GUIDANCE ON MERIT BADGE COUNSELOR QUALIFICATIONS

References:

(1) *Advancement Committee Policies and Procedures*, BSA Publication Number 33088D.
(2) *Guide to Safe Scouting*, BSA Publication Number 34416D.
(3) *The District: How the District Carries Out the Operational Mission of the Council, BSA* Publication Number 33070B.

BACKGROUND

The only stated requirement specifically for merit badge counselors is that "They must be men and women of good character, age 18 or older, and recognized as having the skills and education in the subjects for which they are to serve as merit badge counselors, as well as having the ability to work with Scout-age boys" (Reference 1, page 13). However, Reference 2 states very specific requirements for many Scout activities reflected in the merit badge program. Merit Badge instruction is considered a Scout activity and, therefore, is covered by the policies in Reference 2. The District Advancement Committee is responsible for interpreting and carrying out the advancement policies of the council (Reference 3, page 9). To assist unit leaders in determining the qualifications of potential merit badge counselors, the Goose Creek District Advancement Committee is providing this document which consolidates relevant information from the referenced publications.

SCOPE

This guidance applies to counselors for 13 different merit badges:

(1) Aquatics related badges: Canoeing, Lifesaving, Motorboating, Rowing, Small-boat Sailing, Swimming, Waterskiing, and Whitewater;
(2) Shooting skills related badges: Rifle Shooting and Shotgun Shooting;
(3) Sports related merit badges: Climbing, Skating, and Snow Sports.

GUIDANCE

Merit Badge Counselors must complete and submit National Form 34405, Merit Badge Counselor Information form, and the NCAC supplemental page 2 upon registering to become a counselor. This form and the supplemental page have blanks for the prospective counselor to relate his or her experience, training, and certifications for each merit badge. The Advancement Committees of the unit and the District use this form to judge the appropriateness of a person's qualifications. Therefore, its completion should not be treated lightly. The first line to evaluate a counselor's qualifications is the unit submitting the form. The District Advancement Committee is the final authority for

determining if a person is qualified. A new form 34405 must be submitted whenever a counselor adds a merit badge to his or her portfolio of badges being counseled.

Aquatics Related Badges. The approval of an individual to serve as a merit badge counselor assumes the possibility that there will be instruction with two or more Scouts with no other adult leaders present. The following are extracts from the policy on Aquatics Safety found in Reference 2 and are applicable to all eight aquatics related merit badges.

> "All swimming activity must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult **age 21 or older** who understands and knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of youth members in his or her care, who is experienced in the water and confident of his or her ability to respond in the event of an emergency, and who is **trained in** and committed to compliance with the eight points of **BSA Safe Swim Defense**." (Emphasis added; Reference 2, page 8)
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> "This specialized skill [cardiopulmonary resuscitation, CPR] to endeavor to revive victims of cardiac arrest (no breathing-no pulse) may be taught to Boy Scouts and Venturers by an instructor currently trained by the American Red Cross or American Heart Association." (Reference 2, page 32; BSA Northeast Region expands the number of certifying organizations.)

Evidence of meeting these qualifications will be shown on National Form 34405, Merit Badge Counselor Information form, and the NCAC supplemental page 2.

- their age on page 1 (must be 21 or older);
- and a statement on page 2 that the individual has completed Safe Swim Defense Training (available on-line through the NCAC web site); and,
- a statement on page 2 that he or she is currently trained for CPR and the training organization's name.

Following are **additional requirements** for specific aquatics related merit badges.

Canoeing, Motorboating, Rowing, Small-boat Sailing, Waterskiing, and Whitewater merit badges. Counselors for any of these six merit badges must meet the policy stated as follows:

> "All activity afloat must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult **age 21 or older** who understands and knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of the children in his or her care, who is experienced and **qualified in the particular watercraft skills and equipment involved** in the activity, and who is committed to compliance with the nine points of BSA Safety Afloat. One such supervisor is required for each 10 people, with a minimum of two adults for any one group. At least one supervisor must be age 21 or older, and the remaining supervisors must be age 18 or older. All supervisors **must complete BSA Safety Afloat and Safe Swim Defense training** and rescue training for the type of watercraft to be used in the activity, and at least one **must be trained in CPR**." (emphasis added; Reference 2, page 11)

Evidence of compliance with the referenced policy should be indicated on the NCAC supplement to Form 34405 by showing he or she

- has completed the BSA Safety Afloat training (available on-line through the NCAC web site); and,
- the types and sizes of watercraft he or she has had sufficient experience by which to instruct Scouts.

Lifesaving. It is the strong belief of the District Advancement Committee that to ensure Scouts are instructed in safe and approved methods of aquatics lifesaving, instructors should be formally trained. The committee believes that certification as a BSA Lifeguard or Red Cross Lifeguard is evidence of the appropriate level of training and such certification should be indicated on the NCAC supplemental page.

Swimming. Reference 2 provides the following policy relevant to Swimming Merit Badge requirement 8.a:

> "At a minimum, the supervisor must possess skills and knowledge matching the Snorkeling, BSA award…." (Reference 2, page 16)

This experience should be shown on the NCAC supplemental page.

Waterskiing. Counselors for Waterskiing merit badge should be aware of the following safety information:

> "The Water-Skier's Safety Code and Boat Driver's Safety Code are found in the Waterskiing merit badge pamphlet. These are guidelines to be followed by all those involved in the sport of waterskiing." (Reference 2, page 19)

Shooting Skills Related Badges. Basic BSA policy regarding shooting skills is this:

> "Boy Scouts are permitted to fire .22-caliber bolt-action, single-shot rifles, air rifles, shotguns, and muzzleloading long guns **under the direction of a certified instructor, 21 years of age or older**, within the standards outlined in current Scouting literature and bulletins. BSA policy does not permit the use of handguns in the Boy Scouting program." (emphasis added; Reference 2, page 35)

Qualifications specifically for each badge follow.

Rifle Shooting Merit Badge. In addition to the age requirement, Reference 2 requires a counselor hold a current NRA certification as a rifle instructor or coach. Furthermore, if requirement 2, Option C, Muzzle-loading Rifle Shooting, is to be taught, the counselor must be a currently certified NRA/NMLRA muzzleloading rifle instructor (Reference 2, page 36).

Shotgun Shooting Merit Badge. In addition to the age requirement, a counselor must be a currently NRA-certified shotgun instructor or coach Reference 2, page 36).

A counselor for either Rifle Shooting or Shotgun Shooting Merit Badge should show his or her qualifications by

- Stating their age (21 or older) on page 1 of the Merit Badge Counselor Information form; and,
- Identify on page 2 of the information form their certification as an instructor appropriate to the badge, as described above.

Sports Related Merit Badges

Climbing Merit Badge. Following is the BSA policy for climbing and rappelling activities:

> "A qualified rock climbing instructor who is **at least 21 years of age** must supervise all BSA climbing/rappelling activities. A currently trained BSA climbing director or instructor is highly recommended. Contact your local council or regional service center to locate a qualified individual. **The climbing instructor has successfully completed a minimum of 10 hours of instructor training for climbing/rappelling from a nationally or regionally recognized organization, a climbing school, a college-level climbing/rappelling course, or is a qualified BSA climbing instructor**." (emphasis added; Reference 2, page 40)
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> "Every instructor **must have prior experiences in teaching climbing/ rappelling to youth and must agree to adhere to Climb On Safely and the guidelines set in Topping Out."** (emphasis added; Reference 2, page 41)

A counselor for Climbing Merit Badge must show his or her qualifications by

- Stating their age (21 or older) on page 1 of the Merit Badge Counselor Information form;
- Identify on page 2 of the information form their successful completion of training as required;
- Identify on page 2 of the form their prior experience teaching climbing to youth; and,
- State they have read and agree to Climb on Safely and the guidelines set in Topping Out.

Cycling. Following is BSA policy regarding cycling activities:

> "All unit, district, council, and national event activities must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult **at least age 21** who understands and knowingly accepts responsibility for the safety of children in his or her care, **who is experienced with the skills and equipment involved in the activity**, and who is **committed to compliance with these BSA safety guidelines**." (emphasis added; Reference 2, page 45)

A counselor for Cycling Merit Badge should describe his or her sport bicycling experience in sufficient detail to indicate qualification. Additionally, they should be aware of the BSA safety guidelines listed in Reference 2.

Skating Merit Badge. Following is BSA policy regarding skating activities:

> "BSA skating at any level shall be supervised by an adult **at least 21 years of age, experienced in the use of skates and skateboards**," (emphasis added; Reference 2, page 46)
>
> "This specialized skill [cardiopulmonary resuscitation, CPR] to endeavor to revive victims of cardiac arrest (no breathing-no pulse) may be taught to Boy Scouts and Venturers by an instructor currently trained by the American Red Cross or American Heart Association." (Reference 2, page 32)

A counselor for Skating Merit Badge should describe his or her experience in sufficient detail to indicate qualification. Additionally, they should be aware of the BSA safety guidelines listed in Reference 2.

Snow Sports Merit Badge. Following is BSA policy regarding winter sports safety:

"All winter activities must be supervised by mature and conscientious adults (at least one of whom must be **age 21 or older**) who understand and knowingly accept responsibility for the well-being and safety of the youth in their care, who are **experienced and qualified in the particular skills and equipment involved in the activity**, and who are committed **to compliance with the seven points of BSA Winter Sports Safety**." (emphasis added; Reference 2, page 55)

A counselor for Snow Sports Merit Badge should describe his or her experience in sufficient detail to indicate qualification. Additionally, they should be aware of the BSA safety guidelines listed in Reference 2.

APPLICABILITY

The guidance contained herein applies to all merit badge counselors for the badges stated for those counselors to be approved by Goose Creek District. Unit leaders recruiting counselors for the merit badges listed under "Scope" are requested to follow these guidelines prior to submitting applications to the District and the NCAC.

EFFECTIVE DATE

This guidance is effective immediately for all new merit badge counselors for any of the badges listed herein (including any existing counselor who is adding one of these badges to his or her portfolio). Counselors for these badges already on the list of approved district merit badge counselors, or whose paperwork has been submitted for approval, are not affected for the remainder of this annual term ending May 31, 2005. Present counselors for these badges must meet these guidelines upon renewal of their district certification effective June 1, 2005, and must submit a new Merit Badge Information form for the badges concerned, showing their qualifications as requested above.