



## General Operating Guideline # 100

Subject: Use of Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA)

Approval: March 16, 2023

### Section 1: Purpose

The purpose of this guideline is to establish best practices concerning the safe use of Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA), providing personnel with protection from the health and safety risks associated with contaminated atmospheres.

**Note:** This guideline does not cover the maintenance and testing (GOG 101) nor selection of SCBA equipment as these specifications are covered in NFPA standards and specific to individual manufacturers and the specific needs of the Fire Department.

### Section 2: Scope

The guideline on the use of SCBA is applicable to Lunenburg Regional Fire and Emergency Service personnel.

### Section 3: General responsibilities

#### SCBA Officer

The Fire Department shall have an Officer assigned to oversee the SCBA program. This person shall have the training and experience to administer and oversee the best practices for safe use of SCBA. Overall, this Officer is responsible for selection and training of SCBA personnel and adherence to best practice on the safe use of SCBA. The Officer may delegate tasks to appropriately trained Department personnel.

#### Fire Department Members:

Individual firefighters are expected to use SCBA when and where required and in the way they were trained. In addition, they have the responsibility to care for, maintain and clean their SCBA following the manufacturer's procedures and store them in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Firefighters using SCBA are expected to bring any issues related to functionality or safety of the SCBA to the attention of the SCBA Officer.

### Section 4: Medical evaluation of firefighters required to use SCBA

Using SCBA may place physiological burdens on firefighting personnel that vary with the type of work on the incident scene. The Department shall utilize a suitable medical questionnaire administered confidentially to each member who is intending to use SCBA. The questionnaire will serve to determine if there are any conditions that would prevent the safe use of SCBA or if a follow-up physical examination is required. The member shall have the opportunity to discuss the questionnaire and examination results with the Department and/or physician.

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After a member has received Department clearance and commenced use of SCBA, additional medical evaluations will be provided under the following circumstances:

- Member reports signs and/or symptoms related to their ability to use SCBA, such as shortness of breath, dizziness, chest pains, or wheezing
- The physician informs the Fire Department that the member needs to be reevaluated
- Information from the use of SCBA including observations made on scene, training, or during fit testing indicates a need for reevaluation

### **Section 5: Fit Testing**

All members wearing SCBA must be fit tested with the same make, model, style, and size of the face mask that they will be using. Fit tests will be conducted on all members using SCBA at least annually or whenever there may be changes in the member's physical condition e.g. significant weight gain or loss, dental changes, facial surgery etc. that could affect mask fit. Fit testing should be repeated if the member states that the fit of the mask is unacceptable. Fit tests will be administered by a trained/qualified member or certified agency. The protocol used will be stated on the fit test record for each member.

### **Section 6: Training on use of SCBA**

The Fire Department is required to provide training to all members who use SCBA. The training must be comprehensive, understandable, occur at a minimum annually, or more often if necessary. Documentation of this training shall be maintained.

As a minimum the Fire Department shall ensure that each firefighter can demonstrate knowledge of at least the following:

- 1) Why the SCBA is necessary and how improper fit, usage, or maintenance can compromise the protection provided by the SCBA
- 2) What the limitations and capabilities of the SCBA are
- 3) How to inspect, put on and remove, use, and check the seals of the SCBA
- 4) How to use the SCBA effectively in emergency situations, including situations in which the SCBA malfunctions
- 5) What the procedures are for maintenance and storage of the SCBA
- 6) How to recognize medical signs and symptoms that may limit or prevent the effective use of SCBA

Retraining shall be administered at a minimum annually, or when the following situations occur:

- 1) Changes in the department operations or the type of SCBA render previous training obsolete
- 2) Inadequacies in the firefighter's knowledge or use of the SCBA indicate that the firefighter has not retained the requisite understanding or skill
- 3) Any other situations arise in which retraining appears necessary to ensure safe SCBA use



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## **Section 7: General guidelines on use of SCBA**

Firefighters will use their SCBA under conditions specified by this guideline, and in accordance with training and the manufacturer's recommendations they receive on the use of each model. SCBA will not be used at any time in a manner not consistent with the manufacturer's intended use and certification.

- 1) All required personnel of the fire service will wear SCBA where the firefighter may encounter hazardous or Immediately Dangerous to Life (IDLH) atmospheres, including but not limited to:
  - a) Smoke
  - b) Elevated Temperatures
  - c) Oxygen Deficiency
  - d) Toxic Atmospheres
  - e) Below Ground Level
  - f) Confined Spaces
  - g) Atmospheres, scenes, or conditions that are potentially dynamic, quickly changing and/or unknown or if there are any doubts to the quality of the atmospheric conditions.
  - h) In situations the current atmosphere does not pose an immediate risk but there is a potential for it to quickly change, SCBA may be worn with the facemask removed but in a state of immediate readiness if conditions change and the atmosphere becomes contaminated e.g. atmospheres that have been reported to have a smoke or CO detector sounding but there are no signs of elements present or occupants feeling ill. Members shall investigate and if monitoring proves existence of contaminated atmospheres, members shall fully don SCBA face piece and be on air until such time as the atmosphere is deemed safe.
- 2) SCBA must be worn at all incidents until it is deemed safe by the IC or the Officer in charge. Premature removal of SCBA must be avoided. This is particularly significant during overhaul when smoldering materials may produce increased quantities of carbon monoxide and other toxic products. In these cases, SCBA must be used or the atmosphere must be changed and rendered safe. In fire situations, the decision to remove SCBA shall be made by the Officer in charge based on an evaluation and monitoring of atmospheric conditions. Prior to removal, fire areas shall be thoroughly ventilated and, where necessary, continuous ventilation shall be provided. If there is any doubt about respiratory safety, SCBA use shall be maintained until the atmosphere is established to be safe by testing.
- 3) All members using SCBA shall be annually trained and tested in the safe and proper use of the equipment.
- 4) Only members with a properly fitted face piece shall be permitted to function in a hazardous atmosphere with SCBA.
- 5) All members shall conduct user seal checks as specified by the manufacturer each time that they wear their SCBA.



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- 6) Members with facial hair that interferes with the face piece seal shall be prohibited from using SCBA. These restrictions shall apply regardless of the specific fit test measurement that can be obtained under test conditions.
- 7) Members are not permitted to wear eyeglasses, headphones, jewelry or other articles that are a safety risk and interfere with the face piece-to-face seal. Only manufacturer approved SCBA spectacle kits are permitted to be used by members requiring vision correction.
- 8) If a firefighter detects a contaminant breakthrough, changes in breathing resistance or leakage of the face piece the firefighter will notify his partner and Officer or the Incident Commander and leave the area immediately.
- 9) Accountability of all SCBA teams will be maintained. If a second accountability tag is being used, a monitor shall be assigned to collect the tag of all personnel prior to them carrying out their assignments. The member assigned to accountability shall maintain a constant awareness of the number and identity of the personnel using SCBA, their location, assignment, time of entry and expected time of return. If a second accountability tag is being used it is to be retrieved by the owner personally upon completion of the SCBA task.
- 10) Members using SCBA shall operate in teams of two or more and are to remain in close proximity and communication with each other to assist each other in case of an emergency.
- 11) All SCBA teams are to have an operational radio and be able to contact the Officer in Charge or the Incident Commander. If a team of 4 splits, both teams of 2 then require a radio each.
- 12) A second SCBA team is to be available to relieve or assist the first team prior to the first team entering a hazardous area. The Incident Commander shall evaluate the situation and the risks to operating teams and shall provide one or more Rapid Intervention Teams (RIT) commensurate with the needs of the situation. A RIT shall consist of at least two members and shall be available for immediate rescue of a department member or a team if the need arises. A RIT shall be fully equipped with the appropriate protective clothing, protective equipment, SCBA and any specialized rescue equipment that might be needed given the specifics of the operation under way.
- 13) The Incident Commander is to be notified immediately of any difficulties encountered by the SCBA Team and of any situation requiring rescue. The Incident Commander must immediately provide additional assistance as required.

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- 14) All members of a SCBA team are to exit together when the first low air alarm sounds, if one member experiences problems or as ordered by the Officer in Charge.
- 15) After a SCBA has been used, it shall be decontaminated (preferably in a dedicated area on scene to prevent further contamination of personnel and equipment), thoroughly cleaned, inspected, recharged and put back in service as soon as possible.
- 16) Personnel will be required to rehab and rest after using two bottles or less if very strenuous activity has been involved. If cleared by the rehab unit, personnel may resume SCBA assignments after sufficient rest and rehab.

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