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Members viewing the presentations must sign a OSRT sign in sheet. The completed sign in sheet must be submitted to the OSRT Planning (Training) Section to receive credit for the training.

# CONDUCT BRIEFINGS AND DE-BRIEFINGS



# Reference:

ASTM F2685, Para 10.1-10.3

Training PowerPoint slide program  
prepared by Headquarters OSRT-  
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This power point is intended for Trainees seeking to attain competency as required by the ASTM F 2685, Search Team Leader Minimum Training Requirements

Briefings and de-briefings, are a necessary part of leadership and operational response teams.

We need to know what happened before and after we were there.

What was good and how to improve future deployments.

We want to know what we are facing and what to prepare for.

Were they found and how many people we treated etc.

# EMERGENCY BRIEFING FORMAT

The following checklist\* is the one used by Grand Canyon National Park Search & Rescue personnel for emergencies and prior to launching a helicopter Medical Evacuations (MedEvac) and Emergency Response.

It is another very useful briefing format and great for fast balls or on-the-spot briefings in emergencies.

- Here's what I think we face.
- Here's what I think we should do.
- Here's why.
- Here's what we should keep our eye on.
- Now... talk to me.

# Prepare for the brief/debrief

## Element I

I.1 A briefing/debriefing is planned and prepared in accordance with organization's policy and procedures.

I.2 Relevant personnel involved in the activity are identified and informed of debriefing requirements.

I.3 Briefing/debriefing meeting is scheduled as soon as possible following the incident.

I.4 An appropriate location for the brief/debrief is selected.

I.5 Appropriate incident information is collected.

# Conduct the brief/debrief

## Element 2

2.1 Purpose and structure of the brief/debrief is outlined to incident personnel.

2.2 Discussion, analyses and evaluation by personnel of their anticipated or actual roles in the activity are encouraged.

2.3 Contributions from personnel during the brief/debrief are continually sought, encouraged and valued.

2.4 Review of the activity against the policies, practices and training of the organization is undertaken to identify any discrepancies.

2.5 Brief/debrief is conducted in accordance with the organization's policies and procedures

## Conclude the brief/debrief

### Element 3

3.1 Contributions of personnel are acknowledged in a positive way.

3.2 Brief/debrief follow-up actions are identified and acted upon in a timely manner.

3.3 Brief/debrief findings are summarized and recorded if appropriate in a format suitable for subsequent action by the appropriate personnel.

3.4 Reports are prepared for presentation to appropriate personnel as required.

Incidents worthy of debrief may include those where:

- lives have been lost unexpectedly.
- large and complex searches have been conducted.
- multi agency involvement occurred.
- coordination, communication or response challenges occurred during the incident.

This list is not exhaustive and the conduct of a post incident, multi-agency debrief is at the discretion of the SAR Authority in overall coordination of the incident with mutual agreement of other SAR Authorities and agencies involved.

The importance of de-brief is often misunderstood especially where there is loss of life. It is not to apportion blame, but to recognize what went right, what went wrong and where the resources, planning and execution were inadequate. The aim is to record the outcomes, good or bad, in order to improve similar operations in the future. It is to “establish opportunities for improvement in the operation of the national SAR system.”

# I. Prepare for the brief/debrief

## Purpose and methodology

I.1 A briefing/debriefing is planned and prepared in accordance with organization's policy and procedures.

### Overview:

In an SAR situation where lives may be at risk, a disorganized attitude to briefing would reap disorganized results. Planning is required.

The planning for a briefing (or a de-briefing) should focus on the:

Purpose.

Methodology.

Participation.

Location.

Timing.

Subject matter.

A. Land Search Team leader shall demonstrate the ability to conduct a team briefing on the following minimal subjects:

1. Subject information,
2. Terrain,
3. Tactics,
4. Clues,
5. Weather,
6. Safety and Hazards
7. Assignment objectives, and
8. Attitude

## Purpose:

Much information has to be gathered and collated for presentation by the person coordinating the search.

At the start of an operation a brief is used to inform participants of all the available facts of the incident (Task Information) and the logistics (Operational Information) in fulfilling the Operational Plan.

At the finish of the operation, successful or otherwise, those involved should be offered the opportunity to be part of the de-brief and present their views. This is done to highlight the problems and weaknesses of the brief and to enable those dissatisfied to have their say, air their discontentment and get it put on record.

Briefings and de-briefings are not exclusive to SAR operations, but apply to other group activities. In summary, a briefing is required:

- Before undertaking rescue operations to a incident.
- When significant changes are anticipated at the incident.
- Before undertaking training.
- Before undertaking group projects or other related activities.

Search and rescue operations- The leader needs to know all details of the operation to plan for the safety of the crew and those in need of assistance.

## Methodology:

There is nothing worse than getting to a meeting of and finding out that the arrangements made were disorganized; vital participants uninvited, relevant documentation missing, sufficient working copies unavailable and the brief or debrief a waste of time. Planning checklist forms are a convenient way to organize meeting agendas.

A minimum requirement for brief or de-brief would be the:

- An agenda.
- Notified time and venue at which is to be held.
- Copies of the updated Operational Plan.
- Copies of the updated Incident Report.
- Copies of the relevant chart/s.
- Copies of the Communications Log.
- Any other relevant information / reports

The documentation should be limited to the relevant. The information should be:

- Clear
- Concise
- Factual

## Participation

Relevant personnel involved in the action are identified and informed of the de-briefing arrangements.

The calling of a de-briefing session is the prerogative of the IC of the operation. It is very unusual for a de-brief not to be called after a serious injury or fatality, or when there has been a noted failure or bravery, but other priorities may push this element of an operation onto the back burner.

A list of personnel involved and appropriate attend a de-brief could include the:

- IC.
- Operations Chief.
- Planning Chief.
- Team Leaders.
- Members of any Statutory Authority involved.
- Other specialist such as police, ambulance, fire officers, etc.

Friends and relatives of the deceased or injured may have been participants in the rescue and wish to attend. The risks that a general concern for their sensibilities will inhibit frank discussion or the likelihood that they will misinterpret the de-brief as a pre-coronial inquest must be balanced against their rights. Participation at debriefs may be restricted to particular SAR Authorities and agencies depending on the issues that are likely to arise and would be a decision for the SAR Authority with overall coordination for the incident.

## Timing of a meeting is scheduled

Briefing/debriefing meeting is scheduled as soon as possible following the incident.

The vital but time consuming preliminaries of briefing must start early on and, when possible, in good time before departure. Some personnel engaged for search operations are untrained or inexperienced in the search role. Personnel should therefore be given every opportunity to familiarize themselves with the details of the distress. The briefing officer must have thorough understanding of the overall plan and individual unit tasks.

The phrase, “as soon as possible following the incident” must be qualified by considering the purposes of briefing and de-briefing; that they must be effective.

Timing a brief- The performance criteria for briefing is that it must provide the fullest account of the known task information and sufficient operational information for the response team to be effective in their completion of the operational plan.

Location is selected

An appropriate location for the briefing / de briefing is selected.

The greater proportion of those who were involved in the incident will be more comfortable in familiar surroundings. For most, travel would be reduced and those involved have an intimate knowledge of where the records are and what-ever facilities, including refreshments, are required and called for during the debrief. Either venue must have available the appropriate charts, communications, trained personnel and the search vessels or vehicles.

A venue for briefing will be selected considering the:

- Capacity and security for the expected attendance.
- Convenience of communication and operational planning.
- Convenience to the dispatch of units attending the incident activity.

A venue for de-briefing will be selected considering the:

- Capacity and security for the operational team and others that could have been involved in the incident.
- Copying, communications and display facilities to disseminate reports and provide displays the activities.
- Privacy and security of information discussed.
- Rest and refreshment facilities that promote a comfortable atmosphere conducive to meaningful discussion to gain the most from such meetings.

Information is collected

Appropriate incident information is collected

All the available facts of the incident (Task Information) and the logistics (Operational Information) in fulfilling the Operational Plan have been examined.

Task information- The situation, the resources (assets) available, the expected weather are some of the many questions that need to be resolved. Are we looking for a persons/bodies? Are they injured? When is the best time to commence the operation? Is night approaching and the search area distant? The information concerning the nature of the incident can be summed up as:

Who- Where- When- What- How- Why

Use the headings below to design a “brief check list form” and a “de-brief check list form” that facilitates the planning process.

- Timing, location, participants, purpose, method.
- Fatalities, Injuries.
- Control, command, communications, supporting organizations.
- Incident response and assessment of response strategy.
- Resources, equipment and plant committed to the incident
- First aid, medical, Welfare, Stress
- Strategies to improve response
- Adequacy of initial briefing and analysis of performance against objective

## De-briefing:

The operative personnel from the operations center should arrange access to all of the communication logs and charts utilized during the operation to be available at the debrief.

Those involved in the actual search have an interest to see that all their records and communication logs are also available.

Ancillary operators, providing support services, are also in a similar position and should take steps to have their records available.

Local issues may also need to be reviewed before undertaking the debriefing session as they establish a benchmark against which to measure how the search process was handled.

- Interaction with the SAR authority.
- The chain of command and associated responsibilities.
- The units operational authority when activated.
- Effectiveness of communications.

## Contributions sought and valued

Contributions from personnel during the briefing/debriefing are continually sought and valued.

The mannerisms and attitude of those in charge will impact on the crews. An inept SAR controller delivering his brief/debrief may give participants the view that he knows all and others are there to comply to his/her orders. He/she may put people down rather than reason or argue the issue. The participants in the operation know local conditions and hazards better than any chart. Do not dismiss local knowledge but weight it against established data.

An open mind is a good start in bringing out the best in contributions from the crews, but targeted use of communication techniques can be very effective. Reward pertinent comments.

Don't knock any contribution; they stimulate discussion from others.

Don't dismiss contributions a little wide of the mark as these, hopefully, may be matters of concern to the contributor and others.

The directional format of Briefing. The round table format of De-briefing.

The Briefing is most naturally set up focused directionally at the relevant information. This keeps the conduct crisp and the contributions concise. The briefing officer should be aware that this advantage is matched with the disadvantage that participants can hide in the crowd will be more reluctant to speak up. They may even have to be wooed into contributing.

Such an arrangement is unproductive for the de-brief. The round table layout ensures that all feel on an equal footing to present their unique perspective.

Diametrically opposed viewpoints, heated argument and gas bags are all the territory so a procedural structure in a larger or potentially contentious meetings is essential.

The chairperson should explain the procedure to participants. Key officers should present their factual reports.

The participants should one by one, around the table, be asked for their observations and be given an opportunity for clarification of detail in the reports.

Comments can become emotional and will need skillful and sympathetic handling. If an individual is unwilling to give up the floor when they have nothing new to say then a time limit for further discussion should be imposed.

The chair person should make a point of thanking individuals for their particular contributions and ensure that it is noted in the records.

## Discrepancies identified

Review of the activity against the policies, practices and training of the organization is undertaken to identify any discrepancies.

The de-brief reviews the physical aspects of the operation and the adequacy of operating procedures of the units involved. Various questions need to be asked:

- Were crew put in a situation beyond their training standard?
- Was the equipment available and adequate for the tasks?
- Was damage suffered accidental or from deviation from procedures?
- Were crews over stressed or traumatized? Is counseling available?
- Were communication facilities satisfactory?
- Was the briefing adequate?

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- Was the briefing adequate?

“Full and proper de-briefing of search units is as important as the briefing process. Included in the briefing shall be instructions on the de-briefing procedure to be followed on completion of the search task. A careful interrogation and evaluation of each search crew's effort is essential for intelligent forward planning.

## Conclude the brief/de-brief

SAR Operations enter the conclusion stage when:

- the target is located and the survivors are rescued.
- emergency beacon is located, survivors rescued, beacon has been turned off.
- information is received that the target is no longer in distress.
- all persons are accounted for, or there is no longer a chance of survival.
- the SAR Authority determines that further searching has no significant chance of succeeding and either suspend or terminate the search.

When the target has been located and the survivors rescued, the IC shall ensure:

- all people and organizations involved in the SAR action are stood down;
- all appropriate agencies are notified;
- next of kin are fully informed;
- arrangements are made for the recovery of dropped survival equipment
- the collection and filing of all records in chronological order.
- that administrative and financial procedures are completed.

## Suspension of a search when the target is not found

The decision to suspend a search shall not be made until a thorough review of the search is conducted. The review will focus on the probability of there being survivors from the initial incident, the probability of survival after the incident, the probability that the survivors were in the search area, and the effectiveness of the search. The review should:

- examine decisions, ensuring proper assumptions and reasonable plans were made
- confirm the certainty of initial position and factors used in determining search areas
- re-evaluate any significant clues and leads
- examine datum computations and data calculations
- confirm that all reasonable means of obtaining information have been exhausted
- review all intelligence material to ensure no information had been overlooked

A meaningful acknowledgement at the debrief of the participants efforts never goes astray. It does not matter if the debrief runs a congenial course or it gets a little heated, the input from participating personnel has to be valued and recognized.

Apart from recognition it is important that the recommendations of the debrief are made available to them for scrutiny and they are informed of the action being taken to address the issues identified. Recommendations are of little use unless they are acted upon or, if the consensus of opinion is otherwise, they are dropped.

Let us have a look at these final outcomes arising out of the final debriefing session. What actions have to be addressed and what follow-up actions are required .

The matters which would normally attract the most attention at a debrief would relate to:-

- Was the operation executed as planned and directed at the briefing session.
- Were there inadequacies in the physical resources committed to the operation, such as equipment failures and mechanical problems due to poor maintenance.
- Was too much asked of those engaged in the operation resulting in stress and accidents .
- Were the crews adequately trained.
- Were there too few human resources.
- Was the weather information off the mark and up dates were not pursued regularly.
- Were procedures adequate for the operation,
- Were legislation aspects governing the operation adequate and relevant.

- A. Land Search Team leader shall demonstrate the ability to clearly and effectively provide the following information when debriefed by search management:
  - 1. Safety Issues,
  - 2. Coverage of search area (POD)
  - 3. Clues found,
  - 4. Search difficulties, problems, or both in assigned area.

There is always a lesson to be learnt from these activities but the lesson cannot be effective and worthwhile until and unless they are recorded and acted upon. Some can be put in place quickly as they fall within the authority of the Squad.

On the other hand the matter may be one for the State body, having wider ramifications affecting state training needs.

The changes recommended are to be disseminated direct to those with appropriate responsibilities for their implementation and or consideration.

Brief/ debrief findings are summarized and recorded

Brief/ debrief findings are summarized and recorded if appropriate in a format suitable for subsequent action to the appropriate personnel

The operational records- Records relating to search and rescue operations, including air searches on behalf of other organizations, shall be retained for periods as required under the relevant legislation and regulation.

When a search has been terminated without locating a missing aircraft or its occupants, all records, charts etc. shall be retained and be accessible to SAR staff to allow easy resumption of search activity should further intelligence be received. Reports on SAR actions shall be generated as required for Coroners Inquiries, Management purposes and for training requirements.

Reports are required on anything that search teams consider pertinent, and may include:

- Report on actual weather conditions.
- Positions at which sighting investigations were made.
- Descriptions of items which were investigated.
- Areas searched and not searched and the effectiveness of the search.
- Results of monitoring of radio frequencies.
- Any operational difficulties encountered
- Observer debrief forms when available and completed.

The final report can now be prepared and this should get to the point without wasting words and should be:

- Clear
- Concise
- Factual

This action should have regard to the lines of command within the organization. The most appropriate approach would be to seek advice from your Operations Manager and then follow up at a later date to determine if the changes recommended were in fact acted upon.

## Debrief Notes:

- Thank everyone collectively – general well done
- Begin with a round of Improvements
- Follow with Well Done
- External agencies/debrief facilitator will go last in each round
- End debrief with discussion of technical points raised
- Debrief Rules:
- Be honest with yourself and with others
- Own your own statements
- No justifications; either accept or reject feedback internally
- Don't repeat improvements. Can restate "Well Done"
- Do not make personal attacks
- Note any correctional items and ensure follow up
- Make mental and written notes

## AFTER ACTION REVIEW (AAR)

I was very pleased that Ken Phillips sent me their pocket card for emergency briefings. On the back it has the four steps to the AAR or “After Action Review” or debrief. I like this because it can be used on a “hot debrief” and the key again is for everyone there to take on board any comments and sincere focus on desired outcomes and not personal attacks.

I think everyone on the team should be experienced and mature enough to hold their hand up and say if they let the side down and how it could be made better in future. Take it on the chin and move on. There should not be a blame culture – just one in pursuit of excellent and results.

Obviously if a serious error or unsafe judgment was made that would need to be taken up with their supervisor.

Anyway, here's the 4 stage debrief or After Action Review used by the National Park Search & Rescue Service at the Grand Canyon as given to me from their Chief, Ken Philips.

SOURCE: Adapted from "Incident Response Pocket Guide, NWCG, NFES # 1077"

- o What was planned?
- o Objectives and expected actions
- o What actually happened?
- o Identify effective and non-effective performance
- o Review any non SOP actions or safety concerns
- o Why did it happen?
- o Discuss Reasons for ineffective or unsafe performance.
- o Concentrate on WHAT, not WHO, is right.
- o What can we do next time?
- o Determine how to apply lessons learned next time.

## Briefing

1. Incident Action Plan - what is it and how I fit in.
2. Situation status and predictions.
3. Objectives and strategies (specific).
4. Tactical assignments with explicit instructions.
  - Hazards and safety instructions
5. Weather - present and forecast.
6. Specific equipment needs
7. Communications details:
  - Frequencies to be used
  - Designators and codes
  - Contact persons and times
  - What to do if comm problems arise
  - Emergency communications (whistle?)
8. Transportation details (if needed).
9. Reporting locations and times.
10. How to deal with media/family - where to refer.
11. Where to be at what times.
12. How to handle discovered evidence
13. General hazards and safety instructions.
14. Debriefing procedures:
  - Where to debrief and with whom
  - When to debrief
  - What info will be expected, needed, or required
  - What format should the debrief be in - (oral, written, sketches, maps, etc.)

Briefing should last less than 30 minutes and should be held before, not during, shift (operational period). A combination of written and oral briefings are most successful. **Take notes and ask questions.**

## Debriefing

1. Explicit description of area covered and activities carried out.
2. Average maximum detection range (AMDR) for each subarea of the assigned segment.
3. Estimate of sweep width for each subarea of the assigned segment (the distance beyond which you detect as many objects as you miss within).
4. Qualitative description of search (poor, average, great).
5. Estimate of forward speed of search unit (fast, normal, slow).
6. Exact amount (in minutes) of time spent searching.
7. Location of any clues found, regardless of how insignificant they may seem. (use map, sketches, etc.)
8. Gaps in area searched or any other problems with the search at all.
9. Specific difficulties encountered. (communications, terrain, weather, fitness, injuries, etc.)
10. Hazards in the area - be specific with respect to location and description.
11. Suggestions, recommendations, and ideas for further search activity in the area searched.

Proper info conveyed in the debriefing is absolutely essential for an effective search. Use any means to convey what you want to say about the area searched. (i.e., sketches, maps, briefing reports, notes, photos, videos, etc.)

Debriefing should be done in writing if possible, perhaps using an open-ended questionnaire for personnel coming out of the field. All debriefings should be performed on-at-a-time, on an individual basis, if possible. However, team leaders could debrief their team members and someone in turn debrief the team leader. The above list is a minimum.

QUESTIONS?