC**

The State Advisory Council, which shall be known as the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Emergency Health Services Council.

**PHRN**

Prehospital Registered Nurse - An individual who is recognized by the Department as such under 28 1003.25b (relating to prehospital registered nurse.)

**Principal Official**

The person responsible for the overall operation of the rescue service (e.g., chief, director, or coordinator).

**National Pro-Board**

The National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications. The purpose of the Pro Board is to establish an internationally recognized means of acknowledging professional competence in the fire services and related fields.

**Professional Qualification**

A certificate awarded by an agency accredited by the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) or the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications (Pro Board). Awarding of a professional qualification certificate requires proof of performance through a third party (accredited agency) testing process.

<b>Recognition</b>	Recognition by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Office of the State Fire Commissioner, that a rescue service meets all the guidelines of the Voluntary Rescue Service Recognition (VRSR) program.
<b>Regional EMS Council</b>	A non -profit incorporated entity or appropriate equivalent whose function is to plan, develop, maintain, expand and improve emergency medical services systems within a specific geographical area of this Commonwealth and which is deemed by the Department as being representative of the health profession and major public and voluntary agencies, organizations, and institutions concerned with providing emergency medical services in the region.
<b>Seal of Recognition</b>	A decal placed on rescue vehicles recognizing services that meet the requirements of the VRSR program.
<b>Secretary</b>	The Secretary of Health, Pennsylvania Department of Health.
<b>SOG</b>	Standard Operating Guidelines. Guidelines developed by the rescue service that identify a process for performing certain tasks/functions/operations.
<b>Training Certificate</b>	A certificate issued by a training authority, institute, college, university, educational training agency or other duly recognized training agency which recognizes successful completion of minimum course requirements.

## **II. OVERVIEW**

- A. The recognition program will be an ongoing program of the Department of Health and the Office of the State Fire Commissioner. The Department reserves the right to modify or discontinue the program.
- B. The purpose of the VRSR program in Pennsylvania is to provide statewide standards of rescue service equipment, personnel training and staffing, communications, reporting, and operations.
- C. Recognition by the Department means that a Rescue Service has met the requirements defined by this program, deserving the privilege of displaying the “Seal of Recognition” decal.
- D. When a rescue vehicle displays the voluntary recognition decal, it guarantees to the community it serves:
  - 1. That the rescue service met the standards of these guidelines at the time of inspection.
  - 2. That on each emergency response call, there are an appropriate minimum number of rescue and medical personnel.
  - 3. Rescue services have the appropriate rescue tools and equipment to safely and effectively perform a rescue.

## **III. RECOGNITION PROCEDURE**

- A. Each rescue service wishing to apply for recognition shall submit an application on forms provided by the Department to their Regional EMS Council.
  - 1. The application will consist of the following items:
    - a. The completed application.
    - b. Personnel roster as required for the discipline.



- c. Standard Operating Guidelines – Including, but not limited to:
    - 1) Riding Policy
    - 2) Response guidelines
    - 3) Dispatch protocols
    - 4) Mutual Aid
    - 5) Personnel
    - 6) Use of protective equipment
    - 7) Infection control
  - d. Non-discrimination policy.
  - e. NIMS Compliant Documentation
- 2. The Regional EMS Council shall review the application for completeness and accuracy; incomplete applications shall be returned to the applicant for correction
  - 3. The Regional EMS Council shall schedule an appropriate time with the service for an inspection.
- B. During the inspection of the service for recognition, a representative of the service shall provide the following for review:
- 1. All documentation provided in the application
  - 2. Certificate or weigh slip and a copy of the registration card for each vehicle carrying rescue equipment. Each vehicle must meet DOT gross vehicle weight requirements.
  - 3. All training records listed in the application and roster.
  - 4. Inspection records for all equipment based on manufacturer's recommendations.
  - 5. All equipment listed in the requirements for the discipline being applied for.

- C. The field inspection shall be by a representative from the regional council or an individual approved by the department. The field inspector shall be a subject matter expert in the discipline being inspected. After inspection, the Regional EMS Council will submit to the Bureau of EMS the completed application and associated documentation including checklists, rosters, and SOP's
- D. Upon receipt of the completed recognition Checklist(s), the Bureau of EMS will review all of the applicant materials. If the applicant has successfully met all of the requirements, the Bureau of EMS will return to the Regional EMS Council the appropriate certificates and decals for presentation to the qualifying rescue service.
- E. Services that do not pass inspection will be notified by the Regional EMS Council of their deficiencies. When deficiencies are corrected, the service may arrange with the Regional EMS Council for a second inspection.
  - 1. Deficiencies found during an inspection can be corrected on the spot by the service and marked as so on the inspection form.
  - 2. There will be no provisional or temporary recognition issued by the Department.
  - 3. The service shall have 30 days to correct deficiencies. If greater than 30 days the service must reapply.

#### **IV. RENEWAL PROCEDURE**

- A. Recognition shall be effective for three (3) years from the date of issue (renewal).
- B. The Bureau of EMS shall notify the VRSR service within ninety (90) days prior to expiration date.
- C. At the time of notification, instructions for renewal will be provided to the VRSR service.
- D. The service shall complete the required form and provide the appropriate documentation as required for initial inspection.

## **V. CHANGE IN RECOGNITION - UPGRADE OR DOWNGRADE**

A service may apply to change the level of rescue recognition upon written request to the appropriate Regional Council. The rescue service shall make application as per these recognition guidelines.

## **VI. CRITERIA FOR RESCUE SERVICE RECOGNITION**

In order for any rescue service to receive the program recognition, the applicant service must comply with the appropriate criteria

### **A. Vehicles**

1. There are no requirements concerning the number or type of vehicles to be used by a single service or department seeking recognition. All equipment necessary for recognition in any category need not be transported on one vehicle only. However, any vehicles carrying any of the necessary equipment for recognition must be simultaneously dispatched at the time of the incident dispatch.
2. The original and unaltered Gross Vehicle Weight tag/label as provided by the vehicle manufacturer must be affixed to all vehicles at the time of inspection.
3. Vehicles and watercraft must hold valid registration and current inspection stickers as required by law.
4. The service shall provide a written statement that attests that the vehicle meets DOT gross vehicle weight.
5. The service will provide a copy of the registration card for all vehicles that are a part of the VRSR program.
6. Applicant service must notify the Bureau of EMS, through the regional EMS council of jurisdiction, in writing of any vehicle replacement, disposal or addition during the period of recognition. Re-inspections are required upon notification of such changes.
7. Vehicles shall have a radio for two-way communications, compatible with the local area emergency communication system and shall have the ability to communicate with emergency medical personnel either directly, or through a central dispatching agency.

## **B. Equipment**

1. Each applicant service must be equipped with the minimum equipment listed in the appropriate appendix for the category of recognition they are seeking.
  - a. All equipment must be maintained in serviceable and safe operating conditions, based on manufacturer's recommendations. Refer to NFPA for maintenance recommendations outside of manufacturer's guidance.
  - b. All shipping containers (i.e., fuel storage, compressed gas) that are applicable to DOT regulations for container specification and testing shall be in compliance with said DOT regulations.
  - c. Documentation of air quality testing for breathing air shall be on file with the service and shall meet all minimum requirements of current NFPA Standards and shall be presented at time of inspection.
  - d. A record of annual, monthly, weekly and special inspections and service, or as per manufacturer's maintenance and service recommendations of all self-contained breathing apparatus shall be on file and presented at time of inspection.
  - e. A record of all rescue rope used for life support shall be maintained and presented at time of inspection. As a minimum, this record shall denote date of purchase, date put in service, and dates rope was used, specific use of rope and all monthly, annual and special inspections performed.
2. The applicant service must show that personal protective clothing and equipment is provided to each responder. Use of that equipment is identified in the department's Standard Operation Guidelines. A copy of the SOG shall be available at the time of inspection.
3. The rescue service shall have written mutual aid agreements or established dispatch protocols with other rescue services (not necessarily VRSR services) to service the applicant's community or service area when the applicant is unable.

**C. Personnel**

The applicant service must have a written policy that staffing profiles pertinent to their discipline and level of recognition will be met.

**D. Communications**

Vehicles shall have a radio for two-way communications, compatible with the local area emergency communication system and shall have the ability to communicate with emergency medical personnel either directly, or through a central dispatching agency.

**E. Reporting**

The service must agree to participate in statewide trip reporting to the Department through the use of standardized rescue incident response form for the specific discipline that it represents. i.e. EMS, QRS and Rescue Services may use the DOH Bureau of EMS Patient Care Reporting (PCR) System. Fire and/or Rescue may use PennFirs and/or DOH EMS PCR.

**F. Operations**

1. Emergency service must be provided twenty-four hours a day, seven days per week.
2. Emergency service must be provided on a need basis to all persons in the response area of the applicant service. Ability to pay, sexual preference, race, age, sex, ethnic origin, or any other form of discrimination must not be practiced and must be affirmatively prevented.
3. On all rescue calls involving a person in need of medical care, consultation with the EMS Practitioner possessing the highest level of certification must be maintained.

## **VII. RESPONSIBILITIES OF A VRSR SERVICE**

- A. A service has the responsibility of maintaining the vehicles, equipment, records, and trained personnel described in these guidelines for the period of recognition.
- B. Services that, for any reason, cannot continue to meet the requirements of the VRSR program must notify the Regional Council or Department within fifteen (15) days of the change of status.
- C. It is the responsibility of the service to remove all “Seal of Recognition” decals from vehicles that are no longer in service, or become ineligible, by not meeting the stated specifications. Seals must be returned to the regional EMS council of jurisdiction.

## **VIII. SUSPENSION OR REVOCATION**

- A. The Department, upon recommendation from the Regional EMS Council, or upon its own inspection, may revoke the recognition of a service if the service:
  - 1. Willfully or repeatedly violated or allowed violation by members of the service of any of the provisions of the VRSR guidelines to include:
    - a. Willfully or repeatedly acted in a manner inconsistent with the health and safety of patients, public or rescuers.
    - b. Provided falsified information in order to gain recognition, or is guilty of fraud or deceit in the conduct of a rescue service.
    - c. Allowed the removal of equipment from vehicles, or otherwise failed to maintain the standards of the service as they were at the time of inspection and recognition.
    - d. Failed to notify the Regional Council of any changes in the service that might affect its recognition status.

- e. Failed to provide services to any persons due to inability to pay, sexual preference, race, age, sex, ethnic origin or any other reason deemed by the Department to be discriminatory in nature.
- B. Upon receipt of a written complaint by the Department describing specific violations the VRSR guidelines, the Department shall conduct a joint investigation.

**APPENDIX A**

**Regional Council Submission Checklist  
(All Disciplines)**

Regional Council: \_\_\_\_\_

Rescue Service: \_\_\_\_\_

**Discipline**

**Level**

Vehicle/Machinery     Basic     Operations     Advanced

Swiftwater     Type 1a     Type 2a     Type 3a  
 Type 4a     Flood Evacuation

\_\_\_ Completed Application

\_\_\_ Discipline Specific Personnel Roster

\_\_\_ Standard Operating Guidelines including the following:

- \_\_\_ Riding Policy
- \_\_\_ Response Guidelines
- \_\_\_ Dispatch Protocols
- \_\_\_ Mutual Aid
- \_\_\_ Personnel
- \_\_\_ Use of Protective Equipment
- \_\_\_ Infection Control

\_\_\_ Copies of vehicle registration and weigh slips

\_\_\_ Non-discrimination policy

\_\_\_ Completed equipment checklists

\_\_\_ Act 168 Form for every person on roster