



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA SEARCH & RESCUE STANDARD 7000

TRACKING GENERAL

VASARCO Tracking Standards Committee chaired by Rob Speiden

**APPROVED BY THE VIRGINIA SEARCH AND RESCUE COUNCIL and
THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT**

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This is the final document approved in 2019. It presents general information with regard to the COVSAR tracking standards package. It is accompanied by additional COVSAR Tracking Standards 7100 – 7900.

7000 General Tracking Standard Information

7000 This standard establishes general information with regard to the set of Virginia Search & Rescue tracking standards.

7001 **Scope:** These standards were developed to explain aspects of the Commonwealth of Virginia Search and Rescue tracking standards approved by the Commonwealth of Virginia's Department of Emergency Management (VDEM)

7002 **Purpose:** Outlined in the following standard are general considerations for testing, credentialing and use of tracking resources.

7003 **General:**

7003.1 The Tracker is willing to perform the following functions in the general environment of the Commonwealth of Virginia any time of the year, day or night, and in most weather conditions and terrain experienced in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In order to accomplish this, the Tracker will be able to:

7003.1.1 Search for missing persons in wilderness, rural, suburban and urban areas, using skills associated with awareness, signcutting and tracking addressed in this standard and VDEM standard 7300, as a member of a ground search and rescue team that has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with VDEM.

7003.1.2 Assist, when needed, in missing person investigations on searches to help obtain necessary tracking information.

7003.1.3 Demonstrate familiarity of crime scene preservation procedures and techniques.

7003.1.4 Interface with and instruct other searchers, search staff and local agencies on the abilities of Trackers, and tracking team tactics that might be utilized.

7003.1.5 Demonstrate the ability to explain to other searchers and staff how to be clue, sign and track aware and the importance of each.

7003.1.6 Navigate accurately on land, day or night in most weather and terrain conditions common to the Commonwealth of Virginia.

7003.1.7 Sustain personal operations for eight (8) or more hours in the field.

7003.1.8 Survive an unexpected wilderness emergency.

7003.1.9 Perform other activities which may be required based upon the Tracker's knowledge, skills, abilities, training, experience and base's needs including, but not limited to, working in base, working with other ground teams, and assisting ground rescue teams in the evacuation of the search subject(s).

7004 Definitions:

The definitions used by this standard are listed and defined in COVSAR Standard 7200. They may or may not reflect the definitions used by other individuals, groups, agencies or publications.

7005 Disclaimer:

7005.1 It is the expectation of the tracking standards committee and the tracking evaluators that each and every candidate who participates in each and every tracking evaluation station is responsible to know, and be familiar with, all of the procedures, techniques, scoring methods and criteria used by the evaluators to assess a candidate's tracking skills. It is **NOT** the responsibility of the tracking evaluator to ensure that the candidate is aware of evaluation expectations, objectives, criteria, grading or other evaluation aspects.

7006 Acronyms

- 7006.1 AHJ – Authority Having Jurisdiction
- 7006.2 COVSAR – Commonwealth of Virginia Search and Rescue program administered by the VDEM
- 7006.3 DIRT – Detection, Interpretation, Recording, Trailing
- 7006.4 FAST – Foundations for Awareness, Signcutting and Tracking
- 7006.5 GPS – Global Positioning System
- 7006.6 IPP – Initial Planning Point
- 7006.7 KSA – Knowledge, Skills and Abilities
- 7006.8 LKP – Last Known Point
- 7006.9 MOU – Memorandum of Understanding
- 7006.10 MTM – Management Team Member
- 7006.11 MTL – Management Team Leader
- 7006.12 NASAR – National Association of Search and Rescue
- 7006.13 O.T. – Operational Tracker
- 7006.14 PLS – Point Last Seen
- 7006.15 PTB – Position Task Book
- 7006.16 SMC – Search Mission Coordinator
- 7006.17 STM – Search Team Member
- 7006.18 STL – Search Team Leader
- 7006.19 TRF – Tracker Recommendation Form
- 7006.20 T.T. – Tracking Technician
- 7006.21 T.S. – Tracking Specialist
- 7006.22 VASARCO – Virginia Search and Rescue Council
- 7006.23 VDEM – Virginia Department of Emergency Management

7007 Objectivity and Subjectivity of Tracking Evaluations

- 7007.1 It is the intent of the tracking evaluation to provide an objective evaluation coupled with objective scoring criteria with minimum influence from subjective aspects of an evaluation. The COVSAR Tracking Standard 7300 provides guidance for conducting an objective evaluation of a person's search and rescue tracking skills. One of the important and significant considerations with regard to evaluating a person's skill set (operational, technician, specialist) is to provide various levels of difficulty in each testing station.
- 7007.2 There is a certain amount of subjectivity in assessing a particular level of difficulty of a tracking medium – of a surface across which a person walks. The variables involved in characterizing particular ground covers are endless, and cannot be explicitly described and expected to be constant every time. There is a certain amount of subjectivity that is accepted to exist when setting up evaluations stations for trackers. That is because there is no possible way to set up exactly the same test, with exactly the same conditions every time for every tracking candidate. The only portion of the tracking evaluation that is the same every time is the written test. The tracking tools station will also be similar every time because it merely involves the tracker demonstrating the tools s/he carries and uses and explaining those tools.
- 7007.3 Aside from those stations, and understanding the variables involved, evaluators will make **every** effort to set up similar and consistent tests for each evaluation station. Part of that effort is alleviated by a written description used as a guide for setting up each evaluation station. Another part of that effort is the evaluators' abilities to assess the level of difficulty of a testing area with regards to different ground covers and the ground cover characteristics that receive and retain tracks and sign. The amount of energy an evaluator uses to place tracks and sign can also vary, and is at the discretion of the evaluators when creating an evaluation station. It is also recommended that two evaluators are present at every station when it is created, briefed to the tracking candidates, debriefed after the candidates have presented their answers, and for the scoring phase of the evaluation.

7008 Intention of credentialing

7008.1 OPERATIONAL TRACKER

This certification is intended to assess and qualify trackers who are capable of performing as a tracking team member. This certification is not intended to qualify anyone as an independent resource. This tracker can perform searching or tracking tasks as requested by the Search Team Leader. Operational Tracker is the 'bronze' level of the three certifications, which recognizes some training and practice has been achieved. Since an awareness level certification is of little value to the search manager, this is the first and lowest competency certification of the three. Trackers at this level may still make mistakes and be unaware of their limitations. They can find and follow easier tracks and are familiar with techniques to preserve and relay tracking information. This tracker has yet to demonstrate, through field evaluations, proficiency in working tracking tasks at night. This bar is set higher than the original Field Team Signcutter (FTS) certification that the VDEM espoused for over twenty (20) years. Many Operational Trackers may not have the time and dedication to achieve a higher certification.

7008.2 TRACKING TECHNICIAN

This certification is intended to assess and qualify trackers who are capable of performing as a tracking team leader. This tracker should be able to act as an independent resource in the field; s/he should be comfortable cutting for sign or tracking as a member of a team that has, at a minimum, one other searcher with minimum training along for safety reasons. This tracker has also demonstrated, through field evaluations, proficiency in working tracking tasks at night. Tracking Technician is the 'silver' level of the three certifications, and strives to recognize significant achievement in practice and training. They can efficiently work out tracking problems in the field, record and report detailed tracking information that is pertinent to the search mission. Tracking Technicians are more accurately aware of their limitations.

7008.3 TRACKING SPECIALIST

This certification is intended to assess and qualify trackers who perform tracking tasks as a subject matter expert. These tasks include proficiently performing as a tracking team leader, tracking coordinator and advisor to command staff, or other roles as needed in a search and rescue mission. This tracker has also demonstrated, through field evaluations, proficiency in working tracking tasks at night. Tracking Specialist is the 'gold' level of the three certifications, and it recognizes a skill level that approaches mastery. Trackers at this level have learned so much that they recognize how much more there is to learn, and may even underrate their own skill level. These individuals have a perseverant determination to continue practicing basic tracking skills, and are often inclined to teach others as a way of spreading their own interest in tracking as well as improving one's own skills by teaching others.

7009 Uses of Tracking Resources

Trackers can be employed at the beginning (preferable), throughout, and after a search to detect and describe crucial clues and information that are helpful to locating the missing person.

- 7009.1 The primary use of visual tracking resources is to do the following on every tracking task:
 - 7009.1.1 Look for tracks of interest that may have been made by the subject,
 - 7009.1.2 Document and protect tracks of interest,
 - 7009.1.3 Estimate age of tracks found,
 - 7009.1.4 Determine direction of travel of track maker,
 - 7009.1.5 Follow track maker, and/or
 - 7009.1.6 Assess sign, tracks or clues by determining relevance to the search.

- 7009.2 Tracking team assignments can include the following types:
 - 7009.2.1 Interview family, reporting party or others to determine gait, footwear, possessions, health or habits that may affect sign, and other tracking information about subject
 - 7009.2.2 Look for tracks of subject at IPP (PLS or LKP) or potential clue to determine direction of travel of subject and follow track line towards subject
 - 7009.2.3 Evaluate relevance of clues, tracks or other sign found by others
 - 7009.2.4 Look for tracks of passage along or across a feature such as trail, road, drainage, etc.
 - 7009.2.5 Accompany a hasty team, canine team, sweep, grid or other team to provide clue awareness, detection and evaluation skills
 - 7009.2.6 Backtrack from a location such as find scene to gather additional evidence and information about where subject traveled
 - 7009.2.7 Assist in any other way as needed at search mission

- 7009.3 Tracking team formations
 - 7009.3.1 Ideally, a tracking team will consist of a Tracking Technician or a Tracking Specialist who can provide team leadership and two Operational Trackers.
 - 7009.3.2 Ideally a tracking team will consist of three trackers. A tracking team usually does not need to consist of more than three trackers. If more than three trackers are present, consideration should be given to dividing them into two or more elements or teams.
 - 7009.3.3 If only Operational Trackers are present at a search, it may be necessary to assign a Search Team Leader to work with the tracker(s) to complete task leadership responsibilities.