

## **MINIMUM GUIDELINES FOR MOUNTED SAR UNITS**

These Guidelines are the **MINIMUM** guidelines/equipment for a Mounted SAR Unit. This is only intended to be a basic, core platform in delineating what is needed to be able to properly respond to a mission call-out.

For purposes of simplicity, the term “horse” will be used to represent all equines that may be utilized in a Mounted SAR Unit.

- 1) The first portion of these Guidelines (Preparing for a Mission) provides information and identifies minimum guidelines *with respect to individual Mounted Unit Personnel*.
- 2) The second portion (Responding to a Mission) identifies *important information exchange guidelines when a Unit is called-out*. While it is specific to designated individuals (assigned positions and duties) within a Mounted SAR unit, it is important all members are aware of these Guidelines.
- 3) The third portion of the Guideline (Comments and Considerations) *strives to offer additional areas for consideration any resources* where supplemental information can be obtained. As these Guidelines by definition, only cover minimal information, it is felt the resources may help answer additional questions a unit member or Unit may have.

**Definition:** A Mounted SAR Unit is one that provides a professional component to SAR Missions while on horseback. Being a “professional component” means being prepared to effectively interact with the SAR Command unit and with other SAR units. It encompasses having the proper clothing and equipment and knowing how to use it. It also carries the responsibility of knowing the capabilities and limitations of you and your horse. It means continually undergoing formal and self-directed training in developing the skills for both you and your horse. It is an ongoing commitment.

### **PREPARING FOR A MISSION**

#### **EQUIPMENT:**

##### **Personal Gear:**

*All team members will comply with the current NMSAR Field Certification Equipment Requirements as minimum equipment.*

Certain factors must be taken into consideration with regard to Mounted Unit Teams and the carry of their equipment.

- a. Placing all the equipment in a backpack *may* create an unsafe condition when mounting, riding or dismounting the horse.
- b. However at a minimum the following items should be carried on the Unit Member’s person:
  - i. \*Compass
  - ii. \*GPS (if one is used)
  - iii. Map
  - iv. \*Radio (SAR Channels for communication with Incident Base (IB))

- v. Water supply
- vi. Knife
- vii. Fire making materials

Items that are optional to be carried “on person” or other location:

- viii. \*Signal Mirror
- ix. \*Non-metal whistle
- x. Light, metal cup (so water can be heated over fire)
- xi. Tarp style “space blanket”
- xii. Pencil and Paper
- xiii. Extra Batteries for electronic equipment (In extreme cold weather, batteries may last longer if placed in a pouch with a chemical “hand warmer” and/or pocket close to body core.)
- xiv. Small, light Tarp (for improvised shelter)
- xv. “Parachute” cord
- xvi. Toilet paper

*\*Should be secured with a lanyard (not around neck)*

-----  
 Common options for maintaining such items on your person include use of a vest worn over clothing, or a light backpack with hydration bladder, “cargo pocket” pants, belt packs, etc.

*NOTE: Members may elect to carry more equipment on their person (including a full backpack) as long as it doesn’t create an unsafe riding condition.*

- c. Placing too much additional equipment into saddle bags, pommel bags, etc. can overburden the horse – these are living, breathing animals, and like their human counterparts, there is a limit to the amount of weight they can be expected to carry.

**d. Other Equipment that may be Considered:**

- i. Wire cutter
- ii. Bailing wire to repair cut fencing
- iii. Cell phone
- iv. Folding Saw
- v. Lip Balm
- vi. Bouillon cubes
- vii. Aspirin
- viii. Insect Repellant
- ix. FRS handheld Radio (Non-SAR Frequency for Communications between Unit Teams)

- e. **Foot gear:** Per NMSAR Field Certification guidelines, foot gear must be sufficient to provide good traction in various terrain conditions, and must provide appropriate ankle protection and support. Traditional “Cowboy boots” do NOT meet the criteria for good traction in various terrain conditions. However, typical hiking/climbing boots which satisfy this criteria may not be appropriate for Mounted Unit personnel. In many cases, the toe boxes may be too wide to fit properly into the stirrups. The tread may be too aggressive, and create a danger of getting “hung-up” in a

stirrup. A working compromise can be obtained with certain brands of “Packer” or “Lacer” riding boots. Some brands of riding boots have built their boot sole in such a manner the lugs in the sole are “recessed” so they cannot snag on a stirrup. These boots have a “spur shelf” and also are waterproof and with a liner, is insulated for cold weather.

## **2. Horse Gear:**

- a. All horses equipped with saddle and tack that is in good repair and properly fitted to the horse.
- b. All horses are to wear a halter and lead rope while on a SAR mission.
  - i. While many horses are trained to “ground tie”, for many that technique is not a 100% reliable means of securing them.
  - ii. Tying by the reins can result in injury to the horse.
  - iii. Tying by the halter secures the horse; protects the horse from potential injury; is quick and simple to accomplish.
  - iv. Provides a quick means for another person hold the horse.
- c. Hoof Pick
- d. Emergency “boot” in the event of a lost horseshoe

### **Saddlebags:**

- e. Must be properly attached to the saddle to avoid injury to the horse and prevent slipping from side to side.
- f. Should not be “over filled” with regard to total weight.
- g. As much as possible, should have equal weight on in each bag.
- h. For ease of finding and retrieval in an emergency, Mounted SAR Units may consider having a “packing guideline” so all members carry their SAR equipment placed in the same location in every member’s saddlebag.

## **EMERGENCY TRAILER GEAR:**

- a. Spare tire and appropriate tools for changing a tire.
  - i. Dual axle trailer: Jack or one of the “drive-up” devices that enable you to change a tire without the need for a jack or to off-load your horse.
  - ii. Single axle trailer: requires jack and a supplemental base (metal, wood, etc.) to place under jack in the event of soft or muddy ground.
- b. Road emergency reflectors and/or orange road “cones” (reflective devices should be on board for use at night or in inclement weather).
- c. If horse is tied while in trailer, extra tie rope and snap-clip that hooks to horse’s halter to replace existing one(s) in the event of failure.

## **PERSONAL CLOTHING:**

### **Unit Team Personnel:**

All team members will comply with the current NMSAR Field Certification Clothing Requirements as minimum.

### **To emphasize critical clothing Guidelines per current Field Certification:**

1. NO cotton clothing next to skin.
2. Inclement weather clothing should always be carried.

3. Some form of lighting and/or reflective tape or clothing should be considered in the event riding at night or inclement weather becomes necessary.
4. Sunglasses and/or goggles depending on the time of year and weather conditions.
5. Head cover (Hat or helmet depending on individual unit Protocol).
6. Gloves
7. Bandanna
8. Acceptable Foot gear

**NOTE:** Teams may wear jeans *ONLY* if they carry appropriate clothing to change into and they must be prepared to show the clothing to the IC.

**Optional, but recommended as dictated by search area:**

- Chaps
- Chinks
- Gators

**EMERGENCY MEDICAL:**

**Personal Medical Kit:**

Each Mounted SAR Unit Team member should carry a basic medical First Aid Kit. These kits can be “individualized” by each member, but should include:

1. Band aids and/or medical tape
2. Wound antiseptic ointment
3. Gauze roll or pads
4. Eye drops
5. “Mole skin”
6. Tweezers
7. Sponge or cloth

**Equine Medical Kit:**

1. Vet wrap – 2” or 4” (Elastikon is stronger and sticks to itself, but final end of a wrap will need to be secured with tape so it won’t unravel)
2. Duct Tape
3. “QuiKlot” or similar product. Used in conjunction with compression to help stop blood flow on large cuts or gashes. (This is NOT the stuff used if you cut yourself shaving – this is the product developed for use in combat situations)
4. Gauze roll or pads
5. “Super Glue” (can be used to seal small cuts or gashes)
6. Banamine for pain relief and/or allergic reactions; abdominal pain
7. Electrolyte paste

**NOTE:** This kit is for dealing with basic equine injuries *during* a search. A more extensive kit is recommended to be carried and available in the trailer.

## RESPONDING TO A MISSION

**Mission Acceptance Guidelines:** When the appropriate representative of the Mounted Unit is contacted by NM State Police for a SAR mission, before accepting the mission, the Unit Representative must:

1. Ensure a minimum of two qualified Unit members and their horses are available to respond.
2. While determining a sufficient number of unit members are available to respond, (using a call-tree or other Unit method for contacting members), the Unit Representative should attempt to determine:
  - a. The location where the teams are to report; usually Incident Base (IB).
  - b. The Nature of the Mission (lost subject, recovery, etc.).
  - c. The contact phone number for the Incident Commander (IC) or alternate.
  - d. The radio frequency that will be utilized for the mission.
  - e. That the reporting location is accessible by vehicles pulling horse trailers.
  - f. That there is sufficient safe parking available for trucks and horse trailers.
  - g. Any other information your Unit protocol requires.
3. Where possible, print off or have Unit member print off Topo maps of the search area so each responding member will be able to have one at the IB.

Once the Unit Representative has determined there are sufficient personnel to respond, the Representative will confirm the Unit's commitment to respond and **provide IC, Logistical Section Chief (LOGS), or other designated person with the following information:**

- 1) Anticipated time of arrival at Incident Base (calculated based on the time to prepare departure – hooking up trailers, loading feed for the horses, loading tack and SAR gear, loading horse(s), picking up other members who may be responding, and realistic assessment of estimated travel time to IB). The IC may be unaware of the time required to alert, dispatch, and get a mounted unit “on-the-road” as compared to other SAR units.
- 2) Any limitations on the use of the responding Mounted Teams:
  - a) Number of hours available to be on-station.

**NOTE:**

- a. In the event there are *planned* time limitations for the responding teams to be on the search, (Unit protocol, other commitments, etc.) the Unit Teams' Leader **MUST** advise IC or LOGS immediately when first reporting in to IB. **Irrespective of any “planned” return to base, *ALL TEAM MEMBERS MUST BE EQUIPPED AND PREPARED TO REMAIN OVERNIGHT IN THE FIELD.* Unanticipated inclement weather conditions; a late “find” requiring the team to remain with the subject overnight; injury to a horse; etc. all may conspire to cause a team to stay out overnight. The Team must be prepared to do so. This includes your preferred method to secure your horse and providing for the food and water needs of the horse.**

- b. Number of *teams* that will be responding. Each Team dispatched MUST consist of a minimum of two riders/horses. **No single rider can be dispatched.**

**Arrival at IB:**

**The Mounted Unit Leader will:**

- a. Verify that all responding members of the Unit are present.
- b. Insure all responding members sign in at IB per NMSAR protocol  
***NOTE: ALL personnel responding to a SAR mission MUST sign in with IB on arrival, and MUST sign out when returning to the IB from a search assignment. Once signed in, NO ONE is authorized to depart the area without the knowledge and authorization of the IC.***
- c. Notify LOGS of any team limitations (time on station, etc.)
- d. Coordinate with the IC for search requirements to be assigned to the Mounted Unit Teams.
- e. Ensure the search areas assigned to Mounted Unit teams are accessible via horseback (i.e.: No: fences crisscrossing the search area; very steep terrain; heavy, rocky terrain; deep, wide, or fast flowing water crossings, etc.)
- f. Assign Unit members to their teams.
- g. Ensure all teams attend the OPS or PLANS Task Assignment briefing.
- h. Ensure each team knows and understands their assigned search responsibilities and respective areas.
- i. Double check that each team has the required equipment and tack.
- j. Remind each team to conduct a radio check after traveling a short distance from the Incident Base (IB).

**2. Mission Termination:**

- a. Verify that all teams are safely back in.
- b. At the close of the mission effort for the day, ensure each team member undergoes debriefing, is released by the IC, and signs out with IB per NMSAR protocol.
- c. If leaving the mission IC area for the night/balance of the day, advise the IC of how many Unit teams will be available to continue the search the next day and verify anticipated report time on station at the IB.

**COMMENTS AND CONSIDERATIONS:**

There are *many* SAR situations that can arise that are not encompassed by these *minimum* guidelines. Each Mounted SAR Unit should give consideration to developing guidelines and protocols for such events and in establishing formal training/certification requirements. The following areas are offered for your consideration:

- 1) Equitation Training/Certification requirements– specifically as relates to SAR missions for personnel **and** horses (horse specific – Member must certify on the specific horse(s) that will be used on SAR missions!).

- 2) Non-Equitation Training/Certification requirements for personnel
  - a) NMSAR Field Certification
  - b) Demonstrated skills:
    - i) With Compass, Map and GPS (GPS optional depending in Unit Protocol)
    - ii) Radio use and proper communication protocol
      - (1) This is extremely critical as effective use of the radio and/or protocol proves to consistently be a weak area on missions.
        - (a) At a minimum, responders need to be skilled at turning their radio on/off; changing frequencies; changing batteries; and proper use of “Push-to-talk”.
        - (b) Responders must know how to check their radios on departure from Incident Base to insure the radios are working properly.
        - (c) Radio Check-in procedure. (If a check-in time is missed, check in as soon as is practical. If Incident Base does not respond on your regular check-in, try to reach them with one of your team’s other radios. If you cannot reach Incident Base on any radio – get to a better, possibly higher, location and try again. If you still cannot reach anyone, return to the last location where you had good radio communication, or to Incident Base, if necessary. Do not stay in the field if you have no communication with the outside world.)
    - iii) Basic emergency first aid
    - iv) Basic horse first aid
    - v) Basic tack field repair
    - vi) Use of horse trailer emergency equipment
- 3) Procedures pertaining to the “Find” of a Deceased Subject
  - a) Radio Communication Code (Designated by the IC for that search)
  - b) Verification of “no life”
  - c) Preservation of area around Subject
- 4) Body Recovery Missions
  - a) Information required
  - b) Materials, equipment needed
  - c) Number of personnel required
  - d) Extra (no-rider) horses required
- 5) Overnight Mission Requirements
- 6) Basic Packing Skills
  - a) Materials and equipment
  - b) Pack Saddle
  - c) Packing on riding Saddle
- 7) Search Techniques
  - a) Mountainous Terrain (“Survey”, “Scratch” or “Spiral)
  - b) Flat, Open Terrain (“Line”, “Grid”)
  - c) Containment role
  - d) Hasty Search role
- 8) Periodic Trailer/Vehicle Inspection
- 9) Periodic “Re-Certification”

**RESOURCES:**

The following are offered as resources where supplemental information may be found:

- a. “Study Guide: Search and Rescue Field Certification”: New Mexico Department of Public Safety, Search and Rescue.
- b. Sheriff’s Posse of Santa Fe County Web Site at: [santafesheriffsposse.com](http://santafesheriffsposse.com)

***“When a SAR Mission is initiated, we feel the need to ‘do something’ or ‘help in some way’. This desire to help is admirable, however it is only helpful if channeled in the right direction. Intentions are all honorable but the lack of consistency and training can tie up the effectiveness and efficiency of the most experienced SAR effort!”***

***(Jake Jacobson– Introduction to:***

***“Getting Ready for Mounted Search and Rescue” by Deborah Schultz)***