

# STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

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## SOP 1.1 – Patrol Operations

Section 1 – Patrol Operations.

### Scope

To describe the procedure to be followed by applicable Life Saving Victoria personnel relating to members' responsibilities whilst carrying out duties during patrol operations.

### Audience

	Patrol Captain	Patrol Member	State Duty Officer	Area Lifesaving Ops Officer (LOO)	EMCaR Staff	LSV Member
Basic Awareness						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Working Knowledge		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Expert Knowledge	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

### Responsibilities

Name	Definition
<b>Patrol Captain</b>	<p>Responsible for the coordination of all Patrol Members whilst on patrol and in the event of an incident, therefore their instructions should be followed promptly.</p> <p>Provide an important role in being responsible for the health and safety of members conducting volunteer patrols and ensuring that safety is front and centre of all patrol activities.</p> <p>Note: This position in lifeguard services is titled Team Leader/Senior Lifeguard</p> <p>Refer to RS 1.1.1 for additional duties.</p>
<b>Patrol Member</b>	<p>Undertake a number of roles, including aquatic rescues, providing first aid and emergency care, and providing surf safety information to the public.</p> <p>Note: This position in lifeguard services is titled Lifeguard</p> <p>Refer to Rs 1.1.2 for additional duties.</p>
<b>State Duty Officer</b>	<p>Responsible for an area that may cover one or more clubs. They provide additional lifesaving support to surf clubs and other Lifesaving services.</p>
<b>Area Lifesaving Operations Officer (LOO)</b>	<p>Responsible for managing and coordinating emergency management, search and rescue activities and overseeing the patrols and normal lifesaving operations across Life Saving Clubs and lifesaving services within their Area.</p>
<b>Emergency Management Capability and Response Department</b>	<p>Responsible for providing operational frameworks for clubs, facilitating support, and monitoring capacity and compliance with required standards.</p>

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<b>LSV Member</b>	Needs to be aware of the activities undertaken by the Patrol.
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## Policy

Life Saving Victoria requires all Patrolling members to adhere to the established policies, procedures, and guidelines to ensure safe and effective practices relating to Lifesaving Patrols.

## Procedure

Patrolling the beach is the most important role undertaken as a lifesaver. It is where all the training and experience will be called upon to ensure beachgoers can return home safely after a visit to the beach.

It is important to remember that when the public sees a patrol member on patrol, they will have an expectation that:

- The Patrol Members have the knowledge and skills to keep themselves safe
- The Patrol Members are at all times ready to come to their aid should it be required.

Accordingly, it is important that the Patrol Member convey an image of competence and professionalism whenever wearing the patrol uniform.

### Lifesaving Service Agreements (Patrol Protocols)

The standards of service provision for lifesaving or lifeguarding are covered by a service agreement. A Lifesaving Service Agreement (LSA) is a lifesaving service's patrol responsibilities and commitments for providing lifesaving services to the community.

A Lifesaving Service Agreement for lifesaving services will cover:

- The patrol season
- Times of the day when services are provided
- Patrol strength (minimum number of people)
- Equipment to be available
- Minimum qualifications held by members
- The location and extent of your service

It is essential that your lifesaving service meets its obligations under this agreement at all times.

### Preparing for patrol

Patrol Members should record rostered patrol dates in a calendar as soon as they become available. If the patrol member is unable to attend a rostered patrol, they must advise the patrol captain (or the role responsible for managing the patrol roster), and, if necessary, a substitute can be found as far in advance as possible. Check with your own club's procedures around roster management. Rostering for Lifeguards is managed by the Lifeguard Coordinators, who will ensure sites are staffed.

Patrol Members are required to arrive early to help the patrol team set up the patrol area by the time necessary (as identified in the Lifesaving Services Agreement) and be able to respond to any incidents that may arise during their allocated patrol.

It is important that:

- A risk assessment is conducted so that the safe patrolling location is identified for swimmers
- The necessary number of suitably qualified team members are ready to patrol
- All Patrol Members have the appropriate PPC&E (including Patrol Uniforms as per SLSA Policy 1.05 Patrol Uniforms).
- The appropriate gear and equipment are available and 'rescue ready'.

### Team briefing

On arrival at patrol, the Patrol Captain will conduct a preliminary briefing. It may be the case that you are the first team to patrol the beach for the day, or you may be taking over from a team that has patrolled

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the beach earlier in the day. If a changeover in patrol teams is occurring, the beach must remain effectively supervised by patrolling members during this period.

In either case, sometimes it is important for patrol members to arrive up to 30 minutes before their patrol commences so that they are able to participate in this briefing properly. Patrol team must sign on to the patrol using the method designated in WI 4.1.1 LSV Comms Sign On and Off.

The team briefing conducted by the Patrol Captain should include all members of the team working together to identify:

- Any new and substitute patrol team members.
- What roles individual team members will perform.
- How team members will rotate in their roles during the patrol.
- How the beach will be effectively supervised and managed by your team.
- How the patrol team will communicate with each other and beachgoers while on patrol.
- What potential hazards to beachgoers and Patrol Members exist or may arise during the patrol.
- Any special events or activities (such as Nipper activities, surfing contests, ocean swims, etc.) that are known to be taking place during the day that may influence how you effectively manage the beach.
- How gear and equipment will be allocated to key areas of risk.
- The risks identified in the initial risk assessment and methods for minimising these risks.
- Expectations around patrol uniform and use of mobile phones.
- Timing of patrol shift, including any breaks, expected completion time (particularly useful if extended patrol times are likely due to hot weather days).

## Safety first

The patrol members' duty to ensure the safety of themselves and others. Patrol Members should always ensure that they are both physically and psychologically prepared for duty and any lifesaving training activities.

The **IM SAFE** acronym can help prepare for patrol as well as communicate personal capabilities and limitations to the Patrol Captain.

Table 1 – IM SAFE Process to check fitness for role

<b>I</b>	Injury or Illness	Am I fit to work or fully recovered
<b>M</b>	Medication	Am I under the influence of any medication?
<b>S</b>	Stress	Am I showing signs and symptoms of severe or critical incident stress?
<b>A</b>	Alcohol or drugs	Am I under the influence of alcohol or drugs?
<b>F</b>	Fatigue	Am I feeling extremely tired?
<b>E</b>	Expertise	Do I require any additional training to meet the competency standards?

## Allocation of Responsibilities

Every member of the patrol team will have a role to perform during a patrol, and roles may change throughout the day. The Patrol Captain allocates the role and may be influenced by any number of factors, including but not limited to:

- Any changes in the number, behaviour and activities of beachgoers from time to time.
- The need to ensure all team members are engaged and are provided the opportunity to develop their skills in all aspects of patrol operations through training opportunities and appropriate mentoring from those with more experience.
- The prevailing surf or weather conditions and their influence on the patrolled areas.
- Individual Patrol Member awards and qualifications, and those of the other members of the team.
- Individual Patrol Member's particular skills and experience, and those of the other members of the team.

Table 2 – Examples of Patrol Roles

Allocated Role	Activities During Patrol
Patrolling the water's edge	Members assigned to this role may be expected to act as the primary point of contact with swimmers and board-riders entering and exiting the water. They should have readily available rescue equipment and communication tools, such as a whistle or loudspeaker and may be called upon to effect water-based rescues at any time.
Surveillance	Members allocated to this role will be primarily responsible for ensuring the bathing area is supervised correctly, usually from an elevated position and have direct radio contact with the Patrol Captain.
Roving patrol	Members allocated to this role will conduct a roving patrol to a location designated by the Patrol Captain, with the minimum equipment prescribed for this patrolling method.
Crowd control	Members allocated to this role will be expected to maintain a sufficient boundary between members of the public, lifesavers and victims, while other members respond to an incident.
Water safety	Members allocated to this role provide water safety for SLS junior development activities, special events, skills maintenance sessions and SLS member training as required. They ensure the safety of participants in SLS-sanctioned activities while positioned in the water with rescue equipment.

## Setting up the patrol area

It is the Patrol Captain's decision on where to set up the patrol area. The Patrol Captain may nevertheless ask a patrol member to participate in this process, which may include helping to assess the surf conditions or establishing a safe area to set up the patrol. A risk assessment is to be undertaken before the patrol team briefing (Surf Risk Rating).

The minimum rescue equipment required in order to conduct a beach patrol effectively is outlined in SOP 1.3 – Patrol Equipment and/or Lifesaving Service Agreement (LSA).

## Checking gear and equipment

It is essential that all patrol gear and equipment are in proper working order and condition before your patrol commences, so that you can be confident it is 'rescue ready' and can be used should the need arise. Any damaged or unserviceable equipment should be reported to your patrol captain as soon as possible, removed from service and tagged as unserviceable (as per SOPs) until it is repaired or replaced where appropriate.

## Patrolling methods

### (a) *Between the flags method*

This is the most commonly used patrolling method. It requires setting the red and yellow flags in a location that provides maximum safety to swimmers. This will take into consideration:

- Prevailing surf conditions.
- Accessibility.
- Beach usage.
- Ensuring swimmers and board-riders are each allocated separate zones on the beach so that they do not impede others or present a risk to the safety of one another.

Equipment will be placed near the flags, ready for use.

### (b) *Roving method*

Roving patrols are used in conjunction with the 'between the flags' method. A minimum of two lifesavers can undertake them. In addition to setting and monitoring the flagged area, additional team members are allocated to walk back and forth along the beach, watching outside the flagged area. Side-by-side vehicles (SSVs) or Inflatable Rescue Boats (IRBs) can also assist with a roving patrol. This allows

greater coverage of the beach outside of the patrol area.

The minimum equipment to be carried by lifesavers on a roving patrol includes:

- Radio
- Rescue tube (with swim fins where available)
- Personal protective equipment in a waist bag with a notepad and pen.
- A whistle

### *(c) Outpost method*

This method also works in conjunction with the 'between the flags' method. In addition to setting and monitoring the flagged area, additional lifesavers can set up a patrol at areas that are outside the red and yellow flags. This outpost method usually does not include the actual setting up of a flagged area. Please refer to SOP 1.4 – Remote and Outpost Patrols.

### *(d) Open beach method*

In some locations, there may be only a tower or a series of towers with overlapping supervision zones, and no flags. The tower serves as a point of reference for members of the public wishing to access the services of lifesavers or lifeguards. Open beach observation is best accompanied by a roving patrol.

### *(e) Stand-by method (surveillance method)*

This method involves the minimum number of lifesavers or lifeguards monitoring the public during periods of very low activity, such as in the early mornings, late afternoons or during bad weather. Refer to SOP 1.6 – Inclement Weather and SOP 1.2 – Patrol Types and Requirements for the minimum number of lifesavers and what award holders are required to be on patrol duty.

## Preventive actions

A patrolling lifesaver has the primary role of prevention. A preventive action is a direct action taken to reduce or eliminate the likelihood of a specific rescue, first aid or other reportable incident from occurring in the future.

Preventive actions can be either 'static' or 'dynamic'.

Static preventive actions are interventions that, once implemented, have the effect of reducing risk to all beachgoers over time. Examples may include:

- Conducting risk assessments to eliminate or reduce risks posed by hazards.
- Erecting proper signage to identify key risks.
- Establishing the flagged area in a safe location for swimmers.

Dynamic preventive actions involve direct interventions with particular beachgoers, preferably at an interpersonal level, and can often have a greater effect on beachgoer behaviour than passive preventive actions. Examples may include:

- Communication with swimmers to ensure they maintain their position between the flags.
- Direct communications with particular individuals or groups of beachgoers engaged in risky behaviour.
- Providing surf awareness education to members of the public.
- Public address announcements to particular board-riders encroaching on the flagged area.

Just as incidents are reported, so are preventive actions. These statistics contribute to the research and drowning prevention strategies utilised by LSV and SLSA.

## Crowd control

When an incident occurs, it is natural for members of the public to want to see what is happening. However, unintentional interference by onlookers can hinder the progress of a rescue or first aid treatment. It is important for patrol team members not directly involved in the incident to try to keep the public clear of the scene.

A 'public address' (PA) announcement or a loudhailer ('megaphone') may be used to clear an area if necessary.

Patrol Members may also attempt to create a visual barrier using towels and umbrellas to help control the crowd while maintaining the victim's privacy.

It is essential to have a clear area to work, and people must be kept back during the incident to enable appropriate care of patients.

Patrol Members allocated the tasks of crowd control should always be polite and courteous when dealing with the public but must remain in control in their endeavours to keep the public at a safe distance.

If there are not enough patrol team members for crowd control, you can try allocating a bystander to this role. Most people will be happy to help, and this will give them something to do while you are focused on rescuing or treating the victim. One such technique might be for the bystander to draw a line in the sand or a circle around the exclusion area. This can then be used to keep a crowd from gathering in an area where they will be in the way. The assisting bystander can then define the area they are asking people to stay away from.

## Search and rescue operations

Lifesavers may sometimes be required to take part in organised search and rescue (SAR) operations during patrol or while off duty. In some situations, they may be asked to assist in searches in unfamiliar areas away from their local surf lifesaving club or lifeguard base. An organised search may be conducted for a missing person or group of people, either at sea or on land.

Search and Rescue activity will be undertaken in accordance with SOP 5.3 – Rescue Procedures, SOP 5.4 Search and Rescue Procedures and SOP 5.7 – Missing Persons.

## Major emergencies

During patrol, a major emergency may occur on the beach. This might include a serious first aid situation or being called on to assist other emergency services. If the Patrol Captain is concerned that the team does not have enough resources to maintain effective surveillance of the beach while attending to a major emergency, the Patrol Captain may decide to close the beach until the team is ready to resume surveillance.

## Closing the beach

If you are required to close the beach due to the prevailing conditions or an emergency, please follow SOP 1.5 – Beach Closure.

## Working with other emergency services

The various services available to a lifesaving club form a vital link in effectively controlling an emergency. Patrol Members must have a good knowledge of the emergency services available in their area of operation when seeking assistance. Many emergencies arise outside normal patrol hours, and therefore, members also need to know where various pieces of lifesaving equipment are stored. You can refer to the SOP5.10 Duty Officers for further information on the support available.

The increased development of coastal areas has led to a greater need for efficient lifesaving services. Some sections of the coast are patrolled by surf lifesaving clubs and/or lifeguard services with their inflatable rescue boats, while support such as rescue watercraft (RWC), Marine Search and Rescue (MSAR) rescue boats and helicopters provide coverage that overlaps and covers other gaps in service. Search and rescue support operations provide gap coverage with the ability to cover large sections of coastline and areas not covered by beach patrols.

## Concluding patrol operations

Patrol operations will finish when you hand over to another patrol to take over management of the beach, or at the end of the day, at the time designated by your Lifesaving Service Agreement.

At the end of routine patrol operations, it is important that all gear and equipment is returned to 'rescue readiness' in preparation for immediate use by the next patrol.

Before the team leaves for the day, the Patrol Captain will conduct a team debrief. This debrief will include:

- Completing all relevant reports and documentation.
- Confirming all SOPs were followed.
- Discussing how the team worked together, and any steps that could be taken to help the team improve their response in the future.
- Ensuring all members are aware of the availability of peer support.
- Identifying any patrol team skill gaps or training opportunities that patrol team members may wish to undertake.

During this meeting, it is important that Patrol Members:

- Encourage and acknowledge participation by all team members.
- Give and receive feedback constructively.
- Make suggestions for continuous improvements that you thought of during patrol.

## Special Considerations

All members need to ensure that the protection and preservation of life is maintained at all times.

In the application of this SOP, the following safety considerations apply:

- When assessing risk, responder safety is paramount
- Clubs are to ensure that an adult member (over 18 years old) is part of every patrol.
- Suitable Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and serviceable Lifesaving equipment should always be available for use by members.
- Clubs must ensure compliance with OHS guidelines and procedures, and the use of protective clothing or equipment provided at all required times.
- All members are responsible for identifying hazards, monitoring and assessing risk. Any incident which involves an injury, near miss, damage to equipment or any other hazard observed in the workplace should be reported as soon as practicable.
- The safety of the individual member and others should always be considered.
- Radio Communications to LSV Comms and other Emergency Services Organisations, when required, must always be maintained while the patrol is on duty. If this is not possible, LSV Comms should be notified as soon as possible and provided with an alternate contact number.
- Patrol member/s should be in close proximity to a radio at all times during patrol. Where possible, the Patrol Captain should always have access to a portable radio.
- Members should be assigned patrol duties and positioned accordingly, e.g. First Aid, Board Rescue, Roving Patrol, IRB Driver, etc. Only patrol members should be in the patrol shelter.
- At the commencement of patrol duties, the patrol must ensure they are signed on to LIMSOC and operationally ready (refer to SOP 4.3). At the completion of the scheduled duties, the patrol must also sign off with LSV Comms.

## Related Information

The following references were used in the development of the SOP:

- SOP 1.2 – Patrol Types and Requirements
- SOP 1.3 – Patrol Equipment
- SOP 1.4 – Remote and Outpost Patrols
- SOP 1.5 – Beach Closure
- SOP 1.6 – Inclement Weather
- SOP 5.3 – Rescue Procedures
- SOP 5.4 – Search and Rescue Procedures
- SOP 5.7 – Missing Persons
- SOP 5.10 – Duty Officers
- WI 4.1.1 – LSV Comms Sign On and Off
- RS 1.1.1 – Patrol Captain

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- RS 1.1.2 – Patrol Member
- SLSA Policy 1.05 Patrol Uniforms

## Definitions/Abbreviations

<i>EMCaR:</i>	Emergency Management Capability and Response
<i>IRB:</i>	Inflatable Rescue Boat, an inflatable soft or rigid hull rescue boat fitted with an outboard motor, rescue equipment and approved for use in Lifesaving Services.
<i>LIMSOC:</i>	Lifesaving Incident Management System and Operations Console
<i>LOO:</i>	Lifesaving Operations Officer
<i>LSA:</i>	Lifesaving Service Agreement
<i>LSV:</i>	Life Saving Victoria
<i>LSV Comms:</i>	Life Saving Victoria Communications
<i>LSV personnel:</i>	A collective term used to refer to employees, contractors, volunteer state officers and LSV volunteers.
<i>OHS</i>	Occupational Health and Safety
<i>PA:</i>	Public Address System
<i>PPE:</i>	Personal Protective Equipment
<i>RS:</i>	Role Statement
<i>SAR:</i>	Search and Rescue
<i>SLSA:</i>	Surf Life Saving Australia
<i>SOP:</i>	Standard Operating Procedure
<i>SSV:</i>	Side-by-side Vehicle
<i>WI:</i>	Work Instruction

## Attachments

Nil

## Revision Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Details
0.1	24 June 2025	S. White	Initial Draft Documentation
1.0	15 October 2025	Sash R	Final Revisions

## Endorsement

Effective Date	Endorsed By:
15 October 2025	Kirsty Robertson (COO)