

Core competency standards for ground search and rescue operations: Searcher, team leader, and SAR manager



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Preface

This is the first edition of CSA Z1620, *Core competency standards for ground search and rescue operations: Searcher, team leader, and SAR manager*. The Standard contains requirements and performance specifications for determining and evaluating competency for three core roles in ground search and rescue operations: searcher, team leader, and SAR manager.

Users of this Standard should understand that the requirements contained herein are minimum levels. This Standard does not have the force of law unless mandated by legislation or referenced in regulations of the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ). Users of this Standard are advised to contact the AHJ in their area to determine the extent this Standard is referenced.

This Standard was developed through a highly collaborative effort between federal, provincial, territorial, local, and volunteer search and/or rescue agencies and organizations. The *National Criteria for Ground Search and Rescue* was used to develop the framework of the Standard. Numerous training manuals and reference materials were consulted in the development of the content of the Standard. CSA Group sincerely acknowledges the contributions of those ground search and rescue agencies and organizations that provided their educational materials to help inform the Technical Committee developing the Standard.

The requirements of this Standard result from consensus of the CSA Technical Committee on Ground Search and Rescue that represents a broad spectrum of stakeholder interests. The Technical Committee received input from other stakeholders during the development of the Standard and through public comments received as a result of a wide distribution of the draft Standard during the CSA Public Review and Comment period.

CSA Group gratefully acknowledges the financial and in-kind support from the Search and Rescue Volunteers Association of Canada and other agencies responsible for search and rescue, and the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund (SAR NIF), for the development of this Standard.

This Standard was prepared by the Technical Committee on Ground Search and Rescue, under the jurisdiction of the Strategic Steering Committee on Occupational Health and Safety, and has been approved by the Technical Committee.

Notes:

- 1) Use of the singular does not exclude the plural (and vice versa) when the sense allows.
- 2) Although the intended primary application of this Standard is stated in its Scope, it is important to note that it remains the responsibility of the users of the Standard to judge its suitability for their particular purpose.
- 3) This Standard was developed by consensus, which is defined by CSA Policy governing standardization — Code of good practice for standardization as “substantial agreement. Consensus implies much more than a simple majority, but not necessarily unanimity”. It is consistent with this definition that a member may be included in the Technical Committee list and yet not be in full agreement with all clauses of this Standard.
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 - b) *relevant clause, table, and/or figure number;*
 - c) *wording of the proposed change; and*
 - d) *rationale for the change.*

CSA Z1620:15

Core competency standards for ground search and rescue operations: Searcher, team leader, and SAR manager

0 Introduction

0.1 Background information

In Canada, search and rescue (SAR) is a shared responsibility among federal, provincial or territorial, and municipal governments, and air, ground, and maritime volunteer SAR organizations. Because of Canada's vast size and range of environments, Canada relies on a diverse group of government, military, volunteer, academic, and industry partners to provide overall SAR services to the Canadian public.

Provincial and territorial governments are responsible for conducting searches for persons who are lost or overdue on land or inland waters. These persons are referred to as “being lost” or “missing”; the search is commonly known as “ground search and rescue” (GSAR), and it is often delegated to the police service of the jurisdiction. In Canada there are over 300 volunteer GSAR teams that assist the responding police service by providing the human resources necessary for a ground search, as well as specialized expertise, equipment, and local knowledge. GSAR programs, equipment, and personnel vary geographically in accordance with local needs and available resources. GSAR team members require specialized training, practice, dedication, and hard work. While the organizations and agencies involved in GSAR have developed extensive training programs and reference materials, no national competency or training curriculum standard currently exists.

In 2002, *National Criteria for Ground Search and Rescue* was developed to be used as the basis for formal GSAR competency and training in Canadian provinces and territories. In 2012, with the support of the federal government's SAR New Initiatives Fund (NIF), the Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada (SARVAC) initiated a project to develop national GSAR core competencies as the foundation for the interoperability and portability of GSAR skills within Canada. The goals of the project include

- a) the development of a national set of common skills and competencies;
- b) the interoperability of teams among provinces and territories;
- c) the portability of skills across the country;
- d) the economies of scale in the development and delivery of training, and
- e) minimizing duplication of effort.

The scope of the overall project includes the development of competency standards, training curriculum standards, and a model for program delivery. The results of this project will not replace existing provincial training standards and programs, but will create a national benchmark to augment and provide guidance on what currently exists and provide for future initiatives.

In 2012, CSA Group was contracted by SARVAC to undertake Phase 1 of the project, the facilitation of a stakeholder consultation process, which resulted in the development of a *Consensus Statement on National Standards for Ground Search and Rescue in Canada*. This document provided a clear roadmap

for the development of national competency standards for GSAR, including guiding principles for the document development process.

Phase 2 of the project, the development of national competency standards for GSAR, was initiated in late 2012 with the establishment of a CSA Group multi-stakeholder Technical Committee on Ground Search and Rescue. The Committee comprises representatives from GSAR volunteer organizations, training providers, policing agencies, Parks Canada, Canadian Forces, and government agencies responsible for GSAR. The Technical Committee has been aided in its work through regular input from a larger stakeholder group.

This Standard combines the efforts of the Technical Committee members as well as other stakeholders who have contributed to the project and amalgamates both current thinking and previously published competency and training documents into one comprehensive reference document. This voluntary Standard will serve as an important tool for documenting and communicating the knowledge and skills of competent GSAR practitioners to the public, government agencies, training providers, and other stakeholders. This Standard provides a starting point for the development of guidance on GSAR curriculum, training materials, certification, recertification, and accreditation programs. As the champion for this initiative, SARVAC intends to work with stakeholders to establish national educational and certification programs based on this Standard that benefit and support GSAR activities in Canada.

0.2 How to use this Standard

0.2.1 Core roles

For each of the core roles of searcher, team leader, and SAR manager, the core competencies are organized within a set of competency categories (e.g., program, human factors, and environment). Under each competency category are a set of competency elements (e.g., SAR, ICS, role and responsibilities). The competency categories and competency elements are based on the *National Criteria for Ground Search and Rescue* developed in 2002. See also Figures [1](#), [2](#), and [3](#).

There are ten matching competency categories for the core roles of searcher and team leader. There are eight competency categories for the core role of SAR manager. The core competencies describe the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes required to perform an assigned task or role at an acceptable level of performance. Core competencies are presented in the following format to specify both knowledge and understanding criteria and observable performance criteria.

XXX Competency element	
<i>Knowledge and understanding of</i>	Specifies the essential knowledge and understanding criteria that searchers, team leaders, or SAR managers need to know in order to effectively perform their functions or assigned tasks.
<i>Observable performance (do)</i>	Specifies core competencies where performance can be demonstrated and observed. Searchers, team leaders, or SAR managers will effectively demonstrate their ability to perform the task or skill.

0.2.2 Core competencies build on each core role

This Standard provides core competencies for each of the three core roles of searcher, team leader, and SAR manager. Searcher competencies are the foundation for the team leader competencies, and the team leader competencies are the foundation for the SAR manager competencies. That is, it is a prerequisite for team leaders to meet the competencies of the searcher first before they can be considered as team leaders, and it is a prerequisite for SAR managers to meet the competency

requirements of both the searcher and the team leader before they can be considered for the position of SAR manager.

0.2.3 Foundation for a training curriculum

It is important to understand that this Standard outlines core competency requirements and is not a training curriculum. However, this Standard will be the foundation for the development of a training curriculum. The training curriculum will include learning objectives and additional information that facilitate meeting the core competencies as outlined in this Standard. This Standard can also be used to measure performance, for workforce planning, and for preparing professional development plans so that competence is maintained and enhanced. Annex A summarizes the competency categories and the competency elements for the core roles of searcher, team leader, and SAR manager.

0.2.4 Evaluation of core competencies

While a number of the core competencies can be evaluated in a relatively short time, such as immediately following a training event or a field exercise, many are intended to be measured over time, and are based on knowledge, experience, and performance. This Standard does not specify how competencies are to be evaluated. Core competencies can be measured in many different ways, and this can vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. While written or verbal evaluations or interviews are appropriate to demonstrate many of the knowledge and understanding competencies, demonstrating the ability to perform required tasks or skills (i.e., observable performance competencies) will be accomplished through practical simulated and/or field exercises or through observation during a search mission.

0.2.5 Recognition for regional or jurisdictional differences

Not all competency elements are applicable in every region or jurisdiction, or for every GSAR organization. In some jurisdictions, searchers might not be required to operate specialized equipment or vehicles such as ATVs or snowmobiles, and meeting those associated competency requirements would not be applicable. As well, the use of certain specialized resources might only be applicable or available in certain regions or jurisdictions; each GSAR organization will determine those core competency requirements that are not applicable for their operations.

1 Scope

1.1 Scope

The Standard provides core competency requirements for ground search and rescue (GSAR) operations for the three core roles of searcher, team leader, and SAR manager.

1.2 Purpose

This Standard was developed to provide a foundation for interoperability and portability of GSAR skills within Canada. This Standard will facilitate training curriculum development and professional development planning so that competence is maintained and enhanced. This Standard is an important tool for documenting and communicating the knowledge, skills, and abilities for those involved in ground search and rescue operations and for evaluating performance. It provides a reference tool for multiple stakeholders and presents a starting point for meaningful discussion about the future direction of GSAR in Canada.