

APPENDIX B: MANAGING SPONTANEOUS UNAFFILIATED VOLUNTEERS (SUVS)

Introduction

Immediately following a large-scale disaster, there will be an influx of spontaneous, unaffiliated/untrained volunteers (SUVs). Other names for SUVs are convergent, emergent, or walk-in volunteers. These individuals are our neighbors and other local citizens who arrive to offer help during or after a disaster. Though not “officially” invited to get involved, they are often motivated by an interest in helping others in times of trouble and come from within or outside the affected area. SUVs may be highly skilled and have local knowledge, have awareness of available response resources, and have an established trust with the affected community. Using local SUVs can aid with community recovery and build community resilience. Effective management of SUVs also offers an opportunity for NETs and PBEM to deploy them to assist other agencies involved in response and recovery.

Because they are not integrated or associated with any part of the existing emergency management response system, their offers of help are often underutilized and even problematic to professional responders. Ideally, NET leaders would delegate unskilled tasks to SUVs. Nonetheless, depending on the scope of the disaster, they may need to fill more complicated roles. Determining the scope of what they can do is important in order to use them most effectively, and can prove to be a valuable asset to NETs if utilized appropriately.

Identifying Tasks for SUVs

As soon as the response phase begins, NET volunteers at the Staging Area should identify tasks that SUVs can carry out. NET volunteers must consider:

- When work will start.
- Estimate of how long work will take.
- How many people needed to complete the task.

Receiving Spontaneous Volunteers

If an SUV Coordinator is not already designated in a team's Operations Plan, the Team Leader should delegate SUV coordination to one or two NET members as spontaneous volunteers arrive. As SUVs arrive, NET members responsible for SUVs should register them even if tasks for them and needs have not yet been established. SUV Coordinators must be sure to provide basic information on what NET is so SUVs understand how their efforts will fit into the larger disaster response effort.

SUV Coordinators must be prepared to:

- Register all SUVs and direct them to fill out the Volunteer Information form (see attached).
- Ensure SUVs sign consent forms and waivers.
- Explain to SUVs the procedure for signing in and out.

Incident Team Leaders are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the consent form and waivers are signed and kept safe.

Interviewing SUVs

After initially processing SUVs, the SUV Coordinator(s) must assess whether a volunteer is suitable to help and accept or reject their assistance. This can be challenging due to a lack of time or if there are a large number of interviewees.

Some example questions that NET members can use to interview prospective SUVs:

- Why do you want to help?
- What skills or training do you have that may be useful in this situation?
- Are you mentally and physically suitable for this situation? (Understand that those who may be personally affected by the disaster may not be mentally able to provide assistance at that moment)
- How much time can you spare?
- Do you have transportation?
- Do you have any equipment or tools that will be handy in this situation?

Make notes on each person interviewed. Consider the individual's experience and skills when assessing. For example:

- **Medical training.**
- **Construction skills or structural engineering.**
- **Clerical skills.**
- **Amateur radio skills.**
- **Psychology/crisis counseling.**

Be clear and specific when instructing SUVs and use common terminologies. Clear communication will help NET members manage new volunteers effectively and efficiently. Avoid using acronyms with SUV's as it may cause confusion and misunderstandings.

SUVs who help NET volunteers may not carry weapons. Non-folding knives intended for use as tools are acceptable. Before receiving an assignment, every SUV must be aware of the "no weapons" policy.

If pressed for time when trying to find volunteers for unskilled jobs, small group interviews may suffice. A small group interview, based simply on raising one's hand, may save precious time and fill unskilled volunteer jobs. If you decide to accept a volunteer's help, issue them identifiers prior to sending them on assessment (for example, use vinyl or tyvek bracelets like the ones pictured **to the right**). Check to see if an SUV needs additional training prior to sending him/her on assignment. Check that they have all safety equipment needed for an assignment (e.g. helmet, safety vest, flashlight). If assisting a search and rescue operation or other potentially hazardous assignment, SUVs **must** always work with a trained NET member who will supervise that person regardless of the scale of the operation. For unskilled assignments, one NET member may be able to manage a small group of SUV's; however, it is preferable to have two or more trained NET members with a group of SUVs if possible.



Unsuitable SUVs

It is nearly impossible to make certain that everyone offering help is suitable, and there is a multitude of reasons that a prospective SUVs is unsuitable to assist a NET. For example, they may be affected by the situation personally (e.g. a loved one is missing or was hurt). Individuals may also arrive at the Staging Area to observe the disaster and response operations with no intent or plan to help. Below is some appropriate advice to turn down offered help respectfully:

- **If you decide to reject an SUVs help for whatever reason, be tactful. Explain that there is no suitable volunteer work for her/him.**
- **Do not send them somewhere else where they may burden the operations of other NETs or response agencies/organizations.**
- **Thank them for their offer and say that you will make a note that they want to help. Do not promise to contact them later.**

In some scenarios, it is not appropriate to use SUVs because the risk of injury and liability is too great. SUV Coordinators must keep in mind that NETs have received a level of training that SUVs have not. Assignments for SUVs must **rationally, realistically and conservatively** balance the needs a NET has for assistance with that reality.

Work Schedule

SUV Coordinators must develop a work schedule for SUVs. Shifts should not go longer than 8 hours and should include an 8 hour rest period. They must also receive periodic breaks, and food and water. When possible, inform SUVs when the NET will release them for the day. NETs must exercise caution not overwork SUVs and the SUV Coordinator or NET member supervising them should “check in” with them regularly (**see below**).

Managing SUVs Prior and During Assignment

Once assignments are given, conduct a briefing to keep volunteers informed. This is important because these individuals need to be aware of the situation in order for them to be more comfortable. During this meeting touch on:

- **Identifying NET leaders.**
- **Establishing safety guidelines.**
- **Explaining NET’s role relief effort.**
- **The assignment: meal times, break times, release time, etc.**

During assignment, the SUV Coordinator must track all activities of signed-in SUVs. The SUV Coordinator should track and maintain data on the volunteers’ personal information, hours worked, and their job assignments. Use the registration forms to access contact details concerning the volunteers who receive assignments.

Checking in With SUV’s

SUV Coordinators or Incident Leaders should regularly check in with volunteers to assess their emotional fortitude and fatigue. SUV’s will feel stress and show emotional reactions to events just as most other people would. It is important that NET members are aware of this and are prepared to deal with it. NET Incident Leaders or SUV Coordinators may consider addressing the following with volunteers:

- **Does the volunteer need a mental break or advice?**
- **Is the volunteer familiar and comfortable with his/her assignments?**
- **Keep them informed on developments.**
- **Ensure that the volunteer has taken breaks and is released on time.**
- **Ensure that the volunteer has received food and drink.**

Managing “Overflow” SUVs

If an SUV Coordinator finds there are more SUVs available than needed, s/he should make a note of all offers received to reference for needed assistance in the future. It may help to have knowledge of the needs of other NETs in the area as well. If another team receives little or no SUVs, it may be a viable option to

deploy overflow to them. Once time allows, contact the people who have volunteered but not received an assignment. Ask if they wish to remain on the volunteer list in case the situation changes and help is needed later.

In addition, NETs should consider that delaying the assignment of an SUV or SUVs will permit longer operations. If a NET has significant overflow, stagger start times so that the team continues to receive help.

Ending a Volunteer's Assignment

There is always a risk that a volunteer chosen for an assignment may not be suitable, but this is not made apparent until the assignment is in progress. In these situations, the SUV Coordinator must redirect the SUV or dismiss them. It is crucial for an SUV Coordinator or Incident Leader to act if the individual is not up for the job. Recommendations for managing dismissal or reassignment:

- **Consider an alternative: can the volunteer do other work?**
- **Arrange for two NET leaders to meet with the volunteer in private.**
- **Tell the volunteer that the interview is strictly confidential.**
- **Give specific examples of behaviors/actions that have not worked and explain why (if appropriate to the situation, refer to behaviors/actions that do not conform with the NET Code of Conduct and/or NET Guidelines).**
- **Let the volunteer give his/her side of the story.**

If the SUV continues to be unsuitable for the assignment or acts inappropriately, alert NET leaders and the SUV may be removed from duty immediately and permanently. However, it is important to attempt to redirect the SUV's actions prior to dismissing them permanently.

Post Disaster Follow-Up with SUV's

NET leaders should acknowledge that SUVs may have an interest in becoming affiliated with NET or training in the future. Asking if they would like to remain involved post-disaster is paramount in creating overall community resilience and the effectiveness of NET moving forward. Once life gets back to normal and you have time, work with PBEM to officially recognize volunteers (e.g., certificate, letter, newspaper article, commemorative item, recognition event).

If the volunteer checks off on their registration that they would like to participate in year-round activities to enhance his or her community's resiliency for the next event, the NET Team leader should contact them or prompt the PBEM NET Coordinator to do so.