



Midwest Search & Rescue

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is Midwest Search & Rescue?

Midwest Search & Rescue (MSAR) is an all volunteer search and rescue (SAR) team based out of Kansas City, MO. The team will respond to any location within a 3-hour radius (by car) of Kansas City to provide manpower for searches and non-technical rescues. This is a vast area that covers much of Missouri and Kansas. The team is also able to respond to more distant locations upon special request.

The team is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and will respond prepared to be self-sufficient in the field for 24 hours. Although MSAR's specialty is wilderness search and rescue, the team is available to respond to any need for organized emergency manpower.

In addition, MSAR also functions as a source of education and training for all aspects of search and rescue.

Q. Whoa! 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?

Yes, MSAR attempts to be serviceable 24 hours a day, year round. But, of course, the team is a volunteer organization - that means people have to take time out of their busy schedules to respond, but it also means that they only do so when conditions permit. SAR calls come at inconvenient times and not everyone is able to drop everything and respond. Members are to make all reasonable attempts to respond to a call out request, but they are obviously left to use their own discretion to decide when they can make a call. The optimal team size ranges from 20-40 members; with the idea being that with enough membership, MSAR can field a functional team will be able to respond at any given time.

Attendance expectations are obviously higher for the prescheduled meetings and drills than for real call outs, although there aren't any penalties or cruel and unusual punishments for missing something. But that doesn't mean that membership isn't a serious thing. We really do ask that you think about whether you can make a commitment to the team. If you can, we can overcome any scheduling hurdles.

Q. What is Search and Rescue?

Search and Rescue entails efforts to:

- Locate
- Access
- Stabilize
- Transport

victims of various circumstances. SAR calls can cover a large spectrum of categories - from children who wander off into the woods to overdue hikers and anything in between.

It is important to realize that SAR is not usually the glamorous activity often portrayed by the media. Search and rescue operations are very manpower intensive and they therefore require complicated management. There are often long hours spent performing "tedious" tasks. But, it is the price paid to participate in an activity that can be life saving!

Q. How does MSAR get called out for a SAR operation?

MSAR maintains a contact phone number. This number is routed to a pager, which is carried by the officers of the organization. Once a call for service is received, a phone tree is activated along with an email to all membership in addition to a group text message to member's cell phones.

Q. What does MSAR do on a call out?

In Missouri, the local authority having jurisdiction, which is usually the local fire or police department, manages all SAR operations. Any authority having jurisdiction has the authority to request MSAR's assistance for a SAR operation. Other recognized agencies (emergency management agencies, disaster agency, etc.) may also request the services of MSAR.

MSAR is designed to provide trained searchers and rescuers for use in the field and they may be utilized in any fashion at the discretion of the requesting agency. Assignments have typically ranged from active search efforts, including carryout requests, to passive search efforts such as monitoring trailheads. It is important to realize that MSAR is NOT a technical (rope) rescue team and its members are not expected to perform duties for which they were not trained.

Q. Who makes up the team?

Anybody is welcome to join the team. But, if you're asking what the team looks like now - MSAR is currently comprised of firefighters, police officers, local residents, and members of local emergency services. Almost all members are certified to the level of first responder or EMT (but this level of training is not required). All are competent in the outdoors. A majority of members have received recognized training in the basics of SAR operations, and all participate in training exercises to increase and maintain their proficiency with various skills. However, no special training is required prior to becoming a member, and anyone is welcome to join.

Q. How is MSAR organized?

MSAR is structured into several separate "squads", minimizing the administrative hassle of micro managing large numbers of people while maximizing performance in and out of "the field". The squads train together and function together, but as a real call develops people cross squads to supply both skills and numbers. While each squad has its own leader and vice-leader, there is also a single individual, the team leader, who is in charge of the entire, team.

The squads are designed for convenience, not for a hassle. Changing squads, being in the same squad as your friend, etc., is no problem. (Although there's no real separation, as everyone trains together and works together - it's really the administrative aspect that the simplicity of the squad system becomes apparent.)

MSAR's structure and organization are described in further (excruciating) detail in the MSAR Constitution and By-Laws. While there are elected officers in designated leadership roles, MSAR is designed with flexibility in mind and the ultimate goal of a smooth integration with the Incident Command System (ICS). [What is ICS? - An internationally recognized standard disaster management system in current use throughout the U.S.] Details of operational outlines, as well as a brief outline of the ICS, are described in the *MSAR Standard Operating Procedures*

So what does all that mean? We have elected and appointed officers who run the day-to-day routines, as well as those that lead in the field. Since most likely not everyone can make every call, the field leadership roles are flexible, with certain roles to be designated as a call develops.

Q. What is the "command" system of MSAR?

While there is a clear chain of command, MSAR is not run in a "militaristic" or paramilitary manner. The structure that is described in the question above allows for efficient functioning by permitting and encouraging initiative for further team development, but all the while balanced by a set structure.

It is important to realize, however, that there are two separate atmospheres under which the team operates. The first is the day-to-day routine of training and existence, where everyone has a say and group discussion is an option. The second atmosphere occurs in the field, where there is a rigid set-up dictated by an explicit chain of command. This is a necessary feature for safe and efficient operations in the field.

All members are autonomous to the degree that they cannot be asked to do to do anything they are not willing to do. Any MSAR officer can dismiss someone from the field at any time without discussion, and that person must be prepared to leave as ordered. This is only done when necessary to protect the group and maintain the safety of its members. It is a *condition of membership* that members understand and accept this situation.

That having been said, the group is always open to suggestions and discussion. In fact, the team and its officers highly encourage feedback, comments, critiques, suggestions, and initiative. As a volunteer there is always work to be done and new areas to explore, and all efforts to help the team along its way are welcome!

Q. What is required to become a member?

Membership in MSAR is acquired through a standardized application process. There are basic requirements including the following:

- All members must be at least 18 years of age.
- All members must pass a Missouri Highway Patrol background check.

- All members must exhibit professional attitude and level of dedication.

NOTE: Membership in MSAR is a serious commitment in time and should not be taken lightly. As a volunteer organization, the team is only as strong as the commitment of its volunteers. All members are expected to participate in MSAR meetings, drills, and functions.

- All members must have a basic competency in outdoor living and survival skills.
- All members must acquire and maintain a suitable 24-hour ready pack with all the required gear outlined in the MSAR Equipment List.
- All members must agree to abide by the MSAR *Constitution and By-Laws* and Standard Operating Procedures.
- All members must complete an application form, including the liability waiver, and turn in a completed MSAR *Equipment List* form.
- The first payment of the yearly dues (\$20) must accompany the application (The money will be refunded only if the application is denied.)

Please note: Final acceptance is always at the discretion of the MSAR officers, regardless of qualifications, and membership applications may be denied or put on hold to maintain a manageable team size.

Q. What are the requirements for being a member?

Once someone becomes a member they have some basic obligations to meet:

- Regular attendance at MSAR meetings and functions.

Membership in MSAR includes the obligation to actively participate in MSAR's activities. This cannot be stressed enough. MSAR is still developing and is dependent on the dedication of its members. As a member of a volunteer organization, members are expected to participate in MSAR activities only to the extent that their schedule permits and there are no penalties for absences at MSAR functions. HOWEVER, an inadequate level of dedication and participation is grounds for being asked to leave the organization. (There are explicit attendance criteria; and they are outlined below.)

- Working towards meeting the objectives listed in *MSAR SAR Technician III Objectives*.

The National Association for Search and Rescue (NASAR) has published a set of knowledge and skill standards for basic SAR personnel (NASAR's most basic training in SAR is that of the SAR Technician, Level III). These standards were proposed with the idea of developing a national standard for the basic SAR rescuer. MSAR asks its members to work on meeting (and then, exceeding!) these standards during the course of a membership. This can be accomplished through individual study as well as MSAR drills and training sessions.

- Payment of dues described in the Constitution and By-Laws. (Currently \$20) which help cover various team expenses.
- An outline of all specific membership requirements is given below. Membership begins with acceptance as a probationary member.

Q. What about personal responsibility and liability?

Ohh... the legal stuff....

- MSAR does NOT provide any kind of insurance coverage. *All members must realize that the activities of MSAR are hazardous and that there is the possibility of death, disability, and/or loss of property and that the individual recognizes and accepts these risks, releasing MSAR and its members from all liability.*
- Members are expected to carry adequate personal health and auto insurance on their own.
- Members of MSAR should not expect the organization to provide assistance to members involved in case of accident, illness, auto accident, or lawsuits arising not of his/her membership with the organization. Again, the members of MSAR assume all responsibilities and consequences of all actions/events individually.
- Members are expected to behave responsibly and professionally at all times. Adequate dedication to MSAR activities, including meetings, training sessions, and official call-outs is required. It is understood and accepted by all that members may not be able to attend all MSAR functions, but an obvious laxity in dedication is not acceptable and constitutes grounds for dismissal.
- As a volunteer organization MSAR does not have a large budget. Do not count on MSAR to feed, cloth, equip, transport, or train its members free of charge. Members should be prepared to participate in fund raising activities of the organization. MSAR's budget is open to examination, and proper reporting of the use of funds is mandatory. Note that members are expected to cover all individual expenses out of pocket, including, but not limited to: gear, food, training, transportation, and personal insurance.
- Members are also individually, responsible for understanding and complying with all federal, state, and local laws or regulations that may apply to the individual, the organization, or its activities.

Q. When does the MSAR meet?

MSAR holds general meetings and/or drills on the order of once a month.

- The meetings are usually held in the evening, and they generally last around an hour to an hour and a half. Members are scheduled and announced in advance, and all members are expected to attend (If unable to attend members should inform an officer as soon as possible)
- It is the intention of MSAR to provide regular and appropriate training in activities or skills relevant to its operations. These sessions can vary in length from a couple of hours to an entire day. Dates and times for drills are varied in an attempt to accommodate different schedules. Drill dates are announced a year in advance so that members have advanced notice and can plan their schedules accordingly.

Q. Training?

New members are not required to have any previous experience with, or any official training in, SAR operations. (Of course it doesn't hurt to have had such exposure.) We work as a team to prepare people for the field (e.g., the monthly drills), but we also ask that members take some time to develop their skills on their own. All new members are asked to attend the one-day "SAR Basics" course run, several times a year (currently run at no cost).

In addition to monthly team drills, numerous other (completely open) skill development opportunities are offered. Short seminars on various

topics occur fairly regularly (In fact, if you are well versed in a particular area and would like to share your knowledge and skill, we invite you to teach others on the team.)

Having said all that, there are a few other things to note:

- Members should work to develop and maintain an adequate level of proficiency in basic SAR skill. (Legal note: Ultimately, proficiency is the responsibility of the individual and not the MSAR.)
- Much of MSAR's training will be "unofficial" - no recognized certification will be provided, although a record of training sessions will be maintained by MSAR.
- Some training opportunities may require a fee [the ones that do obviously aren't required], but MSAR attempts to minimize any costs.
- MSAR attempts to keep its members informed of training opportunities offered outside of MSAR as well.

Q. So what's the overall time commitment (and will joining the MSAR help pad my resume?)

MSAR does not exist to help you with your resume! It is a serious commitment. You will find that MSAR is very accommodating to interested and dedicated people who may have difficult schedules to work with. On the other hand, participation is paramount to being a successful member. MSAR is serious about maintaining a professional level of dedication.

The absolute minimum: All members are expected to attend the monthly drills, which tend to average 2-4 hours. Outside of drills and meetings members are expected to (1) maintain preparedness for callouts and (2) monitor and participate in team communications. There's no question, membership requires commitment, energy, and time - but it's worth it!

Of course you are encouraged to set your sights higher than the minimum as the opportunities that exist within the team are almost boundless! If you have certain skills that might be useful, share them! Teach them! If you knew nothing about SAR then come and learn - then help teach others. We ask that you take some initiative - present ideas, topics, and projects. Get involved. If you find that others know more than you in some area - learn from them!

In the end, of course, you get out of MSAR what you put in. There are many avenues in the world of SAR ready for exploration. Your dedication can help open new opportunities and new learning experiences for everyone on the team.