



**Association Québécoise des Bénévoles en  
Recherche et Sauvetage**

# **Norms for certification of ground searchers**

*Version 1.0*



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## 1 - Introduction

### 1.1 - Aim

To define the minimum common norms and standards that the searchers and AQBRS member groups will have to commit to respect regarding the training, certification and actual volunteer services of the specialized ground search team.

### 1.2 - Lexicon

Please note that when the word searcher is mentioned in this document, it always refers to a volunteer from an AQBRS member group.

**Searcher in training:** A volunteer who is in the process of obtaining his certification as a ground searcher.

**Ground searcher:** A volunteer specialized in ground search and who has obtained his certification.

**Team leader:** A specialized ground search volunteer that has been certified and who is in charge of a team of ground searchers to perform a mission.

**Group:** A structured organization involved in search and rescue in Quebec who has joined the AQBRS.

**Team:** A group of searchers who is assigned to a mission, under the supervision of a team leader.

**Ground search and rescue :** Overall it consist to locate, reach, stabilize and transfer a missing person, or find clues allowing us to locate this person by conducting searches mainly by foot and off trails.

**Mission:** Refers to a workload.

**Operational conditions:** A group of factors that define in real time, the actual condition of a searcher regarding its capacity to successfully carry out a specific search mission with which it has been entrusted. The factors that define the operational condition of a searcher are notably (but not exclusively):

- A change in his state of the health (temporary or permanent);
- The state of fatigue of the searcher;
- The meteorological conditions;
- The topography of the terrain;
- The knowledge and the expertise of the searcher;
- The operating condition of his equipment.

## 2 - Scope

### Article 2.1

The norm described in this document determines the basic parameters to be respected by the member groups of the AQBRs, in matters of training, exercising and searching of their specialized ground search volunteers

In no way does it limit the right of each of the member groups of the association, to put in place higher norms regarding the training, exercising and certification of its group, providing that the group's own norm respects at minimum, that of the AQBRs.

### Article 2.2

The obtaining of AQBRs certification by a specialized ground searcher, does not commit the responsible authorities of a search effort in any way, as to their decision to recruit or not to recruit the services of this searcher. The authorities in charge of the searches effort will decide which missions will be entrusted to the searchers who are on site.

## 3 – Ground searcher status acknowledged by AQBRs

The AQBRs acknowledge 3 types of ground searcher status as follow:

- Searcher in training
- Ground searcher
- Team leader

### Article 3.1

The status of **searcher in formation** refers to a volunteer who is part of an AQBRs search and rescue group and has not yet completed all the prerequisites for obtaining his status as a ground searcher.

### Article 3.2

The status of **ground searcher** refers to a volunteer who is part of an AQBRs search and rescue group and has completed all the prerequisites for obtaining his status as a ground searcher.

### Article 3.3

The status of **team leader** refers to a volunteer with the status of ground searcher and has the responsibility of a search and rescue team which he performs the missions assigned to him.

## 4 – Ground searcher (general standards)

**These norms are for ALL ground searchers who are part of an AQBRS group member and participating in missions, regardless of their status.**

### **Article 4.1**

The searcher must be a member of an AQBRS search and rescue group to obtain and maintain his status with the association.

### **Article 4.2**

The searcher must comply with the AQBRS norms as well as the standards of his search group.

### **Article 4.3**

The minimal age for a searcher to participate in missions, is 18 years old. However, with the agreement of the search manager, a ground searcher of 14 years and older can participate in missions, according to the following conditions:

- Having obtained the written consent of his parents
- Having completed the same prerequisites as ground searchers

### **Article 4.4**

The searcher must be physically and mentally fit to perform effectively an 8 hours shift during a mission.

### **Article 4.5**

The searcher must inform his team leader as soon as possible, of any change in his operational conditions.

### **Article 4.6**

Any searcher who has a temporary or permanent illness or health condition, must inform its team leader and possess the necessary medication to treat his condition, when participating missions.

### **Article 4.7**

To avoid injury, wearing of personal protective equipment as described in paragraph 9.1.1 is mandatory for all searchers in AQBRS groups member.

### **Article 4.8**

The searcher must maintain a professional behaviour at all times.

### **Article 4.9**

The searcher must acquire skills to carry out the tasks entrusted to him. The list of those skills is defined in the part of this document which deals with certification, as defined in section 8 of this document.

### **Article 4.10**

The searcher must maintain his knowledge and skills, participating in regular exercise as well as participating in simulations and training of his search and rescue group.

## 5 – Team leader

During a mission, the team leader may delegate some tasks to the searchers of his team.

### Article 5.1

The team leader must comply with the standards described in paragraph 4 of this document.

### Article 5.2

The team leader has the responsibility to assess the missions entrusted to him. He is responsible for carrying out the mission assigned and for the management of the effort of his team on the field. Thus, it has the right to refuse or terminate any mission that has been proposed and the duty to inform the Search commander in the case of:

- The mission assigned exceeds his operational status or requests certifications that he has not yet acquired
- The time allotted to complete the mission is unrealistic given the search conditions
- Health and safety of the searchers of his team are threatened.

### Article 5.3

The team leader has the responsibility to ensure that searchers of his team comply to the general standards of any searcher, as described in part 4 of this document.

### Article 5.4

The team leader must ensure he completed his mission. He must provide written information of what was done and communicate the results, as well as bringing back a GPS track.

### Article 5.5

The team leader must perform a briefing with the searchers of his team, before the beginning of his mission. He must also perform a debriefing with them at the end of his mission.

## 6 – Search groups

### Article 6.1

Each search group remains responsible for maintaining the operational status of its searchers and for the respect of the AQBRs norms.

### Article 6.2

The search group is to organize and/or participate in exercises and simulation searches for missing person on a regular basis. The minimal frequency that every searcher has to train is decided by his search group based on training needs of its members. This frequency must however allow the members of the groups, to maintain a high level of quality in the carrying out of the missions that are entrusted to them.

### Article 6.3

Each search group must without delay, inform the AQBRs whenever the permanent operational status of one of their searchers needs to be modified.

## **Article 6.4**

Each search group has the responsibility to ensure that its members have the skills required by the AQBRS, report for the certification and re-certification exam, succeed them and maintain their skills.

## **7- Responsibilities of the AQBRS**

### **Article 7.1**

The AQBRS is responsible for keeping up the norms and for promoting them with the authorities that call upon the expertise of its member groups.

### **Article 7.2**

The AQBRS has a responsibility to validate the operational status of a search and rescue group or searcher about which it has received a complaint.

### **Article 7.3**

The AQBRS has a responsibility to ensure that the norms have been respected, prior to issuing a certification or recertification.

## 8 – Norms for certification of Ground searcher

### 8.1 Obtaining the status of Searcher in training

The following chart illustrates the skills required to obtain the status of: «Searcher in training ».

Skills	Elements to be mastered	Evaluation method
General knowledge of Quebec Civil Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>General knowledge of the course : «Initiation à la sécurité civile »</li></ul>	Training « Initiation à la sécurité civile » from Quebec Civil protection
Training required by his search and rescue group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>To be validated by his group</li></ul>	To be determined by his group

## 8.2 Obtaining the status of Ground Searcher

The following chart illustrates the skills required to obtain the status of: « Ground Searcher».

Skills	Elements to be mastered	Evaluation methods
All the needed skills to obtain the status of Searcher in training.	See chart above	See chart above
Use of a compass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General knowledge of the compass;</li> <li>• Taking a compass bearing ;</li> <li>• Finding a bearing between 2 points on a map ;</li> <li>• Knowing how to configure a compass, according to the magnetic declination used.</li> </ul>	Theoretical exam: «Ground searcher»  Practical field test
Use of a topographical map	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General knowledge of the elements found a topo map</li> <li>• Knowledge of the map symbols;</li> <li>• Knowledge on how to use a map legend;</li> <li>• Finding a position on a map from coordinates</li> <li>• Giving the coordinates of a point shown on a map ;</li> <li>• Finding self on a map.</li> </ul>	Theoretical exam: «Ground searcher»  Practical field test
Use of GPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General knowledge of the instrument used and the operating principle of a GPS ;</li> <li>• Know how to configure the GPS regarding the type of topographical map used (NAD 83-NAD 27) ;</li> <li>• Being able to give its actual GPS coordinates ;</li> <li>• Knowing how to manually enter a GPS point in the instrument (without the use of the waypoint function);</li> <li>• Knowing how to enter a GPS coordinates using the waypoint function;</li> <li>• Knowing how to delete, start and stop recording path on GPS</li> </ul>	By his search group

Skills	Elements to be mastered	Evaluation methods
Radio communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of the main components of a radio or radios used by the group ;</li> <li>• Knowledge on how to use a radio or types of radios used by the group ;</li> <li>• Knowledge of communication procedures.</li> </ul>	By his search group  Practical field test
Taking charge of a victim - First aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of the First aid principles to administer to a victim;</li> <li>• Communicate effectively the discovery of a victim.</li> </ul>	Theoretical exam: «Ground searcher» Certification required by his search group
Ground search and rescue techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ground search and rescue techniques (Wayne Murray training).</li> </ul>	Theoretical exam: «Ground searcher»
Protection of a clue (protection of a crime scene)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of precautions to take, in order to protect a crime scene and the discovery of a clue.</li> </ul>	Theoretical exam: «Ground searcher»  Practical field test
Behavior of missing persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of different behaviors of missing persons (Wayne Murray).</li> </ul>	Theoretical exam: «Ground searcher»
Knots and ropes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of the following knots: reef knot, butterfly, bowline, figure eight and clove hitch.</li> </ul>	By his search group
Training required by the search group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To validate with the group.</li> </ul>	To be determined by his group

### 8.3 Obtaining the status of Team leader

The following chart illustrates the skills required to obtain the status of: « Team leader ».

Skills	Elements to be mastered	Evaluation methods
All the needed skills to obtain the status of Searcher in training.	See chart on point 8.1	See chart on point 8.1
All the needed skills to obtain the status of Ground searcher.	See chart on point 8.2	See chart on point 8.2
Use of GPS	Knowledge of the device functions and GPS use	Practical field test
Use of a compass and topographical map	Depth knowledge in the use of these tools	Practical field test
Possess a good ground search experience on the field.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being a member of his search group for at least one (1) year;</li> <li>• Have been identified by his group to the AQBRS (coordinator).</li> </ul>	To be determined by his group
Have a leadership recognized by his search group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possess a good knowledge in search and rescue ;</li> <li>• Have the ability to communicate easily;</li> <li>• Versatile, organized and self-confident ;</li> <li>• Ability to follow instructions and to make sure they are followed by the group.</li> </ul>	To be determined by his group
Management and supervision of a team of volunteers.	Ability to manage and supervise a team effectively during a search mission.	Practical field test

## 9 – Material

### 9.1 – Compulsory material for all the ground searchers

#### Article 9.1.1 – Compulsory material for ALL the searchers involved in search missions.

Clothing appropriate to the season and to weather conditions

1. Water (1 liter minimum)
2. Rations for 24h
3. MSP safety helmet (must be worn at all time)
4. MSP safety vest (must be worn at all time)
5. Safety glasses
6. Pair of gloves
7. Long sleeves
8. Long pants
9. MSP identification card
10. AQBRS certification card
11. Flash light and spare batteries
12. Compass with a mirror and adjustable magnetic declinaison
13. Whistle
14. Matches and other objects to start a fire
15. Personal First aid kit
16. Personal medicine for 24h
17. Emergency blanket
18. Surgical gloves
19. Notebook and pencils
20. Permanent marker
21. Flagging tape (orange – 1 roll minimum)
22. Watch
23. 3 large Ziploc bags
24. 2 paper bags
25. 1 garbage bag (preferably orange)
26. Pocket knife or multi-tool
27. Rope
28. Mosquito repellent lotion
29. Socks and hot spare clothes
30. Security candle and other source of heat
31. Other piece of equipment require by the SAR group

**Article 9.1.2 – Additional material required for the Team leader**

- A portable GPS for hiking, which offers the possibility to upload and download data;
- Any other equipment required by his search group.

**9.2 – Recommended material for the base camp**

The base camp material consists of items that will be used by a searcher at the base camp of a search. This material can be left in a vehicle that remains on the base camp site.

- Wool blanket, fleece blanket and /or sleeping bag
- Toilet paper
- Personal care kit
- Additional rations
- Personal medicine
- Shelter (tent, ground sheet, etc.)
- Floor mat or cot
- Utensil set, pan and cup
- Snowshoes (in winter)
- Any other equipment required by his search group.

**10- Complaint procedure****Article 10.1**

Anyone who believes he has a reasonable motive to make it can lodge a complaint concerning a searcher from an AQBRS group member;

**Article 10.2**

To be considered as official, the complaint must be lodged in writing to the Association and should include the following elements:

- The name of the searcher involved;
- The name of the complainant;
- The coordinates of the complainant (address, telephone no., etc.);
- A description of the complaint (place, date of the incident, circumstances, etc.);

**Article 10.3**

Upon reception of a complaint, the AQBRS will inform the searcher involved as well as its group of the existence of the complaint. A copy of the complaint will be forwarded to them (without the coordinates of the complainant);

**Article 10.4**

The AQBRS will contact the complainant if needed, to obtain details of the circumstances of the complaint

### **Article 10.5**

A meeting (in person or by telephone) with the searcher involved and the leader of the search group of which he is a member, could take place if necessary. At a minimum, the AQBRS will contact the searcher to obtain his version of the events;

### **Article 10.6**

The Association will attempt to find, in concert with the searcher and the leader of his search group, an area of mutual understanding in order to remedy the situation if necessary;

### **Article 10.7**

If necessary, the AQBRS could temporarily revoke the status of a searcher (to allow him to acquire additional skills or to correct a situation for example) or in more serious cases the AQBRS will revoke it permanently.