



## Wyckoff Fire Department Standard Operating Guideline

# 103.2.1

**Title: Development of Standard Operating Guidelines**

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**PURPOSE:** So that problems as a result of miscommunication may be avoided within the organization of the Wyckoff Fire Department written guidelines will be developed that will define how operations are preferred to be conducted. These guidelines, called **standard operating guidelines** or SOGs, clearly spell out what is expected and required of personnel during emergency response and non-emergency activities. They provide a mechanism to communicate legal and administrative requirements, organizational policies, and strategic plans to the members.

**OBJECTIVE:** This SOG will detail the processes involved in developing a SOG from its conceptual stage to the point where it has been instituted by the Department as a recognized SOG. This details the preparation, writing, and approval process in order to institute and/or modify SOG's that are utilized by the Department.

**GUIDELINE:** The SOG development process will be broken into eight sequential steps that address the most important organizational and management considerations for departmental personnel. The steps to be followed are listed below and will be further developed:

1. Build the Development Team
  2. Provide Organizational Support
  3. Establish Committee Procedures
  4. Gather Information and Identify Alternatives
  5. Analyze and Select Alternatives
  6. Write the SOG
  7. Review and Test the SOG
  8. Ratify and Approve the SOG
1. **The Development Team-** The Chief of Department will assemble a SOG Committee to administrate the SOG's of the Department. The committee should consist of the Chief of Department, 1 Deputy Chief, 1 Captain, 1 Lieutenant, and 3 members at large who may be of any rank within the Department. The SOG Committee will designate one of its members to serve as Chair.

**GUIDELINES (cont.):**

2. **Organizational Support**-The Department will support the committee in such a way as to promote sound and positive decision making. Additionally, the Department will provide the resources necessary to fulfill the objective of the committee.
3. **Committee Procedures**-The SOG committee will be concerned with the currency of existing SOG's and the development of new SOG's as deemed necessary for the well being of the Department and its members. The committee will perform a review existing SOG's, in order to ensure that they are current, up to date, and follow any local, state, or federal laws and/or ordinance. Additionally, the committee will identify deficiencies which exist and designate one of its members to oversee the development of a new SOG in an effort to proactively correct the situation. While the committee will be expected to lead the development of new SOG's, any member of the Department may author a new SOG with prior approval of the committee. In order to keep the process working, the committee will meet at least once between Department Officers' Meetings. The meeting time will be set by the committee chair.
4. **Gather Information and Identify Alternatives**- Research undertaken by the SOG Development Team at this stage should focus on gathering information, answering questions, resolving problems, and identifying alternative procedures for consideration as SOGs. Procedural alternatives can come from many sources. SOPs from other agencies might be modified to suit department requirements. Input from focus groups, drills, or exercises could form the basis for a new procedure. Specific language from regulations or standards can help identify procedural or technological options for the department to consider. Alternatives might be generated within the Development Team, using information gathered during the research effort, or based on input from other department members. Brainstorming within the group can be particularly helpful in this process; no alternative should be immediately discarded, however unorthodox it may seem at first.
5. **Analyze and Select Alternatives**-Members apply the information gathered during the previous research phase to identify specific procedural methods for addressing the department's needs. The basic analytical process involves a systematic review of each alternative from a range of different perspectives. Factors to consider include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - a. Feasibility—Is the proposed procedure realistic? Can it work “on the street” given the department's operating environment? How will responders react?
  - b. Implementation factors—Can the procedural alternative be readily implemented given the current resources of the department? Will extensive training be required, must equipment be procured, or will new positions have to be created?
  - c. Compliance with regulations and standards—Does the proposed procedure comply with regulatory requirements and guidelines found in industry standards? Does it minimize departmental and individual liability?

**GUIDELINES (cont.):**

- d. Political viability—Will the procedure survive the scrutiny of the public, politicians, and outside interest groups? How will it affect the department's public image? Will member groups be willing to participate? How will individual members react?

The results of the analysis are then summarized and displayed for each alternative. The Development Team next decides on the best alternative procedures to develop into SOPs. The selection may be democratic, or the team might provide recommendations to the Departmental Chief, who makes the ultimate decision.

- 6. **Write the SOG-** To be effective and usable by field personnel, SOGs must be written clearly and concisely, using a logical and consistent format.
  - a. Level of detail—Generally speaking, SOGs should provide only broad procedural guidelines, not specific details of task performance.
  - b. Clarity and conciseness—SOGs should be clear, concise, and written in plain English. Using an “outline” or “bulleted” style instead of a continuous narrative simplifies the presentation of information and helps clarify relationships among different components of the SOG.
  - c. Target audience—Write for the majority of the department. Generally, SOGs should be written to address the needs and educational level of the majority of department members, using language they can easily understand.
  - d. Flexibility and ambiguity—To be effective, organizational guidelines must be unambiguous. At the same time, SOGs should provide enough flexibility for the on-scene commander to make decisions based on the situation at hand.
  - e. The format of the SOG should follow the example template found in SOG 103.2.2-“Format for Standard Operating Guidelines.”
  - f. The SOG number will be assigned by the Chairman of the SOG Committee, following the guideline set forth in the Wyckoff Fire Department SOG Index.
  - g. Any references should be cited for future evaluations.
- 7. **Review and Test the SOG-** The process involves sending copies of the draft SOG to all members of the Department SOG Committee and any selected Department personnel affected by the SOG and others with pertinent knowledge or experience in the subject area. The purpose of this distribution is to receive feedback and/or recommendations for modifications to the SOG as well as to test the feasibility of the guideline. Any copy distributed at this point should be clearly marked as “Draft” so that the reviewers understand what they are reviewing. Once any modifications and revisions are made and then reevaluated, the SOG Committee will then provide the Departmental Chief, all Deputy Chiefs, and Training Officer with a “Draft” copy of the SOG for their review prior to the next Officers' Meeting.

**GUIDELINES (cont.):**

8. **Ratify and Approve the SOG-** The Chairman of the SOG Committee will present the proposed SOG at the next Board of Firematic Officers Meeting. Time will be provided for any questions and/or discussion pertaining to the proposed SOG. At the end of this discussion period the Chairman of the SOG Committee will ask the Deputy Chiefs and Training Officer for approval of the SOG. Should there be a split decision, the Departmental Chief will make a final decision. Once ratified, a hard copy will be added to the SOG manual on file in the Departmental Chief's office and electronic copies will be posted on the Wyckoff Fire Department website, [www.wyckofffire.com](http://www.wyckofffire.com).

**REFERENCES:**

- Federal Emergency Management Agency  
United States Fire Administration- *GUIDE TO DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR FIRE AND EMS DEPARTMENTS.*
- City of Phoenix Fire Department- *Operations Manual*
- Winter Park, Florida Fire Department- *Standard Operating Guidelines*
- Minnesota State University Fire Center- *S.O.G. Team Leader Guideline*