



Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team, Inc.
PO Box 7703
Tahoe City, CA 96145

MEMO

March 22, 2020

To: All TNSAR members
From: TNSAR Board of Directors
RE: TNSAR COVID-19 Update

This memo serves to review procedures and update the TNSAR team on the COVID-19 situation as it relates to SAR activities. It is important to stay grounded and informed in these uncertain times. On March 19, 2020 the California State Public Health Officer has ordered all individuals in the State of California to stay home. There are exceptions. The full text of the order can be found here.

<https://covid19.ca.gov/img/N-33-20.pdf>

As the Board of Directors, we have decided to suspend in-person team meetings and trainings for the time being. We have held over 30 trainings this season. We encourage our members to remain physically fit, mentally prepared and have their SAR gear ready to go should we receive a request for a mission. TNSAR may be asked to do atypical missions as this crisis evolves.

It is probable that backcountry recreation will continue or even expand during this crisis. We should consider that folks inexperienced in backcountry travel will begin to explore the backcountry as an alternative to the closed ski resorts.

We want to emphasize this: **each of us needs to make our own go/no-go decision for each mission based upon the mission profile and our own risk profile.** This applies not only to the virus of the day, but for whatever the risk profile of the mission is. Our planning must also consider the fact that we may also be disease vectors: to the subject, to each other, and back to our community. Please consider your age, health, degree of unavoidable social interaction in your daily life, and your family as you go through your personal and community risk assessment with respect to COVID-19.

The requirements of each mission are often unknown and exist in a fluid state. Every mission has risks, be they avalanche danger, technical terrain, OHV use, working in and around helicopters, or coming into contact with a subject's body fluids. We can't predict who on the team may be infected or if an injured or missing person (subject) may be infected with COVID-19. Statistically it is unlikely our subject will have called for our help because COVID-19 directly. If the subject has respiratory symptoms, we are unlikely to know if the symptoms are due to COVID-19, an altitude related issue, or some other medical problem.

The events of a mission will likely put us and our subject into close, confined quarters such as in the snowcat, truck or helicopter. Testing for the COVID-19 virus is very limited at this time and the test only indicates that person's condition for that moment in time, not future times. Therefore we must assume we could infect each other or become infected by our subject.



Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team, Inc.
PO Box 7703
Tahoe City, CA 96145

If we do have a mission with a subject that does end up being positive for the disease, all respondents will likely have to be tested, and quarantined until being cleared for the disease (which could possibly be after you've had it and recovered). As a team we can request this from the PCSO or agency under which we are operating but we can't say for certain if they will provide it.

PPE is fundamentally important. We must approach every subject as if they may have some disease we do not want, or that we have something that they do not want. We believe that UNLESS (read on) we have specific information that would lead us to believe a subject has COVID-19 or respiratory symptoms, that proper use of the PPE we've all been taught to use, plus logical pre and post-mission disinfecting procedures of people and equipment are still adequate. Diligently following pre- and post- mission procedures will help reduce the risk of passing this or other highly transmissible diseases on to others.

TNSAR outlines the following procedures as reviewed by Dr. Eric Stendell and Paul Cushing, R.N.:

1. Mission Callout / Respondent Decision / Staging / IC
 - a. People in high risk categories are not permitted/should not go on missions (e.g. recently ill or recovering from surgery or injury, known or suspected exposures to COVID-19).
 - b. Missions should expose as few SAR respondents as possible.
 - c. Wash your hands before leaving your house.
 - d. Only the person who is driving the team truck should enter the garage. That person should wash / sanitize their hands before entering the team vehicle and loading supplies.
 - e. Only one person should be in each team vehicle aside from the snowcats. It is up to the snowcat team to be comfortable with who their partner is (are.)
 - f. Wash your hands / use hand sanitizer upon reaching the garage / entering a team vehicle / reaching the IC.
 - g. Briefings and gatherings shall be held outdoors wherever practical.
 - h. Maintain 6' of social distancing whenever and wherever practical given the constraints of the mission.
2. Mission Deployment
 - a. Again, only one person in the cab of each team vehicle.
 - b. At the IC, the vehicle driver should don gloves and pass out supplies to respondents. We do not want multiple people going in and out of the trucks.
 - c. Deploy the fewest respondents necessary to carry out the mission.
 - d. Maintain 6' of social distancing whenever and wherever practical given the constraints of the mission.
 - e. Respondents must be familiar with and use all necessary PPE. This includes when to use it, how to use it, how to remove it, how to dispose of it.
 - f. We have been given 24 masks by North Tahoe Fire. 12 are on the team truck and 12 are on the new snowcat (PB100).
 - g. As few respondents as practical shall engage within 6 feet of the subject. At the scene we will endeavor to expose the fewest possible people.
 - h. Respondents shall use gloves, face masks, and eye protection around the subject when appropriate based on the mission type.



Tahoe Nordic Search & Rescue Team, Inc.
PO Box 7703
Tahoe City, CA 96145

- i. Provide a mask to the subject when appropriate for the mission type .
 - j. Do not touch the subject unless necessary for the mission (medical or rescue).
 - k. Limit the things touched by the subject.
 - l. Use hand sanitizer after you remove your gloves and before you put them back on.
- 3. Post Mission
 - a. Wash or sanitize your hands as soon as possible upon coming out of the field.
 - b. Have clean clothing to change into, including shoes, and bag all potentially contaminated items for sanitizing. You may want to adapt your mission response clothing to clothing that can be washed with bleach following a mission.
 - c. Sanitize all equipment used using the [appropriate method](#) (see link). Use PPE while handling contaminated equipment. Do not use bleach on rope, webbing, or cord. Small units of rope, webbing, or cord, should be discarded if we believe they got contaminated. Ropes can be washed after being put in a mesh bag, then into a large washing machine, but it requires a lot of handling to get the rope in the bag, so be careful. Washing a rope is really to get grit and grime off, not body fluids. It's not considered "sanitizing".
 - i. Disinfectant is located just inside the garage door.
 - ii. Disinfectant is located on the workbench in the garage.
 - d. Be especially cognizant of disinfecting radio microphone.
 - e. To the extent possible, vehicles used in a mission will be cleaned then let to sit for at least two days.
 - f. Sanitize all surfaces you touch in the garage.

Be safe. Take care of your family, your friends and our community. Check the forum for updates.

Sincerely,
TNSAR Board of Directors