



Kentucky Urban Search and Rescue Comprehensive Report



Introduction:

House Bill 157 signed into law by the Governor on March 28, 2023, and now known as Kentucky Revised Statute (KRS) 39A.245, outlines the establishment of the Kentucky Urban Search and Rescue Program, assigning specific duties, employment regulations, administrative requirements, and fund allocations. This report provides an overview of the progress made in implementing the law's directives and the ongoing efforts to develop draft policies, standard operating procedures, and administrative regulations.

Reporting Requirements:

KRS 39A.245 mandates that the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management submit a comprehensive report to the Interim Joint Committee on Appropriations and Revenue prior to December 1, 2023. This report includes the following drafts:

- Policies;
- Procedures; and
- Administrative regulations.

Draft Policies and Procedures:

Draft Policies and Procedures for the Urban Search and Rescue Program have been meticulously crafted and are currently under review. The Kentucky Division of Emergency Management senior leadership and the Urban Search and Rescue Work Group, comprised of stakeholders from across the Commonwealth, are actively involved in this process.

Key Areas Addressed in Kentucky Administrative Regulations (KARs) Draft Format:

The KARs are in draft format, covering crucial aspects of the program, such as:

- Organization and decision-making processes for program response teams;
- Membership criteria for response teams;
- Administrative staffing for both the program and response teams;
- Qualifications for response team members, including training and skills;
- Uniforms and equipment standards;
- Disciplinary measures and professional conduct for response teams;
- Operations of the division concerning response teams, including mobilization and deployment logistics; and
- Other pertinent issues related to program operations.

Additionally, the Kentucky Division of Emergency Management is mandated to promulgate administrative regulations, as per KRS Chapter 13A, addressing accidents, injuries, reimbursement procedures, and any other operational issues.

Budgetary Considerations:

Kentucky Division of Emergency Management reviewed the initial proposed plan, emphasizing the must-haves essential for the program's success within the two-year budget cycle. The budget consideration included the following three key components.

- To establish a Statewide Type 1 Urban Search and Rescue Team. This would include two locations within the state located on Department of Military Affairs property. These locations would be in the western part of the state and central/ eastern part of the state.
- To develop a joint partnership with Kentucky State Police, Kentucky National Guard and Kentucky Division of Emergency Management in a Helicopter Aquatic Rescue Team (HART) program. These funds would support training and equipment.
- To increase funding to the Rescue Aid Program to provide aid for necessary equipment and training.

Benchmarking and Program Alignment:

In an effort to enhance the Kentucky Urban Search and Rescue Program, Kentucky Division of Emergency Management officials visited other states to review their programs, guidelines, fleet, and the FEMA Urban Search and Rescue system. Draft policies and procedures are continually refined to align with best practices observed in other states.

Operational Response:

The current Kentucky Urban Search and Rescue system, comprised of local fire departments and rescue squads, demonstrated its effectiveness on October 31, 2023, responding to an 11-story building collapse in rural Martin County. The incident highlighted the need for ongoing review and refinement of policies and procedures tailored to such specific incidents. It also magnified the need for a statewide Urban Search and Rescue team.

Conclusion:

The implementation of House Bill 157 (KRS 39A.245) is a significant step toward enhancing Kentucky's preparedness and response capabilities through the Urban Search and Rescue Program. Continuous collaboration with stakeholders, adherence to draft policies, and learning from other states' experiences contribute to the program's ongoing development and effectiveness. As the work group refines procedures, the commitment to ensuring a robust response to emergencies remains a top priority.

Attachments:

The following attachments to this Comprehensive Report are listed below. The Kentucky Division of Emergency Management along with the Kentucky Urban Search and Rescue Work Group continue to develop these documents.

- *Attachment 1:* Draft KAR Urban Search and Rescue Program
- *Attachment 2:* Draft Administrative and Operations Manual (Includes Urban Search and Rescue Team Position Descriptions)