

Swift Water Rescue Team Formed

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Story Number is 083006145



By Elliot Richards, Russell Fire
Westfield FF Ted Drummy is rescued into the boat by Westfield FF Tony Rix with Chester FF Rob Larkam positioning the boat While Ethan a Jr FF in Huntington is brought in to shore with the "fail safe"



By Dan Staruk
Members Listen as Butch Hendrick explains swiftwater rescue techniques during the classroom portion



By Dan Staruk

Instructor Butch Hendrick explains how to use low angle rigging for vessel deployment and positioning



By Dan Staruk

Cheif Morrissey with the help of FF Rob Larkam and Captain Corey Russell simulate a boat being pulled down river by the rapid current



By Elliot Richards

FF Rob Larkam and FF/EMT Dan Staruk discuss how to properly anchor the "fail safe" line to this large rock

RUSSELL, MA - Over the weekend of August 25th through August 27th members from Russell, Chester, Huntington and Westfield participated in a swiftwater rescue certification course. The course hosted by the Russell Fire Department was the final step in forming the first known regional swiftwater rescue team in Massachusetts.



By Elliot Richards

Russell Captain Corey Russell rescues Westfield FF/Medic Tony Rix with the "fail safe" set up in the background

Russell Fire Chief Mike Morrissey began forming this team in the fall of 2004 after 3 victims drowned in his town's section of the Westfield River.

The "Westfield River Regional Swiftwater Rescue Team" has the potential to serve Hamden, Hampshire, Berkshire and Franklin Counties. All with hundreds of miles of Rivers, Creeks, and Brooks which become raging torrents during the rainy seasons and are becoming more popular with whitewater enthusiasts and also have the potential to grab unsuspecting fishermen and citizens.

Chief Morrissey initially contacted 9 area communities to help form the team however only 4 responded with interest in the team. He then went to town meetings and requested an appropriation to pay for swiftwater rescue gear and the training required for interested members.

Through Paul Marsters with SARTAC, Chief Morrissey contacted Lifeguard Systems of Hurley, NY and set up the 20 hour Swiftwater Surface Rescue Program Level I certification course. The course taught by instructors Butch Hendrick, Tammy Acosta and Paul Marsters consisted of three sessions of training.

On Friday evening members discussed pre planning techniques, water hydrodynamics, and debriefed videos of actual incidents in Russell's meeting room. Saturday was spent at Russell fire headquarters doing land drills such as accurately deploying a rope throw bag, using a slash weight for victim entrapment and setting up low angle rigging for both a "fail safe" and vessel deployment.

On Sunday the team met at the Zoar gap picnic area on the Deerfield River. While the river was still low the team deployed the systems they learned about on Saturday and set up to rescue themselves. Then thanks to the power companies dam release after lunch the river rose dramatically and became rapid. The members then took turns putting in up stream and then floated through the rescue systems that were set up earlier in the day. This gave

members a chance to experience rescuing and being rescued using each of the different systems.

The members of the Westfield River Regional Swiftwater Rescue Team who attended the course from Russell are: Chief Mike Morrissey, Kevin Kennedy, Corey Russell, Mike O'Connell, Bill Murphy, James Nodwell Jr., Elizabeth Kowisto, Keith Bently and Jr. FF Dean Heppe. The Chester members in attendance were: Deputy Chief Grant Holland, Mike Canterbury, Rob Larkam and Dan Staruk. Westfield attendees were: Captain Mark Devine, Tony Rix and Ted Drummy. And from Huntington Ast.Chief Gary Dahill, Adam Cormier and Jr. FF Ethan.

For More information regarding the team contact Chief Morrissey at the Russell Fire Department PO Box 394 Russell MA, 01070