

# ASTM Standard for Mounted SAR Training



Mesa County (CO) Sheriff's Posse working an orienteering task at Control 3 during the MSARCO 2004 three-day MSAR training in the San Juan National Forest near Pagosa Springs, CO.

By Una Smith, PhD

Under ASTM International's Committee F32 on Search and Rescue, a new Standard Guide for Training of a Level Mounted Search and Rescue Team Member is now in balloting. This balloting completes the first major step toward a formal ASTM standard.

## History and Impetus

In 2002, an electronic mailing list discussion group was established for mutual support of mounted search and rescue (MSAR) responders. This group, MSAR-Riders, united responders belonging to many SAR units throughout the United States and other countries for the first time, providing the impetus for NASAR to form a committee to, among other duties, survey various training and operations standards for MSAR that already exist in SAR units.

In 2003 and 2004, the committee gathered information from many units, resulting in a draft list of knowledge, skills, abilities and equipment for a min-

imum training standard for MSAR team members. In 2004, by agreement between the NASAR Board of Directors and ASTM, the task of incorporating this list into a formal training standard was referred to ASTM.

## ASTM Task Group Formed

At its 2004 fall meeting, ASTM Committee F32 decided to form a task group to write the minimum training standard. To encourage participation by the widest possible range of stakeholders, particularly MSAR volunteers and cognizant SAR management, the task group was implemented as an open forum via an e-mail discussion group created for that purpose: MSAR-ASTM (<http://lists.ibiblio.org/mailman/listinfo/msar-astm>). The host site, [ibiblio.org](http://ibiblio.org), is a major nonprofit Internet collaborative.

From January through early March 2005, MSAR-ASTM generated over 800 e-mails and seven working drafts of the standard. During that time, more than 80 persons subscribed to MSAR-ASTM and more than 60 remained subscribers, despite the high volume of e-mail that

the list generated. Of these subscribers, 27 contributed to the discussions.

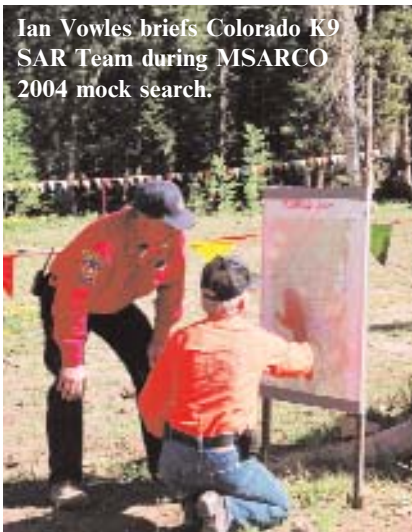
## Contributors to MSAR-ASTM

Contributing subscribers are based across the North American continent in 15 states and provinces. From west to east, they are as follows: *British Columbia*: Hans Dankel of Shuswap Search and Rescue and Lorraine Stubbins of Princeton GSAR; *Washington*: Angie Davenport of Northwest Horseback Search and Rescue, Walter H. Olsen of the National Association of Competitive Mounted Orienteering, Brent Skill and Ann Taylor, both of Clark County Mounted SAR; *California*: Sheila Daly of San Mateo County Sheriff's Mounted Search and Rescue Unit, Jorene Downs of Tulare County SAR, Lyne Peterson of Sacramento County Sheriff's Mounted Search & Rescue and Tom Schneider of Wrightwood SAR; *Arizona*: Michael Mello of Superstition SAR; *Colorado*: J.R. Betts of El Paso County SAR, Michael McDonald of Douglas County SAR and Ian Vowles of Mounted

Photos by Una Smith PhD



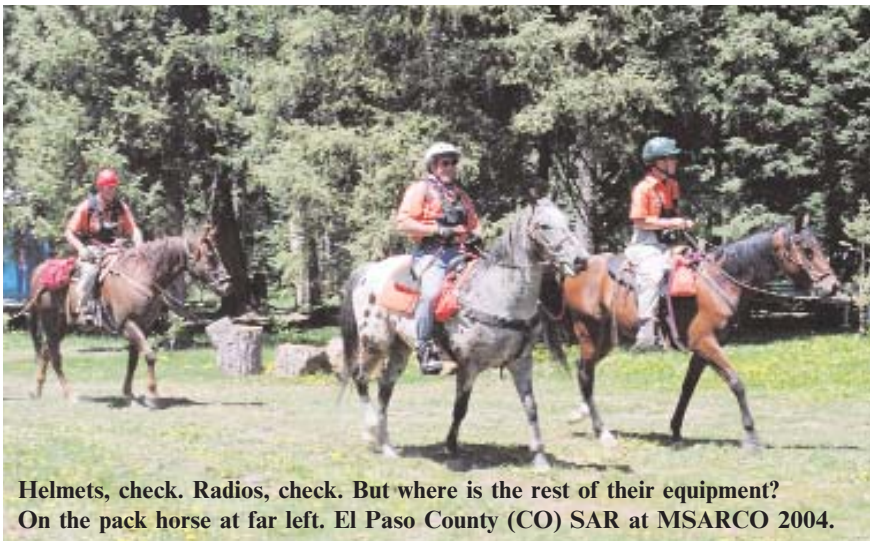
No stalls, no pens, no problem. MSARCO 2003, morning of Day #2. Mounted SAR field teams have many self-sufficient methods of securing horses overnight during a multi-day SAR mission, including the trailer (in the trailer or tied to it), a portable pen, portable electric fencing, highline, picket stake and hobble. The latter four methods can be used in the field away from base camp.



Ian Vowles briefs Colorado K9 SAR Team during MSARCO 2004 mock search.



Horses acclimated to higher altitudes enable MSAR responders to work long task assignments in this environment. Taos (NM) SAR in a wet meadow at approximately 9,000 feet during MSARCO 2004 mock search.



Helmets, check. Radios, check. But where is the rest of their equipment? On the pack horse at far left. El Paso County (CO) SAR at MSARCO 2004.

Rescue; *New Mexico*: Sabine Shurter of La Cueva Volunteer Fire Department and Una Smith of Santa Fe County

Sheriff's Posse; *Texas*: Larissa Barclay of Cen-Tex SAR Canine and Mounted Inc.; *Minnesota*: Terry Nowacki of

Marshall County Sheriff's Mounted Posse; *Missouri*: Roger Vincent of Eureka Fire District Mounted Search & Rescue; *Arkansas*: Ernie L. Greening of Boone County Mounted Search and Rescue; *Indiana*: Yvette Rollins of Indiana Trail Riders; *South Carolina*: Shawn Jones of Charleston County Emergency Preparedness Department; *Pennsylvania*: Irvin Lichtenstein of Huntingdon Valley Fire Company and Robert Sigafos of the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine; *Maryland*: Tomi Finkle and Larry Raskin, both of TROT-SAR; *Unknown*: Susan Anielski and Sol Epstein.

Contributors who are members of ASTM International include: Jorene Downs, Tomi Finkle, Irvin Lichtenstein, Michael McDonald (chairman of subcommittee F32.02), Terry Nowacki, Una Smith and Ian Vowles.

## How Mounted SAR Differs

From the perspective of SAR management, perhaps the single most important difference between MSAR and SAR is that MSAR field teams generally travel twice as fast as field teams on foot and for longer durations, and can travel in terrain (such as heavy forest or wind-throw) that excludes motorized vehicles. Hence, MSAR teams can travel beyond the usual range of many other teams. This difference has both positive and negative aspects. The most significant negative aspect, particularly relevant to less experienced MSAR teams, is that retrieval or extraction of MSAR resources in distress might be more difficult. This is particularly true because large animals are involved. An adult horse of medium size weighs approximately 1,000 pounds.

The ASTM task group writing this standard perceived a compelling need to include recommendations for SAR managers and other users concerning operations and management of MSAR resources. By their nature, such guidelines are outside the scope of a standard guide for training such as this document; hence, they are included as nonmandatory information merely to benefit the user.

## Challenges

One challenge of achieving a fully international standard is the difficulty of

identifying, contacting and recruiting potential contributors from around the world. Mounted SAR units and SAR units with mounted field teams appear to be uncommon outside the United States and Canada, but they do exist. Calls to participate in MSAR-ASTM were distributed by ASTM and NASAR, on several large SAR electronic mailing lists, and to over 250 SAR and equestrian community newsletters, magazines and organizations (state, regional and national) around the world. However, to date, there has been almost no response outside North America.

Several interesting conceptual issues emerged from the task group's discussions. These include the following:

- Top-down versus bottom-up leadership

The operational needs (and hence training goals) of agencies having jurisdiction and MSAR responders do not necessarily coincide.

- Search versus search and rescue

Although both search and rescue comprise the dual purpose of most units, there is little overlap in skill sets required for search versus rescue.

- Training objectives versus tests and curricula, which are merely tools to achieve those objectives

This important distinction is at times hard to grasp. All task group participants have experience as students, many also as trainers, but few (primarily members of ASTM Committee F32) have prior experience in thinking about training on the abstract conceptual level at which the task group worked. To articulate the most subtle training objectives, the task group sometimes resorted to describing specific skills tests having something in common with each other; the training goal underlying these tests would then be extracted with difficulty.

- Performance objectives versus design prescriptions

A good standard will define the objectives of training, not prescribe (dictate) how to achieve those objectives, except for reasons of safety.

- Minimum standards versus certification thereof

At the outset, many task group participants assumed that a major challenge for the task group would be finding an acceptable minimum level of training. However, it was soon apparent that an acceptable minimum was the point at

which a rookie MSAR responder could work in the field under direct supervision, and the task group easily agreed what minimum skills a rookie should have. There was considerable debate, but it did not concern the minimum skills per se; rather, it concerned how to know if a rookie possesses those skills, and operational issues regarding deployment of rookies in the field.

- Training versus operations

Many existing local standards do not make a clear distinction between training and operations. The task group found this distinction to be very helpful, yet often difficult to maintain.

## **Join the Task Group**

Anyone interested in observing or contributing to the ASTM task group may subscribe to MSAR-ASTM at (<http://lists.ibiblio.org/mailman/listinfo/msar-astm>). ■

*Una Smith, PhD, is a member of the Santa Fe County Sheriff's Posse, a volunteer nonprofit mounted SAR unit incorporated in 1941 and recognized by the New Mexico state SAR Review Board since 1983.*