

Whatcom County SAR 4x4 Unit Membership Policy Guide

Proposed February 2026
4x4 Unit Accepted March 2026

ARTICLE I

MEMBERSHIP

1. Membership will be limited to 50 members. No new applicants will be accepted until the 4x4 Unit membership drops below 50.
2. Prospective applicants
 - a. Applications denied by the Sheriff's Office due to background check will be denied without grounds for appeal.
 - b. Applications with Whatcom County Sheriff's Office approval will be reviewed by the Oral board.
 - c. If an applicant is not recommended by the Oral Board, or is not present for two of the next three general meetings after turning in their application, their application is denied. Denied applicants may appeal to the Executive Board.
 - d. Prospective members will serve a six-month probationary period before being voted on as a full member during a general meeting by a simple majority of attending members.
 - e. During this period, the probationary member will acquire basic First Aid, CPR, AED and Blood Borne Pathogens Certifications, train and use SAR GAR, per the Sheriff's Office directives.
 - f. Proof of current training certifications need to be presented to the training officers.
 - g. The six-month probationary period begins after the approval of the probationary member by an oral board.
 - h. Probationary members may attend all sanctioned functions. Members should attend as many of the missions and functions they are qualified for and available for.
 - i. Probationary members must ride with a field qualified 4x4 member on missions. Exceptions can be made if a probationary member has specialized equipment for the mission. In such case, the passenger must be a qualified 4x4 member.
 - j. Probationary members will be evaluated, and voted on, at the end of their six-month probation at a regularly scheduled membership meeting.
3. A member in good standing:
 - a. Meets attendance requirements noted in 4.a of this Membership Policy Guide.
 - b. Is not under disciplinary action by the 4x4 Unit.
 - c. Has proof of current first aid/CPR/AED and blood borne pathogens, and SAR GAR training on file.
 - d. Has an approved, operable, street legal 4wd, registered in their name (or spouse's name) or a board approved ATV.
 - i. Response vehicle must have current proof of insurance.
 - ii. Temporary down time cannot exceed six months, unless approved by the Executive Board for extenuating circumstances.
 - e. Has a current and valid Washington State driver's license.
 - f. Has a current State of Washington Emergency Worker Identification Card issued by the Whatcom County Division of Emergency Management.
4. Attendance

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- a. All members must attend 50% of the meetings and 50% of the scheduled training sessions unless excused. Members should attend as many of the missions and functions as they are available for.
 - b. Excuses for missing meetings and trainings sessions include work, vacation, or illness. To be excused from the function, the member *MUST CONTACT AN OFFICER PRIOR TO THE FUNCTION*. This does not excuse members from meeting the training requirements.
 - c. At the end of the year, an officer of the 4x4 Unit will contact any member not maintaining the minimum requirements. The member must meet with the Executive Board to state whether they wish to continue as a member of the 4x4 Unit or resign.
 - d. If the attendance falls below the minimum requirements at the end of the second year, the member will be removed from the roster by the Executive Board. All 4x4 Unit owned equipment and IDs issued thorough the 4x4 Unit must be turned in.
5. Leave of Absence
- a. A leave of absence request must be submitted in writing, hard copy or email, to an officer and must be accompanied by all 4x4 Unit owned equipment.
 - b. If a member is not in good standing, at the time of leave of absence request. The leave of absence is denied and considered a resignation.
 - c. Leave of absence will be limited to a maximum of 12 months.
 - d. A member on leave of absence will be removed from the call system.
 - e. 4x4 Unit logos may not be displayed while on leave of absence.
 - f. A member on leave of absence will not attend missions or trainings, but is welcome to attend meetings as available. Attendance at special training opportunities will be allowed if requested in writing prior to the event and approved by the board.
 - g. When a member returns from leave of absence, they will be placed back on the roster.
6. Voting
- a. Voting will be a majority of active members in good standing attending.
 - b. Voting for officers and candidate members will be done by written ballot, counted by two active members.
7. Conduct
- a. All members must conduct themselves in a manner that will not discredit the organization, the WCSAR Council, WCSAR Council member organizations or Whatcom County Sheriff's Office.
 - b. Behavior that brings discredit to the organization may subject that member to disciplinary action, which could include expulsion.
 - c. All members will be responsible for the conduct of their guests.
 - d. Meeting Conduct
 - i. Behavior will not be disruptive (As determined by the Officers)
 - ii. Two warnings by an officer conducting the meeting will result in the member being asked to leave.
 - iii. If a member is asked to leave two times during a 12-month period, that member will be called before the Executive Board for possible disciplinary action.
 - e. When contacting members regarding conduct, contact will be made by two 4x4 Unit officers.
 - f. Harassing, bullying or hazing of any form will not be tolerated.
8. Member Rights and Responsibilities
- a. Must maintain training to the level referenced in the WCSAR Council bylaws.

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- b. Must turn in monthly volunteer hours to the Secretary.
 - c. Must be responsible for legibly filling out the logbook, safety sheets and all other paperwork related to Unit owned equipment and vehicles used in a timely manner as determined by the Executive Board.
 - d. Must maintain a safe and reliable 4x4 vehicle or ATV, as outlined in Article III, section 1 of this document.
 - e. If responding in a non-member owned vehicle, member must have written authorization by the vehicle owner to use said vehicle for a SAR activity and have current proof of insurance for said vehicle.
 - f. Must maintain Unit issued equipment and keep it in safe, clean, and serviceable condition.
 - g. When a member leaves the organization, if not a member of any of the Whatcom County SAR units, the Emergency Worker ID Card must be returned to the secretary. The secretary will then return the card to the local DEM office.
 - h. When a member leaves the organization. They will be responsible for returning all 4x4 Unit owned equipment immediately. The member must reimburse replacement value within 30 days for equipment not returned or returned in a non-serviceable condition. If not returned or compensated in 45 days, items will be reported stolen.
 - i. Each member is responsible for keeping track of their own training records and turning in a copy of their training documentation to the 4x4 Training Officers.
 - j. A member falling below support level qualifications for two consecutive years will meet with the board and be placed on an agreed upon improvement plan or removed from the 4x4 Unit.
9. Member Training.
- In addition to the training referenced in the WCSAR Council SOPs, each member must demonstrate to an Officer every five years:
- a. The ability to safely self-extricate their response vehicle from a stuck situation.
 - b. The ability to safely install tire chains/cables on their response vehicle.
 - c. The ability to safely hook a SAR unit owned trailer to a response vehicle.

Each member must have their response vehicle checked annually by the training officer or designee to verify:

- d. The vehicle is in working order, roadworthy and safe
- e. That the equipment listed in Appendix B in the response vehicle.

ARTICLE II

MISSION BEHAVIORAL CODE

1. Code of the road
 - a. Be a courteous driver.
 - b. Be a safe and legal driver.
 - c. Be a thoughtful driver.

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- d. Do not respond while under the influence of a controlled substance.
2. Personal code
 - a. Be professional, courteous, and thoughtful.
 - b. Be alert to dangerous situations.
 - c. Respect the property of others. Tread lightly.
 - d. Be neat. Do not litter. Leave no trace.
 - e. Be cautious with fire and smoking.
 - f. Be aware of your environment and situation.
 - g. Be sensitive to how your comments and actions may be perceived by others.
3. On missions
 - a. Wear mission appropriate attire and visible SAR IDs.
 - b. Be prepared to accept assignments.
 - c. Follow chain of command.
 - d. Do not deviate unless personal safety or serious vehicle damage are factors.
 - e. Work efficiently as a team.
 - f. Settle differences of opinion later, in private.
 - g. Do not criticize leaders or directors in public.
 - h. Keep accurate records.
 - i. Do NOT disseminate information concerning search and rescue progress. Refer the press and others to the Incident Commander or Public Information Officer.

ARTICLE III

MISSION AND TRAINING GUIDELINES

1. To respond to an active mission, you must be a member in good standing as outlined in Article I, Section 3 of these Policies and meet the training requirements as outlined in Appendix A
2. Members must start a mission with a full tank of fuel.
3. Each member is responsible for signing in and out.
4. SAR GAR will be utilized at the beginning of each assignment and re-evaluated as needed during all assignments on all missions, trainings and events.
5. Whenever possible, there should be two people per vehicle and two vehicles per team.
6. Keep track of the miles covered per vehicle and the equipment used on each mission. Each member is responsible for keeping their own records.
7. Members are not to operate outside their level of training.
8. Members must keep communication equipment on and at appropriate volume levels.
9. All operators must meet state, local, and 4x4 Unit regulations for operating 4x4 Unit equipment.
10. Members will not operate 4x4 Unit or WCSAR Council equipment until deemed qualified by the 4x4 Unit training officer or designated trainer.
11. 4x4 Unit owned vehicles must be refueled before returning to quarters.
12. Members must follow the Executive Board maintained major equipment SOG's.
13. Damaged equipment must be reported to the Incident Commander and 4x4 Unit Rep, before leaving the mission, training or event.

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14. State damaged equipment claim forms and other mission related claim forms must be filled out and turned in within 60 days of the incident. Failure to file a timely claim will result in the operator/member being financially responsible for damages.
15. Vehicles must have a functioning mobile SAR radio and GMRS radio to be deployed to the field. A CB is recommended but no longer required. Exceptions for a handheld SAR radio in place of a mobile SAR radio can be made by the most senior 4x4 Unit member on a mission, on a case by case basis. Exceptions to be reviewed at the next regularly scheduled meeting. Exceptions for ATV, which requires handheld radios.

ARTICLE IV

DECALS AND PATCHES

1. Production of logos or logoed items must be authorized by the Executive Board.
2. All decals and patches shall be the property of the organization and shall be issued in accordance with this policy guide when a person achieves full member status.
3. All decals, patches and logoed items must be returned to the organization when a person is no longer a member for a reasonable reimbursement as determined by the Executive board. Exceptions may be made by the Executive board.
4. Logos kept as mementos are not to be displayed or worn publicly.
5. Each member is entitled to one decal and one patch at the expense of the organization. Additional decals and patches require a non-refundable security deposit.
6. Members must be in good standing to display logos of the organization.
7. Candidate members are not allowed to display logos, except at the discretion of the Executive Board.

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(Appendix A) Training and Qualifications

	Topic	Base Camp Responder	Field Qualified SAR Responder
4x4	Valid WA State Driver's License	OF	OF
4x4	Current Proof of Insurance (POV)	OF	OF
WCSO	Current Emergency Worker Card*	OF	OF
WCSO	Unit orientation to training & callout procedures	C	C
WCSO	First Aid/CPR/AED	OF	OF
WCSO	Blood Borne Pathogens	C	C
WCSO	Base Camp Orientation	C	C
WCSO	SAR-GAR	C	C
WCSO	Radio Communications (Amateur Radio License meets qualification)	C & PE	C & PE
WCSO	IS-100-B	C	C
WCSO	IS-700-A	C	C
4x4	Searcher Safety	C	C
WCSO	Physical & Mental Fitness	C	C
WCSO	Helicopter Safety	C	C
4x4	Annual Vehicle Check	Verified	Verified
WCSO	Survival Skills & Equipment		C & PE
WCSO	Crime Scene Identifications & Management		C & PE
WCSO	Search Techniques		C & PE
WCSO	Rescue Techniques		C & PE
WCOS	Land Navigation (Map, Compass, GPS, SARTopo)		C & PE
4x4	Self-Extrication		PE
4x4	Install tire chains/cables		PE
4x4	Hitch a SAR trailer to a tow vehicle		PE
4x4	Annual Vehicle Inspection/Gear Check		PE

OF = On File

C = Classroom Training (or Online Equivalent)

PE = Practical Exercise

All training courses must be redone every five years, with the following exceptions:

First Aid/CPR/AED cards must be kept current by the standards of the issuing agency

IS-100-B and IS-700-A do not need to be retaken.

Unit Orientation does not need to be redone.

Vehicle Inspection/Gear Check will be done annually

Attendance and participation in a mission that utilizes skills that meet training requirements above can qualify for recertification of said requirement.

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(APPENDIX B) EQUIPMENT LIST

1. All personnel are expected to be self-sufficient for 24 – 48 hours.
2. Required Equipment and care:
 - An operational mobile GMRS in any response vehicle, except ATV
 - Self-recovery device (winch or come-a-long)
 - Usable tow points on the front and back of response vehicle
 - Jack appropriate for the response vehicle
 - Tire chains/cables
 - Spare tire or approved run flat equipment.
 - Response vehicle inspected annually by the training officers.
 - Verify 4x4 Unit issued electronics are properly installed and functional.
 - 4x4 Unit issued equipment must accompany each member on mission & training activities.
 - Equipment required by National Forest Regulations
 - i. Ax
 - ii. Shovel
 - iii. Bucket (minimal one gallon)
 - Map or SARTopo device
 - Compass
 - Flashlight/headlamp
 - Whistle
 - Gloves
 - Extra clothes
 - Rain gear
 - Flagging and a permanent marker
 - Pencil and paper
 - PFD (Personal Floatation Device) SAR Approved
 - Space blanket/bivy
 - Emergency shelter
 - Enough food for yourself for 24 – 48 hours
 - Fire starters
 - Gallon of water
 - Sunscreen/bug repellent
 - First Aid Kit (to include two days of medications)
3. The following is the recommended list of equipment that should be carried for all missions.
 - Spotlight
 - Winch kit (cable clamps, snatch block, gloves, etc.)
 - Tow strap
 - Recovery strap
 - Sunglasses
 - Binoculars

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- Toolbox/repair kit
- Chainsaw
- Falling wedges (with chainsaw)
- Flare or smoke signaling device
- Sleeping gear
- Camp stove/cooking kit
- GPS
- HAM radio with license
- Air compressor

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(APPENDIX C) ATV Operating Guidelines

OPERATOR GUIDELINES

1. ATV operators must pass an authorized or in-house ATV course.
2. ATV operators will wear an approved helmet on all mission and training activities.
3. ATV operators will wear eye protection.
4. ATV operators and passengers will wear appropriate footwear.
5. ATV operators will be properly dressed for the assignment.
6. ATV operators should be familiar with controls and operation of the ATV they are operating.
7. ATV operators will always operate their machine in a safe and responsible manner.

EQUIPMENT LIST

1. The following is standard equipment that shall be carried on all ATVs on all mission and training activities.
 - a. Basic survival and mission response equipment (AKA 10 essentials)
 - b. Riding gloves
 - c. Pencil and paper
 - d. Spare spark plugs
 - e. SARTopo
 - f. Flagging tape and permanent marker
 - g. Radio with SAR frequencies
 - h. GMRS radio
2. The following is standard equipment that shall be carried with every ATV team on all mission and training activities.
 - i. Tool kit
 - j. Tow strap
 - k. Vehicle recovery equipment
3. The following is recommended in addition to the standard equipment.

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- l. HAM radio
- m. Spare fuel
- n. Tarp
- o. Binoculars
- p. Spotlight
- q. Axe
- r. Air compressor/tire pump
- s. Tire repair kit/fix a flat

ATV must be kept in a proper, reliable, safe operating condition.

ATV must be 4-wheel drive and cargo racks are recommended. (Motorcycles only when approved by the Executive Board and must wear motorcycle helmet – full face recommended)

All vehicles must have functional headlights and taillights.