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Standard Guide for Using Whistle Signals During Rope Rescue Operations¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This guide covers the methodology for the use of whistles as a means of communication during rope rescue operations.

1.2 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety, health, and environmental practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

1.3 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

2. Terminology

2.1 There are no terms in this guide that require new or other than dictionary definitions.

3. Significance and Use

3.1 Whistle signals are a simple and effective means of communication between rescuers and those operating a rope-raising or rope-lowering system. They may be used as a primary means of communication or as a backup when radios fail or when ambient noise makes them unintelligible.

3.2 These same signals can be used in non-rescue situations, for example, by persons rappelling in caves.

¹ This guide is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee F32 on Search and Rescue and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee F32.02 on Management and Operations.

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4. Procedure

4.1 Using a whistle device, or method, with enough volume to be audible over ambient noise and for the distances involved, use the following pattern of whistle blasts to signal the required action:

4.1.1 **Stop**, 1 Long Whistle Blast—Used to stop all movement until further instructions.

4.1.2 **Up**, 2 Short Whistle Blasts—Means something or somebody is moving up or requires to be moved up. On horizontal systems it would indicate movement of the load towards the anchor or hauling system.

4.1.3 **Down**, 3 Short Whistle Blasts—Means something or somebody is moving down or requires to be moved down. On horizontal systems it would indicate movement of the load away from the anchor or hauling system. It has an opposite field of use to **Up**.

4.1.4 **Rope Free**, 4 Short Whistle Blasts—Used at the end of a climb, rappel, raise, or lower to communicate that one is off the rope, has found a safe position, and that the rope can be used by the next person or for the next operation.

4.1.5 **Help**, Continuous Blast—A general emergency call. Its use may indicate different actions depending upon the system in use at the time. For example, during a rappel, it would include the need for a bottom belay. The signal alerts others to come to the aid and, if necessary, work quickly and safely to effect a rescue.

4.2 A “Short Whistle Blast” is defined as 1 s in duration. Where the signal calls for multiple blasts there shall be a 1-s interval between each blast. A “Long Whistle Blast” is 3 s in duration. A “Continuous Blast” indicating the need for help should be long enough to attract attention and be differentiated from any other signal, at least 10 s if possible.

4.3 These same patterns could be used with any audible signaling device such as a compressed gas horn, vehicle horn, and so forth.

5. Keywords

5.1 signals; whistles