

TEXSAR, Inc.
Texas Search and Rescue
Code of Conduct



Last Revision:

August, 2018

TEXSAR: Texas Search and Rescue is committed to the highest ethical standards. The success of our organization and reputation depend on the ethical conduct, and compliance with legal duties, of its Board Members, staff, and volunteers.

While the intention of this code of conduct is to guide us in the right direction, additional guidance on fiscal, human resources, and organizational policies are available as needed for specific situations. While no document can anticipate all challenges, the intent of this document is to assist us in making good decisions that are ethical and in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

This code is a general set of guidelines. If you ever have any questions or concerns, please ask. More experienced team members often can provide guidance. If you are experiencing issues with other team members, please bring it to the attention of the chain of command before it turns into a major problem. We have access to attorneys if additional legal questions arise that need legal advice.

We are committed to making a positive difference in our community and to having an organization that is relevant to all people, cultures, and communities. We are accountable for our work and results. We act in ways that respect the dignity, uniqueness, and intrinsic worth of every person – the community, the donors, our own staff and families, boards, and volunteers.

Texas Search and Rescue (TEXSAR) is an all-volunteer, non-profit 501(c)(3), first responder organization. TEXSAR's mission is "Committing to service-above-self, perpetual training, and inter-agency cooperation to maintain a constant state of readiness for search, rescue, incident response and above all else, safety."

We base our core values on integrity and responsibility, fiscal accountability, teamwork, excellence, training, and service.

For TEXSAR to conduct its mission and live up to its core values, its members must accept their individual responsibilities as representatives of TEXSAR. The Code of Conduct outlined below is a guide for members on how to conduct themselves as a TEXSAR Member. See the Standard Operating Guidelines for more detailed information.

I will adhere to all rules and policies in the Standard Operating Guidelines and TEXSAR by-laws. Failure to comply may result in suspension or dismissal from the team.

Change Control Guideline

This Code of Conduct will be reviewed annually and/or after an occurrence, or when a change of the code (or portions thereof) warrants an update.

The Chief Executive Officer or Chairman of the Board is responsible for incorporating all changes and providing a revised copy of the plan to all members of the Team.

Revision History

Revision Date	Change Information
October, 2017	Initial release of the Code of Conduct
August, 2018	Conflict of Interest Section updated; Change Control Guideline added.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY

A personal and organizational commitment to integrity in all circumstances benefits each individual as well as the organization. We therefore:

- Strive to meet the highest standards of performance, quality, service and achievement in working towards the TEXSAR mission.
- Promote a working environment where honesty, open communication, and minority opinions are valued.
- Exhibit respect and fairness toward all those with whom we come into contact.
- Respect the dignity of others. I realize behavior that constitutes harassment or abuse is unacceptable. I will refrain from using profane, insulting, harassing, or otherwise offensive language while at searches, training, meetings, and other team events.
- Will not misrepresent the intentions, capabilities, certifications, or mission of myself or of the team.
- Will not provide training, instruction, certifications, or anything that could reasonably be construed as expert advice while representing TEXSAR unless I am certified, trained, and expressly authorized by Command Staff to do so.

INCLUSION

TEXSAR is an equal opportunity organization and is committed to the principle of inclusion – that is the law and also our belief and values.

We therefore:

- Value, champion and embrace inclusion in all aspects of TEXSAR activities and respect others without regard to race, color, religion, creed, age, sex, national origin or ancestry, marital status, veteran status, sexual orientation, or status as a qualified disabled or handicapped individual.
- Refuse to engage in or tolerate any form of discrimination or harassment.
- While representing TEXSAR, I will refrain from public criticisms of fellow members, clients, other responding agencies, other search teams, and public officials. This includes personal online and electronic communications.
- Will work to cultivate the support and cooperation of other agencies, families, and the public during TEXSAR operations.
- Shall not participate in any sexual harassment or hazing of another member, client, or customer. I will promptly report any perceived incident of sexual harassment to Command Staff, Executive Director, or a member of the Board of Directors.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

We must avoid any activity or outside interest that conflicts or appears to conflict with the interests of TEXSAR, including involvement with a current or potential vendor, partner agency, or general citizen.

To avoid any conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest that could tarnish our reputation as well as undermine the public's trust, TEXSAR staff and Board Members must:

- Ensure that outside employment and other activities do not adversely affect the performance of their TEXSAR duties or the achievement of its mission.
- Ensure that we will not use our position for private gain, for the endorsement of any product, or for the private gain of any service or enterprise, friends, family members, or persons with whom the staff or volunteer is affiliated.
- Ensure that we choose vendors without the influence of family members or friends or are affiliated with, employ, or are employed by a person with whom they have a relationship that would create a potential or real conflict of interest.
- Ensure that travel, entertainment, and related expenses are incurred on a basis consistent with the mission of TEXSAR and not for personal gain or interests.
- Refrain from influencing the selection of staff, consultants, or vendors who are relatives or friends or affiliated with, employ or employed by a person with whom they have a relationship that adversely affects the appearance of impartiality.
- Will avoid appearances of impropriety. It is our duty to disclose all potential and actual conflicts of interest.
- Will accept no gift, gratuity, or loan in exchange for services performed while representing TEXSAR, unless approved by the TEXSAR Board of Directors.
- Not be a member of, volunteer for, or serve in any capacity in any other volunteer Search and Rescue Organization that provides services in the State of Texas or any part thereof. A Search and Rescue Organization is any group or entity that performs Search and Rescue activities of any type, including, without limitation, K-9, aerial, or ground searches, as a primary purpose of the organization. It does not include groups or entities that perform Search and Rescue occasionally as a collateral function, including, without limitation, fire departments, law enforcement agencies, and EMS providers.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

Confidentiality is a hallmark of professionalism, and also required by state and federal laws.

We must therefore:

- Ensure that we maintain confidentiality at all times and protect personal identifying information, medical information, and any other information designated as personal, privileged, sensitive, confidential, or otherwise related to any aspect of our members, subjects of our search, and also including law enforcement operations, tactics, means or methods. The duty to protect this information is perpetual absent express approval or authorization through the appropriate chain of command, even after affiliation with the organization ends.

- Ensure that no confidential, privileged, or nonpublic information is disclosed inappropriately.
- Refrain from use of information acquired in the course of work for personal gain.
- Respect the privacy rights of all individuals in the performance of their TEXSAR duties.
- Respect the privacy of others and private information.
- Recognize that all information, whether hard copy or electronic, is the property of TEXSAR and may not be copied or removed without express permission of the Command Staff or Board of Directors.
- Respect the privacy of and safeguard the confidentiality of information concerning any deployments.
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of information that a donor reasonably would expect to be private
- Respect and hold in confidence all information regarding a TEXSAR deployment unless otherwise authorized by Command Staff. The rights and concerns of the victim(s) and their families are our primary concerns.
- Any breach of confidentiality, intentional or unintentional release of confidential information or case-sensitive information may result in the immediate termination of membership.

RESPONSIBILITY

- Maintain accurate financial records and report our financial results in an accurate and timely manner.
- Be honest and faithful fiduciaries and protect the funds entrusted to us.
- Use the resources, equipment and material of TEXSAR only for the necessary performance of our duties.
- Comply with all limitations on incurring expenses in the course of authorized activities for TEXSAR and will not seek or receive reimbursement for expenses not incurred.
- Provide members and staff with a confidential means to report suspected financial impropriety or misuse of TEXSAR's resources.
- Always place the safety and welfare of a subject, our team, and my safety above all else. I will refuse to participate in unethical or unsafe procedures.
- Never self-deploy (attend other Search and Rescue deployments or events as a TEXSAR representative unless approved by Command Staff). I will not freelance or initiate an activity or task outside of the objectives and instructions given in TEXSAR deployments.
- Be professional while in uniform. I will comply with uniform guidelines at all deployments. I will not wear my uniform or intentionally represent TEXSAR at functions, events, or in groups unless authorized by Command Staff.
- Not alter or embellish the TEXSAR uniform without authorization from the Command Staff.

- Maintain accountability for the duration of my deployment.
- Only use emergency lights or sirens when responding to an incident when specifically instructed by TEXSAR Chief of Party or in a life safety situation. Both member and vehicle must meet EVOG qualifications.
- Be prepared mentally, physically and emotionally for the duty to which I'm called.

ALCOHOL AND ILLEGAL DRUGS

- Members will refrain from using alcohol while at a TEXSAR deployment, training event, meeting or while in uniform.
- The use of illegal drugs of any kind is strictly prohibited.
- The Chief Executive Officer or Chairman of the Board of Directors may make exceptions for the limited use of alcohol in uniform at specific private functions.
- Excessive use of alcohol or inebriation while in uniform or at a TEXSAR sponsored event will not be tolerated.
- Never respond to a deployment if impaired from alcohol or drugs including prescription medications. Safety is always paramount. Deploying under the influence of drugs or alcohol will result in immediate removal from the incident and termination of membership.

USE OF VEHICLES & CELL PHONE POLICY

- When driving to or from a deployment, observe traffic laws and safe operation of your car.
- If you are excessively physically fatigued after a deployment, do not drive. Catch a ride with another member or sleep and drive home after resting and recovering.
- Use of a cell phone while driving should be minimized to no more than is needed to assure correct directions or respond to instructions from the Team Command. We strongly encourage you to pull off in a safe place to take and/or make calls while driving to or from a deployment, training or any other TEXSAR activity.

FIREARMS

- Concealed carry of a firearm by our non-law enforcement members is permitted if the member has a current, valid Texas license to carry and possession of a firearm is otherwise not prohibited at the subject location, unless otherwise directed by law enforcement personnel or Command Staff.
- All members who participate in the concealed carry of a firearm while representing TEXSAR must have a current valid Texas license to carry (LTC)/concealed handgun license (CHL), which must be in possession of that license and must strictly adhere with all law regarding the possession, carrying, use of firearms, and/or use of force.

- Due to our operations in rough terrain and dealing with physically challenging circumstances, firearm must be carried in a sturdy holster, which securely retains the firearm even if the team member, holster and firearm are inverted, take a fall, or are bumped by equipment or other team members or similar.
- The team member must maintain safety as a paramount consideration.
- Open carry of a firearm by our non-law enforcement members is prohibited unless otherwise directed by law enforcement personnel or Command Staff.
- Concealed carry of a firearm is preferred for our law enforcement members while in TEXSAR uniform. However, open carry is permitted for our law enforcement members with a visible badge or while in law enforcement agency uniform in accordance with your department's policies, which will take precedence. You are requested to advise the team command and any law enforcement liaisons at the scene to avoid any surprises or misunderstandings.
- Any unsafe or reckless actions associated with the handling, storage or carrying of a firearm will result in immediate removal from the scene or event participating in, and potentially removal from the team. Safe firearms handling shall be observed at all times. If you are carrying, it must remain secured, or firmly attached to your body and concealed at all times.
- All discharges (intended & unintended) must be reported promptly to the team leader and the law enforcement liaison at the scene.
- If you are involved in a use of force incident, TEXSAR does NOT provide any legal representation for you and is not responsible for your conduct. You should have your own attorney identified in advance and be prepared to contact them immediately in the event of a use of force or firearm discharge.

TRANSPARENCY

We will:

- Communicate openly and candidly about our activities and operations, within the realm of confidentiality.
- Provide members of the public who express an interest in the affairs of the organization with a meaningful opportunity to communicate with an appropriate representative of TEXSAR.
- Make available for public inspection a copy of our annual report and most recent IRS form 990 filings, as well as a copy of our exempt status application.
- Recognize that I hold a position of public trust that carries an inherent personal commitment and my actions reflect upon that. I agree to disclose any felony convictions and/or conviction of any laws of moral turpitude.

GOVERNANCE

We will:

- Govern carefully and honestly to advance the mission of TEXSAR.
- Strive for excellence and professionalism in all TEXSAR related activities.
- Commit ourselves to the mission of TEXSAR and competently, efficiently, and professionally perform the duties and tasks we assume.
- Fully and candidly discuss issues entrusted to us and respect others' viewpoints.
- Endeavor to be active listeners and learners, embracing opportunities for others to express their ideas.

DUTY

We will:

- Seek guidance concerning breaches to the Code.
- Report potential or actual breaches of the Code.
- Treat reports of potential or actual breaches of the Code or laws as confidentially and respectfully as possible.
- Comply with instructions from leadership, whether at the organizational level or in the field under the Incident Command System (ICS). However, I also understand that I not only have the right but the duty to bring to another leader's attention if I witness or experience anything that is unsafe, unethical, illegal, or unprofessional.

MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- I will not speak to the media regarding specific cases or searches unless specifically tasked to do so by command staff. Direct all media inquiries to the Command Staff.
- I will not electronically transmit deployment-related images and data without prior permission from the Command Staff.
- While in uniform, I will not electronically transmit any inappropriate, compromising, or unethical situations. If you are unsure, ask for approval from Command Staff. The term "TEXSAR Uniform" refers to any article of clothing or item that has the TEXSAR name, logo, or emblem.
- As a representative of TEXSAR, I will be respectful as to what I post and share electronically.

POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND ENDORSEMENTS

TEXSAR encourages individual participation in civic affairs. However, as a nonprofit organization, TEXSAR may not contribute to any candidate for public office or political committee and may not intervene in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. In addition, an employee may not endorse a particular candidate or political party on behalf of TEXSAR.

You may not wear a uniform to a candidate's political functions or do anything else which would or could create the appearance of TEXSAR endorsing or supporting a candidate.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

Anyone who knows or suspects a violation of TEXSAR's Code of Conduct must immediately report the matter to the Chief Executive Officer or Chairman of the Board. If an individual is uncomfortable reporting the matter to the CEO or Chairman of the Board, he or she may contact any officer of the Board of Directors.

In conducting investigations of reports, TEXSAR will respect a request for confidentiality and/or anonymity to the extent possible, consistent with the need to conduct an adequate review and investigation.

The Chairman of the Board will determine whether the matter will be investigated and, if so, what issues should be investigated and who should conduct the investigation. If the report involves alleged conduct by the Chair of the Board, the Executive Committee without the Chair's participation will make these decisions. The Executive Committee has the authority to enter into contracts with outside legal, accounting, or other advisors for services related to investigations ordered by the Chair.

Results of investigations conducted pursuant to this policy shall be reported to the Executive Committee. If the Executive Committee determines that there has been a violation of the Code of Conduct, they will take appropriate corrective and remedial action, including but not limited to disciplining the offender. TEXSAR considers Code of Conduct violations to be major offenses that, depending on the circumstances, may result in suspension or termination.

Reporting Without Fear of Retaliation

TEXSAR forbids retaliation against any employee, volunteer, or Board Member who reports a suspected violation of the Code of Conduct in good faith or who participates in good faith in an investigation of such a report. No employee, volunteer, or Board Member is authorized or permitted to retaliate or take any adverse employment action whatsoever against anyone for reporting in good faith a suspected violation of the Code of Conduct.

Any individual who feels that he or she has been retaliated against in violation of this policy is responsible for reporting the retaliation in the same manner as suspected violations of the Code of Conduct. Any individual who engages in retaliation prohibited by this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

GLOSSARY

Confidential Information - the non-public, proprietary, private, or secret information preserved by TEXSAR.

Donor - individuals and entities that make charitable or in-kind contributions to the TEXSAR.

Employee - anyone who acts in a paid staff capacity on a full, part-time, or temporary basis.

Family Member - persons related to a TEXSAR employee.

Gift - includes any gratuity, favor, discount, entertainment, hospitality, loan, forbearance, or other item having significant monetary value. It includes services as well as gifts of training, transportation, local travel, lodgings and meals, whether provided in-kind, by purchase of a ticket, payment in advance, or reimbursement after the expense has been incurred.

Nonpublic Information - any business, financial, or personal information that is not widely known or publicly available.

Privileged Information - a communication protected from disclosure by legally recognized privileges such as attorney-client, doctor-patient, and others.

Vendor - an individual or entity that provides services to TEXSAR for a fee.

Volunteer - individuals who perform duties without compensation.

Code of Conduct Certificate

TEXSAR's Code of Conduct

I understand that it is the responsibility of all TEXSAR members and employees to comply with the Code of Conduct. Any violation of the articles of the Code of Conduct may result in the suspension or termination of membership.

I understand that if there is any doubt concerning the applicability of the Standards or Guidelines to a particular situation, I am to make contact with the Chairman of the Board.

I understand it is my responsibility to report violations or suspected violations to the Chairman of the Board or an officer of the Board.

I understand that any direct or indirect retribution for reporting violations or suspected violations is itself an independent violation of the Code.

The Certification process is mandatory for all TEXSAR members and employees.

I pledge to abide by the TEXSAR Code of Conduct:

Typed or Printed Name

Phone Number

Signature

Date

Please complete and return this certificate directly to the Executive Director:

TEXSAR
P.O.Box 171258
Austin, TX 78717