

SANTA ANA POLICE DEPARTMENT

DAVID VALENTIN · CHIEF OF POLICE

TRAINING BULLETIN

"Education promotes professional and responsive law enforcement"

Swift Water Rescue Procedures

Purpose

The purpose of this bulletin is to provide police personnel confronted with swift water incidents in the Santa Ana River with sufficient information and direction to ensure that these incidents/operations are conducted in a safe and effective manner.

Introduction

During periods of heavy rains, the Santa Ana River has the capability of funneling water from the San Bernardino Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed renovations to the riverbed within the Santa Ana city limits in late 1996, replacing the natural dirt and rock structure with concrete. This process reduced the possible risk of flooding to residential and commercial areas adjacent to the riverbed. During times of heavy rains and water run off, the possibility of swift water rescues increases, as does the risk to safety personnel directly involved in water type rescues.

I. Responsibilities

As SAPD officers are more likely to be the first safety personnel on scene at a swift water rescue, the handling officer, or first officer on scene shall take command of the scene until properly relieved by a SAPD supervisor or by SAFD personnel. Once SAFD personnel are on scene, they shall be in command of the scene. Once relieved by SAFD personnel, officers shall take a support role in any Swift Water Rescue by securing the immediate area and ensuring that no additional persons enter the riverbed. Traffic on the major bridges that cross the Santa Ana River, within the city limits of Santa Ana, shall be diverted and officers will position themselves along the riverbed on both the east and west banks to assist SAFD personnel. The purpose of diverting the traffic on the bridges crossing the riverbed is to allow SAFD equipment complete access to effect a Swift Water Rescue.

SAFD personnel have gone through extensive training to conduct Swift Water Rescues and have the necessary equipment and tactics in place to respond to any extrication. During seasons prone to rain, SAFD Station #1 at 1029 W. 17th Street has personal watercraft (*Jet Skis*) on station in the event of a call out for a Swift Water Rescue. During the event of a Swift Water Rescue, SAFD personnel will launch these watercraft at 17th/riverbed.

SAPD first responders to a call of a person in the riverbed during periods of heavy rain or water flow should immediately assess the situation to determine the following information:

1. Point that the person/victim was last scene in the water.
2. What time was the person/victim last scene in the water?
3. How many persons/victims in the water?
4. Age of person/victim.
5. Description of person/victim including clothing if possibly.
6. Determine if the process will be a rescue or body recovery.

Officers positioned along the riverbed banks shall immediately advise SAPD Dispatch upon locating any persons/victims and relay their location. Officers should try to follow the victim down river, utilizing the unit's Public Address (*PA*) system to maintain contact with the victim. Upon completion of a rescue, SAPD personnel shall continue to assist SAFD personnel with traffic control until such time as the emergency equipment has secured from the scene. Should the rescue evolve into a body recovery, SAPD personnel will take over the investigation based upon the information available and complete all necessary reports.

II. Hazards Associated With Swift Water Rescues

There are several hazards that are associated with Swift Water Rescues. SAPD personnel should be aware that attempts by them to effect a rescue could actually place themselves in jeopardy of serious injury and even death. SAFD personnel conducting Swift Water Rescues are especially equipped with helmets, flotation devices and "*dry*" suits to prevent hypothermia and reduce the possibility of infection by contaminants in the water. The following is a list of the major hazards associated with a Swift Water Rescue.

1. Temperature of the water.
2. **Water speed.** The normal flow of water three (3) feet deep in the Santa Ana River will carry an object from the Memory Street Bridge to the Pacific Ocean in approximately 28 minutes.
3. **Debris in the water.** This debris can be either man made, such as shopping carts, old bicycles, mattresses, used syringes and other trash that has been dumped into the river.
4. **Man made structures in the water.** The concrete abutments in the river which support bridge structures, as well as the structures made to slow down the flow of water in the riverbed. There is one low head dam with one concrete strainer inside the riverbed. This strainer is a man made hazard that will churn the water back upstream, causing a whirl pool type of effect on the water.
5. **Water contamination.** During periods of heavy rain, the amount of bacteria in the Santa Ana is extremely high. This condition is due to chemical run off that is transported via the water table down river, as well as contaminants that are illegally dumped into the riverbed from upstream.
6. **Unwanted assistance.** Officers should take every precaution to ensure that no civilian or other individual attempts to enter the water to assist in a Swift Water Rescue. Often times these individuals may believe that they are helping, however all too often they simply add to the number of victims which need to be rescued from the riverbed.

A. Safety Tips for First Responders

First responders should avoid trying to walk down the sides of the riverbed, as the concrete lining the riverbed will become extremely slick and difficult to negotiate. Should personnel find it necessary to access the riverbed on foot, they should proceed with caution and use a diagonal approach to better maintain traction with the concrete sides of the riverbed.

Summary

During periods of heavy rain, or water flow in the Santa Ana River, the possibility of a Swift Water Rescue greatly increases. Santa Ana Police personnel will most often be the first responders to any type of rescue and should utilize safety precautions whenever possible and communicate with Fire Personnel the last known location of any victim. SAPD officers will relinquish command of the incident to Santa Ana Fire Personnel upon their arrival on scene, until such time as the rescue/body recovery is completed.

Acknowledgment: This training bulletin was researched and prepared by Officer Matt Hermans #2101. 1/2000

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Revision Date: February, 2005