

For SPOT, alarm and coordinates routed to SPOT call center; for PLB, alarm and coordinates routed to U.S. Air Force. Based on the location of the victim's coordinates, they figure out which authority to call

SPOT or PLB activated; call to 911

0:00

Call routed to nearest 911 operator

0:01

911 operator assesses situation; contacts SAR at local sheriff's office

0:05

Victim's GPS coordinates and any other known info shared with search and rescue deputy.

SAR deputy assesses situation and decides on course of action; immediate response for injured hikers; SAR team contacted

0:10

For missing hikers, the deputy might wait a little longer for the person to show up, depending on how long they've been overdue, or check the trailhead for the hiker's car.

SAR team assembles at meeting place; if enough team members show up, rescue mission will commence

0:45

For injured hikers, someone from the SAR team is asked or volunteers to pick up the command vehicle and group equipment (litter, radios, etc.) from the unit's headquarters.

A "hasty" team is dispatched to find the victim while the rest of the SAR operation is organized

1:00

While the "hasty" team is searching, the remaining SAR teams are deployed

1:30

If not enough SAR members or teams arrive on site for a safe rescue mission, a second round of pages will go out.

The "hasty" team reaches the victim

2:00

If the victim is evacuated by litter, they exit to the nearest road to meet an ambulance; if road conditions are unfavorable, they meet a 4x4, which then transports the victim to an ambulance.

The remaining SAR teams reach the victim

3:00

Operation leader decides the best way to evacuate the victim from the location

3:30

If the terrain prohibits a safe evacuation, or the situation is dire, the victim is evacuated by helicopter.

The victim is taken to the hospital

SAR teams return to trailhead or command center for mission debrief

DID YOU KNOW ...

✿ The SAR page that goes out is usually 1-2 lines of text summarizing the situation and the meeting place. Ex: 30-year-old female with broken ankle. Meet at Little Si trailhead.

✿ Each command vehicle is self-sufficient and stocked with everything its occupants might need for 48 hours, from power to food to water.

✿ Most SAR volunteers keep their personal mission gear in their vehicles and leave wherever they are within 5 minutes of being paged.

✿ SAR volunteers are not allowed to use sirens or exceed the speed limit when on their way to a call.

✿ As the name implies, the "hasty" team is responsible for getting to the victim as soon as possible. These SAR volunteers carry minimal gear—sometimes just warm clothes and a medical kit. Their goal is to scout the location, stabilize the victim and communicate the situation thoroughly to the rest of the SAR team.

✿ Special permission is required to fly a helicopter into designated wilderness areas. If a helicopter evacuation is necessary, that permission is obtained (quickly) from the U.S. Forest Service.

✿ Packing someone out on a litter is an arduous process. Because it's so tiring, packers frequently switch out with each other for breaks. Also, sometimes they must construct special rigging to get the litter down a particularly steep or otherwise dangerous section of trail. Because of all of this, the typical speed of a team packing out a litter with an injured person is 1 mph.

✿ Once the injured person is in the ambulance, their care is transferred from search and rescue to EMS.

This timeline represents a best-case scenario of a mountain rescue operation. Rescue times can vary significantly depending on terrain, weather and other factors that can make rescue operations more challenging and take longer.