Rescue Commands

Introduction

The purpose of this discussion is to provide a set of commands that should be uniformly understood by all field-capable members of EPCSAR. These commands cover typical on-rope work including belaying, climbing, rappelling, wheel carryouts, scree evacs and vertical evacs.

It is not practical or desirable to dictate a limited vocabulary to cover all communication between members during technical operations. However, commonly understood meanings to simple, clear commands improves efficiency. It should be acknowledged that other teams use different commands, and in some cases use the same commands to mean somewhat different things. Reasonable precautions should always be taken, especially in circumstances when a misinterpreted command can have serious consequences. Efforts have been made to define commands that will not likely be mistaken for other commands. For example, "Lower" and "Slower" are generally not used.

Commands

COMMAND	GENERAL USE	MEANING	COMMENTS
On Belay?	Any belay situation; climbing or technical evacuation	Request from climber or litter to belayer or break to verify that the belay is ready to accept the full load	—
Belay On	Any belay situation; climbing or technical evacuation	Reply from belayer or brake to "On belay?"	Load should not be placed on the system until this reply is received

Up Rope	Any belay situation; climbing or technical evacuation	Request from climber or litter to take up slack in rope	—
Rope	Any Technical Setup	A rope is about to be thrown	—
Rock	Anytime anything is falling	Something is falling	It is not necessary to identify the object falling; "Rock" is clearly understood
On Rappel	Rappelling	Rappeller is starting down the rope	Often followed by the rope color (or other rope identifier) if several rappel ropes are in use
Off Rappel	Pappelling	Rappeller has removed himself from the rope and it is clear for the next person	—
Climbing	Belayed climbing	Climber is ready to climb	—
Climb	Belayed climbing	Belayer confirming that he is ready for climber to climb	—

Tension	Belayed climbing	Take up slack in rope and pull rope tight	–
Falling	Belayed climbing	Climber is falling or about to fall	A safety courtesy only. Climber will obviously not always be able to give warning of a fall
Loading the Litter	Technical Evacuation	Litter informing the brake that the system is being loaded	–
Anyone not ready	Technical Evacuation	Query form any team leader before issuing a command	Better than "Everyone Ready?" as only the lack of a reply ensures that the entire team is ready
Lift on Three	Technical Evacuation	Litter bearers lift the litter on count of three	
On your command	Technical Evacuation	Command from top commander that uphill or brake is ready to move at litter's command	The litter mover at the litter's request, not at the top's request
Down	Technical Evacuation	Litter requesting to be lowered by the brake	–

Slow	Technical Evacuation	Litter requesting reduction in movement speed	—
Down down	Technical Evacuation	Request from the litter to increase lowering speed	—
Head	High angle technical evacuation	Request from the litter to move only the rope connected to the head of the litter up or down, depending upon whether an up-haul or lowering is underway	—
Foot	High angle technical evacuation	Request from the litter to move only the rope connected to the head of the litter up or down, depending upon whether an up-haul or lowering is underway	—
Stop	Technical evacuation	STOP!	Anyone can call stop
Stop why stop	Technical evacuation	STOP! Query from litter, brake, or haul team; the litter has stopped moving and the reason is not apparent	Lack of movement could be due rope or litter caught on an obstruction.
Up	Up-haul	Raise the Litter	—

Up Up	Up-haul	increase the speed of raising	–
Set	Up-haul, sometimes lowering	Up-haul: Ratchet Prusiks are set and ready to take the load Lowering: Prusiks are set	–
Reset	Up-haul	Command from top command that the up-haul is to be reset	Alway preceded by "Set" from the prusik tender; should be relayed to the litter team as a litter my descend some
Reset ready	Up-Haul	Prusiks that arch to the haul line to load the line are set and ready for the up-haul to resume	These Prusiks may attach a separate "Piggyback" haul system to a load line or attach a pull to a load line in a simple system
Down on three	Technical evacuation	Litter bearers lower the litter to the ground on count of three	
Slack	Any belay situation; climbing to technical evacuation	Command from the climber or litter that slack is needed in the rope	Does not mean that the need for belay is past

Off Belay	Any belay situation; climbing to technical evacuation	Climber or litter in a safe location and belay is no longer needed	Climber or litter may or may not still be attached to the rope
Off Rope / Ropes Free	Any belay situation; climbing to technical evacuation	Climber or litter are no longer attached to the rope(s) and they can be pulled up	–
Belay Off	Any belay situation; climbing to technical evacuation	Reply to "Off belay" – Acknowledgment of command	
rf?#$@2c	Anytime	STOP!	Any misunderstood command means STOP

Special Concerns

1. During a technical operation, a radio channel should be devoted to the operation. All other traffic must use other frequencies or wait until the operation is over to avoid "walking" on potentially critical communications between the litter and brake or uphaul team.
2. Remember to key the microphone and wait a second or two before speaking to ensure that the entire command is transmitted.
3. As much as is feasible, these commands should be used in preference to anything else, and additional talking should be kept to a minimum. However, common sense should prevail, and if additional explanation serves a purpose, explain further. For example, if the litter needs to be raised only six inches during an uphaul, the litter probably should specify "Up Slow". It is

generally unnecessary to specify distances for movement of several feet.

4. Generally, commands are not repeated. For example, if a litter captain calls for "Down", the brakeman does not need to repeat the command back. Some situations may require repeating of commands, such as noisy situations where it is necessary to be sure the command has been heard.