

John WILSON
Police SAR Coordinator
ROTORUA

Tuesday, 2 June, 2015

To whom it may concern

Firstly thank you for the opportunity to be involved in your SAREX for 2015. It is always good to visit other areas and see how it is done. To share ideas and catch up with our neighbouring groups.

I have been involved in SAR with the Wairoa group for the last 12 years. And for the last eight years I have been the Police SAR coordinator for the Wairoa District. Jock O'Connell is the Wairoa SAR volunteer group chairman and has been a member of the Wairoa group for over thirty years.

The SAREX has been evaluated on the following. Scenario Planning, Briefing, Objectives, Execution and Debriefing.

Scenario:

Thursday, May 14th: 4 people (Mum, Dad, son and daughter) went camping at the DOC campsite in Minginui. The two women go off mountain biking for the day, while the 2 men decide to take the 4WD up to Taupiri lookout and then go hunting from there for the day. They take with them an unruly black and white dog. They were planning on being back in the afternoon.

When the women return from their bike ride late in the afternoon (around 4pm) the men have not yet returned. They wait until dark (around 6pm) and then ride their bikes up to the lookout to check if the truck is there. They locate the vehicle, but no sign of the males.

They call for them but no response, so they decide to ride into Minginui to call the police. By 11pm they make it into Minginui and contact the Police. The vehicle is located at GR 173204.

Situation

The annual SAREX for the Rotorua Police area will occur on Saturday and Sunday, 16th & 17th of May 2015. The exercise will be conducted in the Murupara area, south east of Rotorua.

Last known point for the purposes of the exercise will be Map BG38 GR 173204.

This area is plantation forest managed by Kaingaroa Timberlands Ltd. It borders onto Department of Conservation tenure land adjacent to the east. The area is forested in plantation pine forest, and regenerating native forest.

Mission

To locate the missing party in the Taupiri area as quickly and efficiently as possible

SAREX Objective

The purpose of the exercise is to test the activation/response and deployment of the Rotorua Land SAR Organisation. To this end a "lost party" will be deployed in the area.

Sarex planning.

The scenario was well planned with a committee of volunteers developing the scenario and presenting it to Police. The Police SAR coordinator then implemented the scenario into an area, and engaged the missing party, organised the dates and timings, base to run the Scenario from, and produced an operation order "Operation Taupiri" SAREX 2015.

The scenario was based in an area near Murupara that gave teams experience both in Native forest and Pine plantation. The scenario was of a simple but realistic nature looking for an overdue hunting party in a mix of both terrain and Flora and Fauna. It was situated in an area of likely occurrence of a genuine SAROP which in turn gives the SAR group the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the area, identify hazards to be aware of and resources that are available for them to use in the area. It also allowed them to evaluate and identify the best communication resources for that area.

Briefing

The briefing was conducted by the John Wilson (SAR coordinator and Referee) for this SAREX. The Briefing was well done using GSMEACS guideline and included a full safety briefing. The briefing was comprehensive yet engaging and people willingly questioned and asked questions. There was no reason for anybody to walk away from the briefing not knowing what the situation was and what where and how there mission was going to be tasked.

Objectives an Execution

The objective in this Scenario based exercise was to test Activation, Response and Deployment of the Rotorua land SAR organisation. There were four teams out in the field supported by the local 4x4 club and AREC.

In the Management team there was one SAR trained Police Constable dedicated to the position of Incident Controller. Four members of Landsar took up the positions of Intel and planning and Operations with one further member in a MSU position. A further two members of the Police SAR squad were attached as Logistics. The CIMS structure was adhered to and clearly defined and presented on the wall for all to see. The people that took up these roles including the IC were generally all first footers in the Incident management team and had differing levels of experience in the field.

I believe that they all took up there roles in a professional manner and as the Exercise continued they continued to improve and work more as a team towards the desired outcome of locating the missing party. They had good comms to work with and a relatively small area to coordinate their search. Teams seemed well equipped and competent in carrying out all taskings put before them. Field teams camped overnight with 4x4 vehicles traveling home overnight.

I believe that activation, Response was good and deployment was carried out in a safe and informative manner. The biggest learning from this SAREX would have been for the Incident management team being new to their roles.

Field members whilst picking up and or enhancing general skills would have benefited from the familiarisation within the area which as previously mentioned is a likely area for deployment.

The Exercise went off without any problems and issues that presented themselves were ironed out as the exercise progressed.

Debriefing

The debriefing was conducted once all teams had arrived back, had something to eat and had time to share experiences. The debriefing was conducted by John Wilson SAR coordinator for the Rotorua area. All teams, Field teams, 4x4 teams, AREC and IMT and individuals were given the opportunity to have their say. The SAREX was well debriefed and Lessons Learned and things for improvement were talked about.

One suggestion is that after the Missing party is located and the IMT team have organised the extraction, there is often time to debrief the IMT team in depth whilst teams are being extracted. This just allows further in depth discussion about lessons learnt and how things could be done better within the IMT.

Recommendations

I questioned at the time the reason for leaving a team at the LKP given that this was an exercise and a note on the vehicle would have been sufficient to cover the vehicle off, giving management another three field members. Apparently the team had some limiting factors but I believe they could have still been utilised better in this situation.

I believe that it is good to bring fresh faces into the Incident management team not only as development for the future I.M. members but also to give field members an idea and better understanding of the workings of the Incident management team. With an understanding of how the I.M team works and what information they have to deal with field members are more understanding and accepting of their taskings.

However if this is the case the Incident management team should have at least one member who has a sound knowledge of all roles within the management team so that the team can hit the ground running even if that member takes a back seat as the search develops and the I.M team grasps hold of the situation. Alternatively he could be separate to the I.M team and just act as an advisor for the I.M team to bounce ideas off and can intervene when and if he sees the team going off track or not working as a team within the boundaries of CIMS.

One thing I believe is that the CIMS team should be wearing their relevant vests or signage so that anybody entering the Management room can quickly and clearly define who's who within the IMT.

Both Jock and I spoke to individuals in the Incident Management team and shared ideas with them and with John Wilson. I believe that this is of the greatest benefits for all involved throughout the weekend. And there are ideas that we will take back to Wairoa from Rotorua.

Police and Volunteer relationship

A key component to the success of any SAREX and or SAROP is the relationship between Police and the volunteers. Whilst there was camaraderie evident between Police and volunteers I believe that there is room for improvement. This is not to detract from a successful SAREX with a positive outcome. However I believe that there is room for more of a "One Team" approach.

Whilst there will always be tasks that the Police SAR team will attend and resolve internally, a Joint response to training and operations will develop relationships well into the future.

Summary

Thanks for the opportunity to contribute to and be a part of the Rotorua SAREX 2015. There are many positive aspects to this SAREX and points raised in this report are merely observations and suggestions of one person put forward as ideas for continual improvement.

It was evident that the SAREX was well planned, staffed and conducted; this led to an enjoyable, beneficial and successful SAREX with lessons learnt throughout.

Tony Maultsaid
Sole Charge Tuai
WAIROA SAR co-ordinator