



## For immediate release

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### **“Billing for rescues and searches endangers public safety,” say state’s search and rescue teams**

For many hours the anguished wife searched for her new husband, missing above timberline in our mountains. The sun set and after dark a front rolled in enveloping the peak in solid clouds — in which her new husband and, finally, the rescue team members, could see but a few feet. The rescuers risked walking off the top of invisible 500' cliffs in the dark.

Why didn't she call for help for those many hours?

She was afraid that calling for help would cost her thousands of dollars. She had begun to wonder which bank account, hers or her new husband's, held enough money to pay the bill she expected.

Fortunately, the SAR team found the missing husband in the wee hours of the morning, but not before operating in extreme conditions with potential for a catastrophic, fatal, accident. She was very grateful and glad to learn her fear was unfounded.

In 1987 the Colorado Search and Rescue Board, our state's organization of SAR teams, stated it opposed requests made for reimbursement for anything except "actual extraordinary expenses" incurred while coming to the aid of someone in distress.

The Colorado SAR community has gone so far as to state it "will actively oppose and disassociate themselves from any effort to enforce collection of expenses from a victim or his family." SAR teams recognize that reimbursement for actual extraordinary expenses may be requested, and do not oppose those requests, "provided that such a request is clearly an appeal based upon a perceived moral obligation under particular circumstances, and that it is not a demand for payment nor apparently based upon either legal right or routine policy. We believe that any such request should be made privately and not publicized, so the victims and their families are not embarrassed, and so the general public does not infer that such requests for reimbursement are routinely made." The full position statement can be read at <http://www.coloradosarboard.org/csrb-sarfees.asp>.

This position is not unique to Colorado; SAR units across the United States have similar positions. The Mountain Rescue Association, the National Park Service and the U.S. Coast Guard all agree.

Citizens that enjoy Colorado's outdoors organized them selves as specially trained SAR teams and began performing rescues and searches in Colorado in 1946. There was no one else to do it. Today our state's nearly 60 SAR units provide this service to residents and visitors and still ask for no compensation.

When SAR teams are called and carry out the mission they will not bill the victim, local government or taxpayers.

The idea of not billing for our services perplexes many people. The reason is very simple — public safety. The SAR community knows of many instances in which someone in a dire predicament delayed calling for help. Others have refused to call 9-1-1 for help. Each "remembered" hearing, seeing or reading, "somewhere" that rescues and searches cost thousands of dollars and they would receive a bill. This belief is as unsafe as not calling the fire department when, in seconds, a small stove fire grows to the ceiling and begins to fill the entire room, because your first thought is not safety, but how in the world will I pay?

The Colorado Outdoor Recreation Search and Rescue (CORSAR) Card is for hikers, campers, climbers and other outdoors users, or who work in the backcountry. It costs just a few dollars and **helps cardholders help SAR teams save thousands** of dollars if something goes wrong while they are enjoying the outdoors. Hunters, fisherman, visitors to state wildlife areas, owners of boat, snowmobiles and off-road vehicles also pay into the state search and rescue fund through their state licenses and vehicle registrations.

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