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Golden “does the right thing,” say state rescue organizations

Denver, Colo. June 8, 2009 In a joint statement, the Colorado Search and Rescue Board and the Mountain Rescue Association’s Rocky Mountain Region announced, “We applaud the Golden City Council for doing the right thing in ending the city’s practice of billing recreationalists and sportsmen for rescue outside the city.”

Richard Solosky, chairman of the Rocky Mountain Region of the national Mountain Rescue Association said, “We are very pleased that the city took into account the unintended consequences of the city’s practice of billing for rescue, which put hikers and climbers in the dangerous position of wondering if they could afford to call for help if they had an accident.”

“The hikers, hunters, climbers, fisherman, bicyclists, campers, skiers and snowmobilers that compose Colorado’s search and rescue teams praise Golden for its decision; we appreciate the city’s council’s vote on June 5 to change the ordinance,” said Colorado Search and Rescue Board President Bruce Fosdick.

A city ordinance required the city to bill anyone it rescued outside the city limits. The Golden Fire Department responds in Clear Creek Canyon, in unincorporated Jefferson County, at the request of the Jefferson County Sheriff.

Across the nation, local SAR teams and state and national search and rescue organizations have long opposed billing for rescue because the fear of being unable to pay the bill has deterred victims from calling 9-1-1.

The issue received national prominence in June, 2007, when Golden Fire Department billed David Seals, a visitor from Kansas, \$5,905 for his rescue after he sprained his ankle while hiking above Clear Creek Canyon.

In bringing the issue to the city council, representatives of The Bent Gate and The Golden Bike Shop, retail shops in Golden, and the Golden-based Colorado Mountain Club said the city caters to outdoor recreation but the city’s practice of billing discouraged their customers and members from coming to the Golden area for recreation and to purchase outdoor gear.

The Golden City Council revised its policy to exempt people engaged in recreation, June 4, 2009. The Golden Fire Department will continue to bill for responding outside the city for motor vehicle crashes, hazardous material spills and water rescue.