I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose: To provide Department members with information and instruction for operating safely at rope rescue incidents.

B. Scope: This instruction applies to all sworn personnel.

C. Author: The Deputy Chief of the Special Operations Bureau is responsible for the content, revision, and periodic review of this instruction.

D. Objectives: To assist Department personnel in recognizing unsafe situations and to ensure personnel operate safely at rope rescue incidents.

E. Definitions: See Glossary.

II. RESPONSIBILITY

A. All sworn personnel are responsible for the information contained in this subject.

B. Company officers/training captains are responsible for training personnel and ensuring proficiency with the information contained in this subject.

III. POLICY

A. Rope rescue incidents, in general, have a higher degree of risk than other types of rescues. Rope rescue incidents are often in areas of falling rock, snow, ice, swiftwater, sharp edges, tall buildings and/or other person made structures, and many other natural and person made hazards. It is imperative that personnel have the proper training, equipment, and skills to safely and successfully complete a rope rescue operation.

1. All personnel shall wear appropriate safety equipment at rope rescue incidents, which shall include a helmet, eye protection, gloves, brush clothing, and a whistle. Any personnel working close to “an edge” shall be secured to a separate lifeline to minimize any danger of falling.

2. It is the policy of this Department that a separate belay lifeline be used on all lowering and raising systems. The belay lifeline is the only means of protection should a fall or failure of the mainline occur. A separate anchor point should be provided. At no time shall both lifelines be attached to the same anchor point. A failure of a single anchor point with both lifelines attached may result in serious injury or death.

3. In the event that a second lifeline is not immediately available for a belay, and the incident requires immediate action to reach a victim in a precarious position, a rappel rescue system shall be used to reach and secure the victim until additional units arrive. Single lifeline rappel rescue systems have no back-up in the event of an anchor or lifeline failure.

4. All rescue systems, rigging, and personnel shall be double-checked before any rescue operation is started. This information shall be relayed to the Incident Commander prior to the start of the operation.

5. It is desirable to establish a safety officer as soon as possible at a rope rescue incident. The safety officer should be the most experienced person at the scene and should check everything from the anchor point to the rescuer to ensure that the lifeline is secure.

6. Before and after using any rope rescue hardware, software, and harnesses, all items shall be thoroughly inspected for cuts, worn or frayed areas, broken fibers, soft or hard spots, discoloration, or melted fibers. Hardware should be checked for damage, sharp edges, and to ensure proper operation. If there is any doubt about the reliability of any item, it should be removed from service immediately for further evaluation.

7. A safe rescue system shall be evaluated using these three tests (below). If your system passes these three stringencies, then it is safe to use. If you answered no or are unsure of these stringencies, your system is not safe to use.

    A. **White board analysis:** Look at all components of your system. Do they all do what you intended them to do (i.e., will your belay really catch a fall? is your pulley system really what you think it is? how do you know for sure?)

B. **Critical points examination:** Look at every component of your system again. Are all points backed up by other system components in such a way that no one point (either gear or personnel) would cause a serious or fatal accident were it to fail?

C. **Whistle test:** If a whistle sounded, and every rescuer held up their hands and let go of the system, would the system still protect the patient and rescuers from catastrophe?