



SURF LIFE SAVING AUSTRALIA POLICY STATEMENT BODY RETRIEVAL

POLICY
NUMBER
1.3
JULY
2006

BACKGROUND

The retrieval of deceased persons is an unfortunate but often necessary part of Search and Rescue operations. Surf Life Saving Australia members through their patrol duties may become involved as first responders.

Deceased persons may be located either on land or in water. A body in the water will under normal circumstances initially sink and then (over 36-72 hours) as the bodies' cells degenerate, gas will be released and the body will float. Variables include water temperature and depth, cold water will slow down degeneration and deeper water will compress the gases.

AIM

The aim of this protocol is to ensure SLSA members can perform the task associated with body retrieval operations in a safe and expedient manner.

POLICY

The following general principles apply to body recovery operations:

- i. The body should be disturbed as little as possible
- ii. The Police Service should be notified as soon as practicable
- iii. Isolate the area
- iv. Consider:
 - Members of the public
 - Relatives/friends
 - The deceased person
- v. Note locations, times and other relevant details
- vi. Keep any witnesses close to scene or take contact details
- vii. At no time should the media be advised of any details

RECOVERY

On land

- i. Assess Situation
- ii. If necessary ensure body is retrieved above waterline
- iii. If body must be moved, note any details and keep as close as possible to the original site

In Water

- i. Assess Situation
- ii. Recover body if possible
- iii. Minimise direct contact with body
- iv. If no recovery is possible mark or note location and if possible, maintain contact/sight of the body
- v. Deceased should be removed on seaward side of rescue craft

SAFETY

All normal hazards associated with SAR operations apply. It is not appropriate to risk life, injury or equipment damage in body recovery operations.

The risk of infection is increased and the use of gloves is highly recommended. Personnel involved in operational activities should be aware of the available counseling services that aid in maintaining psychological health (please refer to Trauma Counseling protocols).

RECOVERY KITS

Lifesaving operation facilities should consider maintaining a body recovery kit. This kit should include:

- i. Body bag
- ii. Arm length gloves (2 pairs)
- iii. Blanket/Sheet
- iv. Plastic bags
- v. Face masks (cloth)
- vi. Disinfectant
- vii. Small anchor / buoy system

TRANSPORT ARRANGEMENTS

The arranging of transport for the deceased person will normally be the responsibility of the Police Service. Surf Lifesaving resources may be requested to assist in this task (especially in remote areas).