

Connecting the Search and Rescue Sector

news



Vendemiaire with Coastguard in Auckland



International Relationship Formed

Sharing information and skills between Coastguard New Zealand and their New Caledonian colleagues from Les Sauveteurs en Mer, has already produced results, thanks to a series of training exercises held in November.

The plan to develop a relationship between the two organisations was set in motion after Les Sauveteurs en Mer's Stephan Gil, visited Phil Pollero, Coastguard's Central Region Manager in 2008. Further planning coincided with a visit by the French frigate Vendemiaire to New Zealand, and so the date was set to formally establish the relationship while she was visiting Auckland.

A number of people from Coastguard and Les Sauveteurs en Mer attended a function on board the Vendemiaire, which was followed by a visit from a number of volunteers from Les Sauveteurs en Mer to the Coastguard Northern Region Marine Rescue Centre. There the visitors learned about Coastguard's training programmes and joined its volunteers in various marine training exercises.

Both organisations believe that the visit, training and relationship-building experiences were a great success, and it is anticipated that the association between Coastguard New Zealand and Les Sauveteurs

en Mer will provide further opportunities to share information and learn from each other's organisations.

If you would like more information contact Phil Pollero, Regional Manager Coastguard Central Region.
Email Phil.Pollero@nzcoastguard.org.nz

Water Safety Messages

For the Marine environment the four key safety messages are based on common factors in recreational boating deaths:

- **Lif jackets** – take the correct sized lifejacket for each person on board, and wear them.
- **Weather** – check the latest marine forecast and tides before you go out.
- **Communications equipment** – carry at least two means of communication on you.
- **Avoid Alcohol** – stay safe on the water.



NZSAR Core Curriculum

The New Zealand SAR community has taken another significant step towards the goal of 'one SAR body'.

Under the auspices of the NZSAR Secretariat, a working group of experienced SAR practitioners identified the common activities that are undertaken across the sector. This 'Core Curriculum' now provides a platform for consistent, interagency training of these common activities, knowledge and skills.

The content of the Core Curriculum (CC) is based on eighteen topics.

- 1 Government Policy and SAR Governance
- 2 NZ SAR Structure and Organisations
- 3 Law, Ethics and Guidelines
- 4 International
- 5 Research & Development
- 6 Preventative SAR
- 7 Risk Management
- 8 SAR Technology
- 9 Investigation & Search Planning
- 10 Rescue Planning
- 11 Management
- 12 Medical and Welfare
- 13 Media Management
- 14 Incident Management
- 15 Major Resource Utilisation
- 16 Incident Review and Evaluation
- 17 Training and Assessment
- 18 Common Terminology – Glossary

The Curriculum is primarily aimed at SAR managers and senior trainers to help them decide how to best make use of their training resources and to develop programmes not only for their own organisations but also in collaboration with SAR partners.

The working party operated on the principle that first-rate practice in SAR and related Emergency Management (EM) already exists, therefore it makes sense to identify and capitalise on that good practice and not re-invent wheels. A good example is the current work on EM competencies and exercises led by the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency

Management. Their Competency Framework fits well with the SAR Core Curriculum.

The NZSAR Council has endorsed the list of priorities for action, with Incident Management (topic 14 in the CC) being the prime area of focus for improving search and rescue work. An Incident Management training package will be developed shortly for use across land, marine and aviation organisations so that SAREXs and SAROPs continue to improve in effective and consistent ways. One manager summed up the Curriculum's role:

"This Curriculum gives me confidence to make decisions about training knowing that my colleagues in other organisations are on the same page. That has got to be good for us all."

The final report on improving search and rescue outcomes was signed off by the NZSAR Council in December. It sets out the Core Curriculum in detail as well as the other tasks the working group covered. The final report can be found at www.nzsar.org.nz.

The working group also produced:

- a list of key courses currently offered in the sector;
- a matrix of these courses and their location in the Core Curriculum;
- a decision that CIMS-based Emergency Management and SAR competencies are largely interchangeable (and therefore the CDEM Competency Framework is worthy of application to SAR);
- a 'first-look' adaption of the CDEM Competencies Framework for SAR purposes;
- an examination of current key SAR courses; and
- a list of recommended priorities for attention.

The regular working group members are Rodney Bracefield (Rescue Coordination Centre NZ); Ross Browne (LandSAR NZ); Laurie Gallagher (LandSAR NZ); Ross Gordon (SARINZ); Bruce Johnston (NZ Police HQ); Phil Pollero (Coastguard NZ); Brett Sullivan (Surf Life Saving NZ); Sherp Tucker (NZ Police Tasman); and Ted Preston (Project Facilitator). Other members are Nigel Clifford (RCCNZ) and Gerry Prins (NZ Police).

The members of the working group have brought their collective experience to this task and shown commitment, goodwill and open-mindedness in their discussions. The NZSAR Secretariat expresses appreciation, on behalf of the NZSAR Council and the NZSAR Consultative Committee, to those people and organisations who contributed to this work for the SAR community as a whole.

International Observations

Beacons: AMSA reports that Australia has approximately 135,000 beacons registered within their database and they estimate approximately a further 30% remain unregistered but available for potential use within Australia. The Australian developed beacons database allows bulk uploads of beacon information and has mechanisms to support beacon rental agencies.

Prevention: Many Canadian SAR organisations are involved with education about what to do if someone is lost. The Hug-A-Tree programme is extensively taught in schools.

More info: www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/hugtree-presarbre/index-eng.htm
S.T.O.P (Sit, Think, Observe, Plan) is used for adults.

SAR in action



School teacher by day, LandSAR volunteer by night

Rowena Johnstone spends her day in the classroom teaching primary school children and spends her evenings using those valuable skills and talents to run the Wellington LandSAR's training programmes. Originally a Guide and Scout

leader with a solid grounding in camping, tramping and bushcraft, she first became involved in LandSAR after joining the tramping club at Victoria University. Later, she discovered a brilliant way to combine her interests of tramping and walking her dog: through SAR dog training. "I decided to formally train so that we could get called out together."

These days Rowena runs the Wellington LandSAR training programmes, for both new and experienced volunteers, who must keep themselves up-to-date with the latest SAR techniques and constantly maintain their skill areas, such as first aid, tracking, electronic mapping and search operation management.

"I had done a lot of back country training through other organisations but this is a whole new dimension. Search management, and effective team work, is very interesting and challenging."

The Wellington LandSAR operational area includes the greater Wellington metropolitan region, Kapiti Island, and the Chatham Islands. Conditions within their search area are a mixture of backcountry and urban landscapes.

"It's not only bush SAR operations – Wellington LandSAR is also called in to help with suburban SAR incidents. Volunteers are trained to go door to door to conduct urban property checks through people's gardens. A lot of SAR is about eliminating areas, both in bush and urban settings. I might come across a cliff, well I can't search that. I might come across a house that I really don't feel comfortable about approaching, so I note it hasn't been checked. As long as everyone knows where you've searched and where you haven't, the unsearched areas can be dealt with and you can eliminate huge search areas. That's part of good communication and good team work."

Rowena says there is a real "buzz" when your team finds someone, although they are not always alive.

"The bad buzz is when you get called off a job and you haven't found someone. Not a good outcome. Finding a body is always devastating but at least it's a find for the family."

"Over the summer break I was called in to help search for a man who got lost in the Orongorongos, around 11 o'clock at night. We found him around 5 the next morning. He had lost track of time – it was dark before he realised it – and he wasn't equipped for staying the night in the bush, with no food, shelter or extra clothing. But he had known to stay on the track, which was a real bonus. It was also great that his partner alerted us early on, so he hadn't gone too far. When you think how far someone can move in an hour or two, and you make a radius, it just gets bigger and bigger and bigger. Because we had been called in quickly, we could make some assumptions about where he could be, and because he had stayed on the track we were able to find him quickly. Our role is not to judge how a person got themselves in that situation, but to rescue them. People need to know that, if in doubt about a person's whereabouts, they can always call for SAR services; much like they can always call for an Ambulance regardless of whether their injury is a result of self inflicted drunken antics."

Wellington LandSAR also helps search for suspected despondents, Alzheimer's sufferers and young children. "We may find them or we may find important clues that lead to them, such as footprints, cigarette butts, muesli wrappers and receipts. Our search management and techniques are governed by 'lost person behaviour': statistical evidence gathered internationally (which NZ contributes to), plus local knowledge (including what's not on the map – popular trails or old roads, etc). So, for example, we know that a person who is suicidal might go to a high point where they have a view; a familiar spot that has meaning for them. We know that most people will be found within 300 metres of where they were last seen. Many children will be found within their house or its grounds."

A lot of the skills Rowena has crossover between her work and interests: "I do a lot of teaching inside and outside the classroom. My LandSAR experience complements teaching because I am helping the children to think, learn and manage themselves. I set up the learning opportunity and help them decide what needs to be done next. I can't commit to SAR during the day – only out of work hours and in the weekends – but Skype, email and Google-shared documents help me communicate and manage the workflow efficiently 24/7."

Rowena says volunteering for a SAR organisation is not a hobby – it's a commitment.

"With a hobby you can choose what your involvement is and when you do it. With this, you are actually committing yourself to the organisation along with your availability for call-outs and training. It's also a community service: I am putting something back into mine."

GIS: Australia's Victorian Police SAR has made extensive use of GIS mapping systems, which are linked directly to hand-held GPS enabled PDA's, during their post bushfire work. They are making increased use of GPS enabled PDA's for SAR work, as are the other Police jurisdictions.

Numbers: Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCCs) near the English Channel monitor very high numbers of vessel movements. MRCC Solent sees approximately 10 million pleasure boat and 1 million commercial movements per year, and has 70,000 pleasure boats moored in the region.

Diary of a Beacon SAROP



RCCNZ Operation Room

Growing numbers of people are carrying 406MHz emergency distress beacons when heading into the outdoors – with latest figures showing more than 20 thousand beacons registered in New Zealand.

The Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ) is responsible for responding to all 406MHz distress beacon alerts within New Zealand's search and rescue region. It also maintains the database for all beacon registrations, providing a free service to all beacon owners.

RCCNZ's Nigel Clifford says beacon registration and usage has increased significantly since the old 121.5MHz distress beacon frequency was switched off on February 1st last year, with over 8 thousand people taking the opportunity to "make the switch to 406" since the cut-off date.

"In particular, we are noticing more people using 406MHz Personal Locator Beacons when heading into the great outdoors, particularly as the cost of the technology comes down, and as more positive publicity around the benefits of carrying them is generated."

"For example, there have been a number of incidents that RCCNZ has coordinated in which people in distress have been able to be rescued very quickly – sometimes within 90 minutes – because they have been carrying a registered beacon and have been thoroughly prepared for an emergency."

Nigel says the availability of GPS-equipped beacons (which provide additional accurate positional data in the event of a beacon being activated) has in several cases also helped to speed up rescue times.

"While carrying any beacon is great, we encourage people if they can afford it to buy a GPS equipped model, as this provides more accurate positional data and cuts down the size of the potential search area. This can greatly assist in the speed of the response, from RCCNZ's perspective."

So what does happen when an emergency beacon is activated? Here is a summary based on the log from a real beacon incident, responded to by RCCNZ.

Incident summary

Date: 30/12/2009

***Note:** All times are New Zealand Daylight Time using 24 hour format

10:29 – Resolved beacon alert – position: 44 35 South, 168 14 East (Hidden Falls Creek, Routeburn Track, 70km West of Wanaka).

10:31 – Resolved beacon position confirmed. Registration database shows beacon is registered to Southland Locator Beacon Trust. RCCNZ contact trust who confirm beacon was hired from them in Queenstown by a party of two from Auckland. Party's planned route confirmed.

10:35 – RCCNZ contact the Wanaka Police SAR Coordinator to re-task Aspiring Helicopters (call sign HAH), who are returning to Wanaka to drop off a casualty following an earlier incident. Helicopter already has Alpine Cliff Rescue team on board.

10:50 – HAH machine departs base for Hidden Falls Creek area.

10:58 – RCCNZ to Te Anau Police SAR Coordinator: to provide situation report and advise of helicopter tasking.

11:03 – RCCNZ to Police Southern Communications: to inform them of the SAROP and obtain Police event number.

11:36 – RCCNZ to HAH: crew confirm they have located beacon and tramping party. Unable to land directly at site, so are landing 600m above location. Rescue teams walking down.

11:50 – RCCNZ notes Otago Helicopters (call sign HUP) are en route toward Wanaka with paramedic on board and may also be able to assist with medevac if required.

11:53 – RCCNZ contacts HUP to discuss situation. HUP will be available at Wanaka in about 10 minutes to assist if required.

12:10 – HAH crew to RCCNZ: to confirm a 28-year-old male patient with broken lower left arm and gashed thigh, but able to walk. No other apparent injuries.

12:14 – RCCNZ to Ambulance Southern Communications: to advise of situation with patient and availability of second helicopter with paramedic if required.

12:25 – RCCNZ to HUP crew: on-board paramedic advises he will assess patient and decide whether he needs to be flown to Dunedin or treated locally.

12:28 – RCCNZ calls patient's emergency contact. Message left.

12:55 – HAH crew to RCCNZ: to advise they are landing with patient at Wanaka.

13:02 – Call from Te Anau Police to RCCNZ: update provided.

13:23 – Call from patient's emergency contact to RCCNZ: contact advised of situation. RCCNZ will call back with further information once details of casualty are received.

13:35 – Call to RCCNZ from HUP on-board paramedic: to report that patient will be flown to Dunedin for treatment.

13:46 – Call from RCCNZ to patient's emergency contact: update on patient given.

14:52 – Call from RCCNZ to Police: to request beacon to be switched off.

15:39 – Call from Police to RCCNZ: to advise that beacon has now been switched off.

Incident closed

Elapsed time from beacon activation till delivery of casualty to Wanaka: 2hrs 26mins.

SAR in action continued



Barry (Baz) Kirk

Coastguard Skipper

It's been a busy summer for the Coastguard in Tauranga. Coastguard Eastern Region Operations Manager, Barry (Baz) Kirk, says many beautiful, calm days on the water have meant lots of boating activity, and positively, any incidents have been mostly minor.

"This is excellent news as I think it shows the education aspect of SAR, which we strive to do well, is actually getting through to the public, more and more."

Gisborne born and bred, Baz's professional life has had a strong maritime focus; he became a commercial fisherman as soon as he left school. He skippered and worked on vessels of various sizes and configurations in a range of commercial fishing operations, both inshore and offshore. He also tutored and managed a Gisborne Maritime School. He joined Gisborne Coastguard in 1990 as a volunteer crew member:

"I became a Coastguard Skipper in 1993, eventually picking up the role of Training Officer. I became Vice President, then President, until I moved to Tauranga to become the Coastguard Operations Manager."

That was in 2005. Baz loves making a contribution to his community and helping those in need. He says being part of a team, and working in conditions that can be demanding, means everyone must be committed to training to a professional standard so that they can deal with a diverse range of problems in an efficient and timely manner.

"What more could I ask for? Working in an environment I have a great passion for, with fantastic like-minded people, is a dream come true. I used to envy those who made a career out of their interest. Now it's a reality for me too."

There are times when certain callouts or incidents can be traumatising to a volunteer, especially in a small, close-knit community like Gisborne where it's very likely they will know the person or people involved. Baz believes the key role of a SAR volunteer is to provide an answer or result that helps bring closure to the event. "It's often more taxing when you don't find anything and can't close the incident."

And he has had his fair share of incidents with both bad and good results.

"One of the biggest rescues I took part in was off the Mahia Peninsula. A commercial fisherman had been struck by a lead swivel, which entered his skull through his eye socket and lodged in the back of his neck, behind his ear."

The patient was in a critical condition and Gisborne Coastguard was tasked to retrieve him, as a helicopter was unable to fly due to failing light. We used a large planning hull commercial vessel from Gisborne to cover the distance (approx 3.5 hours) and rendezvous with the fishing vessel, taking a St John paramedic with us. I learnt a valuable lesson that day. No amount of medical equipment and paraphernalia is going to prevent an 'act of God'. We were told by the paramedic that things were looking grim. Keeping him as comfortable as we could, talking, reassuring and monitoring his progress, we watched him slip into a virtually unconscious state. Alongside the wharf, transferring him to the ambulance, he opened his one good eye and gave us the thumbs up. He recovered after a long battle, lost an eye, but survived. For me, that is the ultimate reward."

Baz says boaties can stay safe on the water. "It is all about being properly prepared, having the right equipment (and knowing how to use it) and not taking risks. "If the weather looks like it's going to get a bit nasty, they should be proactive and come home earlier. A good sailor respects the environment. If you leave things too late to decide – it's too late!"

Communicating with You

Link is produced for you by the NZSAR Secretariat as a way of keeping you informed of the latest strategic developments across our sector. Now in its second year, Link provides a greater understanding of SAR people and organisations. It also promotes the positive work the sector does on both a national and local level, and is part of the strategic leadership provided by NZSAR.

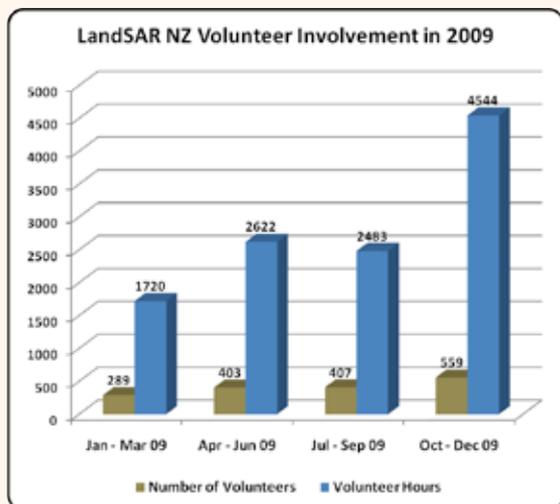
It is appropriate that NZSAR constantly reviews how we communicate with the SAR sector to make sure that we are giving you effective and relevant information in a form that you can access easily. Part of this evaluation involves a review of Link: we want to get your views on what works and what doesn't. Some of you will shortly receive a more detailed questionnaire about our communication in general and we urge you to have your say. In the meantime, please take 5 minutes to answer the following questions:

1. Does Link keep you up-to-date with the work of NZSAR?
2. Do you find the information contained in Link informative and useful?
3. What, if any, changes would you like to see?
4. What is your SAR role?

These responses should be sent to Blair McLaren at Splash Consulting Ltd, who is undertaking the independent review of Link for NZSAR. Blair can be contacted at:

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PO Box 3
Greytown 5712
Ph: (027) 672 2599
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stats attack



This table shows the involvement of LandSAR NZ volunteers in assisting the two coordinating authorities during search and rescue operations in the 2009 calendar year. This is representative of the significant contribution that volunteers provide across the whole search and rescue sector in New Zealand. There was one incident in October 2009 in which 86 LandSAR volunteers provided 1,512 volunteer hours to the coordinating authority. While such large scale responses are infrequent, this demonstrates the importance of having trained volunteers available to assist the coordinating authorities.

calendar

Combined NZSAR Council and Consultative Committee Meeting
– 21 April 2010

NZSAR Awards Evening – 21 April 2010

NZSAR Marine Workshop, Wellington – 16-17 May 2010

Avalanche Workshop, Twizel – 1-2 June 2010

NZSAR Consultative Committee Meeting – 22 July 2010

Rescue 2010 Conference, Iceland – 22-24 October 2010

useful website links

www.nzsar.org.nz – New Zealand Search and Rescue Council

This newsletter is available as a PDF on this website

www.amsa.gov.au/Search_and_Rescue – Australian Search and Rescue

www.beacons.org.nz – 406 beacon information and online registration

www.sarinz.com – Search and Rescue Institute New Zealand

www.safetyatsea.co.nz – Specialists in sea survival equipment

Duncan's desk

I trust that you and your loved ones have had a safe and enjoyable summer. The weather hasn't been all that flash for much of the country, which has made it bad for holiday makers but perhaps good for search and rescue as the early indicators all point to a lower than average rate of SAR callout. While some of this may be attributed to the generally poor weather we are also making progress with prevention measures and education initiatives, ensuring people are better prepared as they get out and about around New Zealand. We plan to capitalise on this trend with a greater effort being put into preventative work in the coming months and years.



Carl and I have had a good start to the year. We've had the first NZSAR Consultative Committee and Council meetings for 2010. These are significant events for us as they allow the various sector organisations to meet, share ideas and agree on actions and strategies that affect our SAR sector. The Consultative Committee meetings are also a great place for advice to be sought and received, and for various policies and work between organisations to be discussed and agreed. We have been running these meetings for several years now and I believe they are delivering significant benefits to the wider New Zealand search and rescue sector, as well as providing assurance to the NZSAR Council. Once approved, the minutes for these meetings are posted on our website (www.nzsar.org.nz) for all to read.

In mid-February I had the opportunity to visit the Alpine Cliff Rescue team at Aoraki/Mount Cook as well as the SAR teams in Wanaka and in and around Dunedin. As always, I was very impressed by the skills and dedication of the SAR people I met. The lower South Island is an unforgiving environment and a significant number of visitors get into difficulties in the area. Many of the SAR operations require a very fast response and highly specialised skills. We are fortunate to have strong and committed teams there who are able to respond when required.

We have also been busy planning the next round of NZSAR workshops. These will focus on SAR operations for Marine, Avalanche and people who wander due to some form of incapacity. We have been very pleased with the positive approach people have taken to the previous workshops and anticipate that the next three will be equally well received.

Duncan Ferner

NZSAR Secretariat Manager

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This column alternates with Senior Advisor Carl van der Meulen

