

Connecting the Search and Rescue Sector

news



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The Water Safety CODE

Before you enter the water get familiar with New Zealand's Water Safety Code.

4 simple rules to help you stay safe:

- 1 Be prepared**
Learn to swim and survive and set rules for safe play in the water. Always use safe and correct equipment and know the weather and water conditions before you get in.
- 2 Watch out for yourself and others**
Always pay close attention to children you are supervising in or near water. Swim with others and in areas where lifeguards are present.
- 3 Be aware of the dangers**
Enter shallow and unknown water feet first and obey all safety signs and warning flags. Do not enter the water after drinking alcohol.
- 4 Know your limits**
Challenge yourself within your physical limits and experience. Learn safe ways of rescuing others without putting yourself in danger.

For more information about how you can prepare for your water-based activity, visit www.adventuresmart.org.nz

The Water Safety Code

NZSAR is very pleased to be releasing our third safety code – the Water Safety Code – which has been developed in collaboration with the Drowning Prevention Council, Accident Compensation Corporation and Surf Life Saving New Zealand.

The Water Safety Code is timely, as 31 people have already lost their lives this year through drowning – an increase of 8 over the same time last year.

In line with the previous two codes supported by NZSAR (the Outdoor Safety and Boating Safety codes), the aim of this code is to provide the public with messages that encourage people participating in water-based activities to take simple steps to stay safe. We want them to respect the environment they are in, allow them to make smart decisions, and give them the confidence to explore and enjoy themselves while staying safe.

Christchurch Earthquake

In the wake of the devastating earthquake that hit Christchurch on February 22nd many SAR people and organisations have offered their skills to assist. LandSAR mobilised its biggest operation ever, a tent city (pictured) grew overnight as 350 volunteers set up camp in Halswell Park. You can read more of the SAR sector's response on page 5 of this Link.





Technology Challenge Workshop

“Tools, or toys?” was a recurring theme at the NZSAR’s Technology Challenge workshop held in December.

Identifying and sharing knowledge about existing, new, and potential technologies was the purpose of the day. It opened the door for a wide variety of issues and ideas related to affordability, needs versus wants, and possibilities to be discussed in a practical way. The day also included sessions on using cost benefit analysis, procurement methods and GIS to help in the decision making process.

The session on the life cycle cost of technology identified the challenges our sector faces: to keep everything affordable and still deliver; maintain and/or raise standards and skills; and keep up with public expectations.

Using the ‘whole of life costs’ of technologies, the presentation considered the ability to be able to recognise and prioritise things that are game-breakers for SAR (i.e. the helicopter and distress beacons). It pointed out that, “while we know that we just have to have ‘it’ we also know that we can’t do it all and we can’t have it all.”

- ‘It’ costs a lot more than the initial purchase cost
- ‘It’ needs to be maintained, trained, replaced, etc
- ‘It’ needs to make financial sense as well as performance sense

A number of speakers discussed the benefits of technology and the tools they are presently using, their limitations, and the potential for improvement, focussing on:



Life Cycle Costs (Whole life cost)



We need to be able to recognise and prioritise technologies that are game-breakers for SAR (i.e the helicopter, distress beacons)

- Searching, Detecting and Locating
- Alerting Systems
- Planning, Command, Communications, Control and Organisation

Panel discussions were held at the conclusion of each of these sessions. Among some of the technologies discussed was the use of UAS (Uninhabited Aerial Systems) as search tools, the abundance of new SEND (Satellite Emergency Notification Devices) to generate alerts, and the use of video collaboration software to improve command and communications during incidents.

36 people from all over New Zealand, as well as one Australian, representing a variety of voluntary organisations, government agencies and academia attended the workshop.

It was a valuable forum for the sector to identify technologies of future interest. Work is now underway to determine what areas the sector should follow up on. The detailed report of the workshop and copies of the presentations are available from the website: www.nzsar.org.nz under ‘Training and Workshops’.



SAR people: this photo taken at LandSAR conference, features current and past members of LandSAR Horowhenua and the Levin Police SAR Squad.

- Iain Watson (now LandSAR FSO)
- Ross Gordon (now SARINZ)
- Brent Swanson (now Tekepo Police/SAR PLO)
- Sean Judd (now O/C SAR West Coast)
- Stu Davies (now SAR advisor in P. North)
- Ross Browne (now LandSAR National Training Coordinator)
- Dave Ditmer (now Mt Cook)
- Chris Maher (Chairman of Horowhenua SAR)
- Warwick Price (Horowhenua SAR adviser)

SAR in action

Lady Elizabeth IV



It has been a busy summer for the newest addition to Wellington Harbour – the Wellington Police Maritime Unit’s (WPMU) launch Lady Elizabeth IV. The launch arrived in August, and has been described as a quantum leap forward when compared to the Lady Elizabeth III, which it replaces.

“We can do a lot more jobs, and we can do them a lot more safely. The operational capability is absolutely fantastic,” says Senior Sergeant John Bryant, Officer in Charge of the WPMU.

Made from aluminium, 18.5 metres long and fitted with high strength towing bollards, the Lady Elizabeth IV is designed for the conditions and jobs it will face in the Cook Strait. Its two Hamilton Jet propulsion units allow the launch to cut the travel time to incidents in half (weather permitting). It is also able to be used on extended operations of up to a week.

The Lady Elizabeth IV carries a small RIB which increases the options available to the crew as it allows the launch to stand off as the RIB makes transfers with smaller sized vessels. Deploying the RIB during searches immediately doubles the number of search assets and, along with the better response times, increases the chances of success.

John says one such example of the improved capability was a recent multi-day search where the launch was able to stay on the scene for the duration while they used the RIB to transfer replacement crew during the operation. “Lady Elizabeth III would’ve had to leave the search area to replenish fuel, and to transfer crew, but we never had to leave the search area at all.”

The WPMU works with the local Coastguard Units and Wellington Airport’s Rescue Vessel. John points out the importance of having good relationships with the other rescue organisations in the area. Dave Collins from Wellington Coastguard Unit is quick to agree.

“We are trying to engage more with the Westpac Rescue Helicopter, and we train regularly with the Lady Elizabeth IV. This all came together in the search for the three divers off Wellington’s South Coast at the end of last year. It was a great example of us all working together in a collaborative fashion.”

And John is pleased to see the recently released Boating Safety Code. “This is the information we need to get out to people using the water. The 5 steps are simple and if people follow them, fewer lives will be at risk. The Wellington Coast and the Cook Strait are very unforgiving. But that’s why we have the Lady Elizabeth IV – to go out and rescue people from those conditions.”

International observations

COSPAS – SARSAT. The Cospas –Sarsat Secretariat continues work to upgrade the COSPAS-SARSAT system. Future intentions include utilisation of MEOSAR satellites (GPS/Galileo/Glonass). This will allow very rapid identification of beacon activation and location. Return links are being considered for new beacons. Existing beacons will be backward compatible. New ground stations will be required to support the updated system. New Zealand is a heavy user of the COSPAS SARSAT system and possibly one of the highest in per capita terms.

Tracking Systems. Western Australian Water Police trialed two tracking devices throughout last year, and will be looking at developments from other States and agencies. It is hoped to have all Police vessels, Aircraft, and Volunteer Marine Rescue vessels on the one tracking system, which will allow the SAR Mission Controller to track all movement of SAR assets, especially in remote parts of the State.

SAR insights



Queenstown's official tourism site sets the scene: "Whatever you do, whatever your style, Queenstown will feed your imagination, fuel your passions and revitalise your spirit."

With descriptions like that there is no doubt tourists from across New Zealand and the globe are coming for action and adventure. For the local SAR community this means constant attention must be paid to education and prevention messages, as well ensuring that everyone involved in SAR knows their job and understands how their piece fits the jigsaw.

And so, for the first time, a coordinated multi-agency Marine SAREX was run out of the Queenstown Police Station in November last year, using the SAREX guidelines and supported by funding from the NZSAR Council.

Engaging an out of town experienced operations manager was vital to the SAREX's success. Mark Whitehouse, Coastguard's Southern Regional Operations Manager, was the Exercise Director. He had overall control of the exercise but worked with three local exercise coordinators.

Queenstown Police's John Fookes recognises the value of an external overview. "It is easy to get set in your ways, so getting that independent analyses prevents you from overlooking fundamental flaws that can become ingrained in your systems."

Mark says the SAREX identified good practices as well as areas that can be improved. "People from different agencies worked well together and developed a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The understanding and interaction between the Management Team on land and the Operations team on the water could be developed and the lack of VHF or Comms was also identified as an issue."

John Fookes adds, "Our skills for evaluating an actual SAR operation were more enhanced having gone through a well-run SAREX. We were able to apply a new level of objectivity – it helps with everyone's critical thinking. And it has resulted in a comprehensive report and a detailed action plan, which can be worked on by us all to improve our capability."

This SAREX could not have been more timely – given the events less than a month later in which two French canoeists lost their lives on Lake Wakitipu.

Mark Whitehouse: "This incident happened before we completed the November SAREX report. The incident debrief identified a number of areas in which we could improve performance, especially the potential involvement of local commercial operators. Their understanding of SAR procedures and on-water search techniques was something that could be quickly acted upon.

"Given the progress and connections we made in November, Coastguard decided to undertake this training immediately. Police, the Harbourmaster and Coastguard Queenstown coordinated the local commercial operators.

"We conducted a mini exercise on December 23rd which involved Incident Management training for on-land and on-water search patterns. It gave local commercial operators a greater understanding of how a managed, coordinated response gives missing people a higher chance of being found. It also gave Police and Coastguard a better understanding of the skills and capabilities of those commercial operators, who are willing to assist in future search and rescue incidents."

Insights

- Use the SAREX guidelines – to help identify key objectives and how the SAREX will be organised, monitored and debriefed.
- Use an out of town exercise controller – to cut through issues relating to patch protection or interfering personalities.
- It is vital to bring all the players together – not just SAR people.
- The Evaluation process is invaluable. We will continue to use that to build a more effective multi-agency response.
- This is not going to be an overnight change – but we now have a common set of goals and further opportunities to work together and develop relationships.
- We are building a seamless 'one SAR team' – and everyone participating needs to get value from the SAREX – so make them relevant, challenging and fun.

stats attack

Lives Saved, People Rescued, People Assisted

New definitions were adopted last year to improve the precision of information NZSAR uses to measure the effectiveness of the NZSAR sector.

At the start of each SAR operation, it is assumed that there is a person, or people, at risk and that they require the assistance of New Zealand's SAR services. These new definitions measure how these people have been assisted.

The new definitions are:

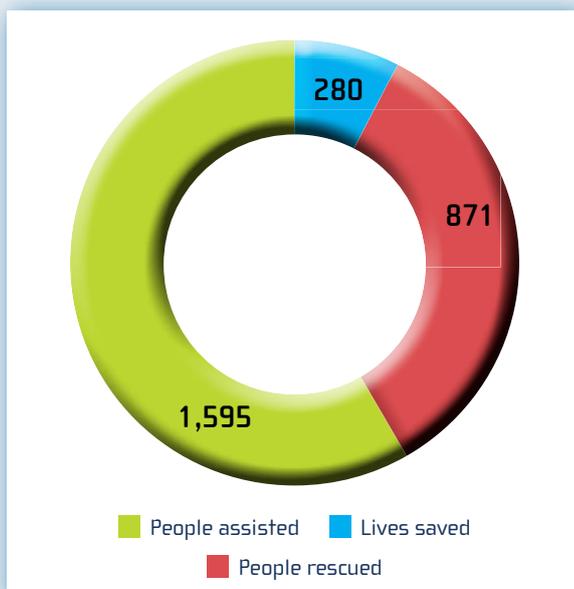
Lives Saved: Where, if SAR agencies had not intervened, life would definitely have been lost.

People Rescued: Where SAR agencies locate and rescue a person or people at risk and return them to a safe location.

People Assisted: Where SAR agencies aid a person or people at low risk, but who, if left, would be at risk.

Using these definitions NZSAR calculated that New Zealand's search and rescue sector saved 280 lives, rescued 871 people, and assisted a further 1,595 people during the 2009/10 year.

A total of 2,376 SAR operations were carried out, and 3,603 people were identified as being at risk. These are very significant numbers. They illustrate the major impact that the SAR sector has on communities throughout New Zealand and on visitors to our region.



news continued

The Christchurch Earthquake – The Sector Responds

In the wake of the devastating earthquake that hit Christchurch on February 22nd many SAR people and organisations have offered their skills to assist. Alongside this some organisations have been officially tasked with work – all of which has helped immensely in the rescue and recovery effort.

LandSAR mobilised 350 of its volunteers who have been tasked with checking homes, walkways and tracks in the west of the city – from Dry River to Lyttleton. Called Operation West, this is the biggest operation LandSAR has ever been involved in. Their teams are making initial assessments of every home in their designated area, determining the needs and wants of residents and gathering basic information for engineers. The volunteers are totally self-sufficient; they have set up 'tent city' in Halswell Park, complete with 3 days emergency supplies.



Coastguard volunteers from the Southern Region were tasked to help run the Windsor School Welfare Centre – a 24/7 operation for the first eight days after the earthquake. CIMS qualified personnel have been in great demand as this is the universally used command and control structure for emergency management in New Zealand. Coastguard teams from around the country remain on standby to relieve their colleagues as necessary.

Surf Lifesaving volunteers have been working the Christchurch City Council, running patrols warning people to stay away from the sewage contaminated beaches. They are also helping with the clean-up, shifting people out of affected homes and assisting Coastguard teams at the welfare centres. The National Surf Life Saving Championships have been relocated to Mt Maunganui, from New Brighton. The event will be held on the existing dates of 10-13 March 2011.

URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE

Urban Search and Rescue (or USAR) falls under the responsibility of Civil Defence and the NZ Fire Service. USAR involves the location and rescue of people trapped following a major structural collapse. This situation could arise from a single building or bridge collapsing, or as the case in Christchurch, as the result of a major earthquake. More information about USAR can be found at www.usar.govt.nz

Duncan's desk



As we go to print with this edition of Link – the tragedy of the Christchurch earthquake is still unfolding. On behalf of the NZSAR Council and Carl, I would like to extend our deepest sympathy to all those affected by the earthquake on February 22nd. Some of our organisations have lost members – our thoughts are with you.

We can be proud of the work our SAR colleagues are doing – from the frontline USAR teams to the many SAR people who have been helping on the ground in numerous ways. We have a brief outline of the work being done on page 5. I would also like to acknowledge the difficult and specialised work of the Disaster Victim Identification team, a number of whom are Police who work with our organisations.

Summer is always our busiest season and the 2010/2011 one hasn't disappointed. In recent months, we have conducted hundreds of search and rescue operations in and around New Zealand saving, rescuing and otherwise assisting a huge number of Kiwis and guests to our country. While search and rescue is well regarded in New Zealand communities, we must make the most of every opportunity to promote our SAR organisations and to let people know how to keep themselves safe.

The work we do gives us many opportunities to engage with our communities either directly or through the media. When the opportunity arises, such as after a SAR operation or during a SAREX, we can use it to foster support and goodwill for our organisations, encourage people to volunteer for search and rescue, and to let people know a few safety messages so they stay out of trouble.

The recently released Water Safety Code for in-the-water activities, the Outdoor Safety Code for land-based activities and the Boating Safety Code for on-the-water activities, can be used to present safety messaging to the public. These Safety Codes have been developed with the assistance of many SAR and safety-related organisations and are intended to present a set of consistent, core safety messages. Additional safety advice will be required for specialised adventurous activities (for example alpine white water kayaking, rock climbing or kite surfing).

If you have the opportunity to talk to the media or the general public, please take the time to let them know the points in the safety codes. One at-risk group who needs to receive this safety advice is visitors to New Zealand. We have a great opportunity to reach them because they often get advice from Kiwis before they set out to enjoy the country. Repetition of the messages in the three Safety Codes will help us to keep people safe and reduce the overall number of searches and rescues required in and around New Zealand.

If you haven't had the opportunity to read the NZSAR Annual Report for 2009/2010 (see www.nzsar.org.nz), it is worth reflecting on the huge impact search and rescue has on the lives of New Zealanders and guests to our country.

As detailed in this Link: collectively, the SAR sector saved some 280 lives within New Zealand's region of responsibility, rescued 871 people and assisted a further 1,595 people during the 2009/2010 year. This is a remarkable achievement. Saving one life is extraordinary but saving 280 lives affects a huge number of families

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This column alternates with Senior Advisor Carl van der Meulen

useful website links

www.nzsar.org.nz – Information and resources for the New Zealand Search and Rescue community. The Training and Workshops section includes material from all the workshops run to date, as well as the SAREX Guidelines. This newsletter is also available as a PDF on this website.

www.beacons.org.nz – Information about 406 Beacons, including where to purchase, rent and register a distress beacon.

www.adventuresmart.org.nz – General safety information and tips for the public planning outdoor activities as well as links to organisations housing specific safety information about their chosen pursuit.

www.backcountryrescuer.com – A US information resource for SAR missions in the backcountry.

www.smartboater.com – Is a Canadian site dedicated to boating safety information.

www.usar.govt.nz – Urban Search and Rescue.

www.uscg.mil/hq/cg5/cg534 – The United States Coast Guard.

calendar

Major SAREXs are planned for the following Police Districts in March – Central, Tasman, Southern, Eastern, Canterbury, Wellington.

April – Air Observer Training , Southern Marine Sarex.

See the online calendar for more information about these significant SAR training events – www.nzsar.org.nz

13 April – Combined NZSAR consultative committee and Council meeting Wellington.

20 – 22 May – Washington State Search and Rescue Conference Cowlitz, Washington.

2 – 4 June – US's NASAR Conference, Sparks – Nevada.