

Connecting the Search and Rescue Sector

news



Hovercraft 040 to the Rescue

It may be one of the more unusual assets called upon during a SAR incident, but the Auckland Airport Hovercraft certainly played its part during the recent search for a fisherman missing in the Manukau Harbour – and it is likely to be used more often.

Three men went to set a fishing net at low tide on the Karore Bank behind Auckland International Airport in late October; one man became separated from his two companions as they returned to their vehicle.

The Hovercraft was called to assist with the search as it is the only vessel able to traverse the vast area of mudflats. LandSAR volunteers used their observation skills on board the Hovercraft to search the area. Unfortunately the body has still not been recovered.

Auckland Police SAR coordinator Dene Duthie says it was great to be able to call on the Hovercraft and its crew and he is keen to use it more often. "It is an extremely efficient asset, covering

ground others can't. The mudflats go on forever at low tide and they get very deep in places, so we can't send people out on foot. I expect us to use the Hovercraft at least twice as often as we do now."

The Airport Emergency Service (AES), which owns the Hovercraft, presently responds to about three SAR incidences on the Manukau Harbour each year.

AES Deputy Crew Chief Tony Beattie says they are a multi-skilled unit that respond to a wide variety of emergency situations. "Obviously our primary role is to respond to an aircraft crash, but we are trained and used in a number of other roles too. We provide a medical response within the Auckland Airport boundaries, we are a Registered Industrial Fire Brigade and we assist with marine search and rescue when requested."

AES responds to an average of 250 calls per month and is a 24/7 operation. ●

news continued

TEC Reviews Funding of SAR Training

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is reviewing how it funds search and rescue training.

The review is a timely and welcome development as the NZSAR Secretariat believes the current funding model for SAR training should be updated. This review is an opportunity to establish a new training system that will support training and continuously improve search and rescue knowledge and skills, all of which are essential to ensuring SAR people are ready to respond in the most effective way when the need arises.

In its submission to the TEC discussion document, the NZSAR Secretariat outlined a number of key elements that are important for any new SAR training funding arrangements. These elements include that it:

- Be fit for the whole of the search and rescue sector.
- Ensure SAR agencies are able to control and direct the training of their personnel.
- Ensure SAR training organisations meet the needs of SAR agencies.
- Ensure that individual SAR members are not required to pay for their training.
- Ensure SAR agencies own and can develop and share all relevant intellectual property. The free-flow of information is important to the NZSAR goal of promoting continuous improvement within the SAR sector.
- Be used for initial or advanced skill acquisition training.
- Result in nationally recognised skills.
- Result in a recognised NZ qualification for some SAR people who complete significant SAR training.

A wide range of SAR organisations also made their own submissions to TEC. The TEC is presently considering all the submissions and is likely to make decisions early in 2012.

More details of the TEC SAR funding review can be found at <http://www.tec.govt.nz/Tertiary-Sector/Reviews-and-consultation/Search-and-Rescue-Funding-Review/>.

The NZSAR submission is available at www.nzsar.org.nz.

New Team Member for NZSAR Secretariat

Phil Burgess started work with Duncan and Carl at the NZSAR Secretariat in early December. Phil will focus on the delivery of the national SAR support programme and brings his expertise to the sector in training, training development and planning as well as running good quality exercises.

Governor-General Adds LandSAR to His SAR Patronage

The Governor-General, Lt Gen Rt Hon Sir Jerry Mateparae, has become the first patron of LandSAR.

LandSAR Chair Phillip Melchior says they are thrilled to be associated with a New Zealander of such high standing.

"We couldn't be more delighted. He absolutely typifies what LandSAR members are all about: a community-minded outdoorsman who is willing to drop everything to go and help complete strangers. LandSAR's about protecting a cornerstone aspect of the New Zealand way of life – the right to go into the outdoors on our own terms. We're thrilled that the Governor-General has chosen to lead us.

"His patronage reinforces both the importance of volunteer search and rescue in New Zealand and the regard in which our members are held."

The Governor-General has a strong relationship with the SAR sector: he is also the patron of Surf Life Saving New Zealand and the Wellington-based Life Flight Trust.

Check out www.adventuresmart.org.nz

www.adventuresmart.org.nz

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Tips and advice to keep you safe

Land Snow Water Boating Air

"Be AdventureSmart"

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO THE ESSENTIAL CODE 5 simple rules to stay safe

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO THE ESSENTIAL CODE 4 simple rules to stay safe

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO THE ESSENTIAL CODE 5 simple rules to stay safe

Get Ready, Get Outdoors
ADVENTURE smart
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SAR in action

Clear and Consistent Messages + Targeted Education = Lives Saved

We are an island nation with one of the largest coastlines per head of population in the world. For generations, New Zealanders have flocked to their favourite body of water, be it a beach, lake or river, to unwind. Activities such as swimming, surfing, sailing, diving and fishing are all part of our culture. We don't want to stop people enjoying the water, but we do want to prevent people being injured or killed during their activities – and this is where clear messages and targeted education comes in.

As SAR people know – you don't have to be on or in the water to drown; rock fishing in particular has proven this. In 2005, Surf Life Saving Northern Region and WaterSafe Auckland collaborated with the Auckland Regional Council and Safe Waitakere to target safety messages to rock fishers.

Kevin Moran, co-Chair of the International Task Force on Open Water Drowning Prevention and Chair of WaterSafe Auckland, says the messaging they use for rock fishing are underpinned by the Water Safety Code.

"The programme started in 2005 as a consequence of four rock fishing fatalities in three months. The critical message for rock fishers is to wear a life jacket. We have been surveying rock fishers on the west coast of Auckland for the last 6 years and when we began, only 4% responded that they often or always wore a life jacket. This year that figure had climbed to 51%. So in six years we've achieved a mind-shift about wearing life jackets, which is great, but we've still got plenty of work to do."

Kevin says targeting the rock fishing population is really tricky because it is transient, many people only visit a spot once, and the fishers change every year, so they constantly have to start again.

"The compounding problem is that the demographics are quite unique: they're predominantly new migrants, a mixture of Asian and Pasifika ethnicities, so you have a communication issue because English is often a second language. We have to think about our signage, which has to be pictorial, and if we are going to give out any information it has to be multi-lingual.

In 6 years the number of rock fishers wearing life jackets has risen from 4% to 51%



SAR in action



Japanese visitor Toshiaki Goya, complete with life jacket, checks out the angel ring and safety signage before fishing at Auckland's west coast 'danger beach' – Flat Rock, Muriwai.

“And then how do we find them? For the Pasifika community, we target churches and use champions, such as Michael Jones. For the Asian community, we target their media, festivals and the organisations that work with migrants. We’ve been able to employ fishing advisors who are bi-lingual or multi-lingual to go to the fishing spots during summer. That’s the diversity of the approach – you just can’t put stuff out there and assume it’s going to hit.”

Surf Life Saving and Coastguard Northern Region volunteer, Dean Lawrence, agrees that education is the best way to change behaviour; in particular educating people to be aware of the environment they are in.

“The environment in the water changes in different locations and most accidents happen to those who don’t understand what they’re getting into. I fully support that you should have life jackets and all safety equipment on your vessel or in the environment that you are in, but these are devices to save you after the event. We should be trying to stop people creating the event in the first place. So we need to teach people to make the right judgements. We have to give people the best information and education to help them make the right decisions, and to reduce the number of times they make a bad call.”

Dean says there needs to be a more continuous connection in water safety education and an expectation that water education will start at an early age. “There’s a plethora of organisations teaching water education, which is great, but there needs to be better alignment and clarity amongst them.”

Both Kevin and Dean agree that collaboration is a great way to raise awareness of the sector’s clear and consistent safety messages. Kevin adds, “The nice thing about the Water, Boating and Outdoor Safety Codes that have been developed over the past couple of years is that anyone can pick them up and not dispute the content. It’s also nice to see that SAR and safety organisations are all singing the same song.” ●

SAR insights

When Rescuers Become Rescues: Practice and Training Saves Lives

It’s dark and the sea conditions and visibility are poor. Coastguard volunteers are on the water attempting to locate a yacht in difficulty and bring its distressed crew to safety. So far the SAROP is progressing well, with trained and qualified volunteers working to a plan, focussed on the task at hand. This is what they have trained for and what they do: saving lives at sea.

Suddenly – in the space of 2-3 minutes – this all changes and the rescuers become the victims in distress. In the course of the search, the rescue boat has collided with rocks. Most of the crew have sustained injuries, some of them very serious – and the years of training kick in. The Mayday call is sent, the vessel is moved into a position that will keep the crew safe and the injured crew are assessed and made as comfortable as possible until help arrives. The Coastguard Radio and SAR Coordinators help to secure the environment, supporting the injured crew as they battle with the sea, the wind and their injuries.

A helicopter is swiftly on the scene, the injured are airlifted to safety, with two of the crew immediately transferred to hospital in Auckland, others treated at the local hospital and some released to go home. While a neighbouring Coastguard Unit secures the rescue vessel and tows it to safety, one of the local Coastguard auxiliary vessels assists the stricken yacht to a safe haven.

Bruce Reid, CEO of Coastguard New Zealand, says, not surprisingly, that this is not the type of event you ever want in your organisation.

“People injured; the rescuers having to be rescued. But at the end of the day the outcome was the best we could have hoped for with everyone back on land, injured but safe. The event (which occurred in 2007) was unprecedented for Coastguard, and one we never wish to happen again, but it did reinforce how we train and what we train in.”

For all the refinements, improvements and changes Coastguard made to reduce the chance of an incident like this occurring again, it was what happened afterwards that highlighted a serious gap in their planning and structures. In the minutes, hours and days following the accident, aspects of Coastguard systems were exposed.

“When it came to saving lives at sea the systems processes and training we have in place kicked in and managed the situation. However, there was no structured plan for the aftermath and it was only through the quality of the people involved in managing what happened that we made it through. We identified the post-incident plan was as important as the in-incident plan,” Bruce says.

The subsequent reports into the accident highlighted some areas that could be improved and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that needed to be changed to cover a Coastguard “in distress” situation.

SAR insights continued



Since this event Coastguard has developed a plan, called a 'Black Book' (Incident Response Plan), which provides a fluid structure that can be applied. The key to the plan is to have people and resources allocated early in the event, a structured hand-over and good tracking of communication and contacts.

If practitioners of search and rescue read this and wonder why Coastguard didn't have such a plan in place already, Bruce says, "You only know what you know. It is sometimes only when the unthinkable happens that you realise you don't know as much as what you thought."

Insights

- As a volunteer organisation, the level of people contact with the injured, their family, their crew and the other volunteers is an extremely high priority.
- The control of the information flow is also a priority because the reputational risk is high. Problems and concerns created by misinformation or lack of information can cause more problems. The media can be our friend – we just need to keep talking to them and explain what we know.
- There also needs to be a way of managing the flow of assistance. Almost too many people want to help and be involved at the start, but this reduces dramatically after the first couple of weeks. An accident such as this is a sprint that turns into a marathon, so the Black Book plan ensures we are prepared for the long haul if required.
- As memories of the event wane we have a responsibility to ensure the lessons we learnt remain fresh in the minds of our staff and volunteers. The key is to review the Black Book annually, incorporate the practices into training and look at ways of ensuring the urgency that we all felt post-accident remains.
- The Incident Response Plan is now used for all events where our people sustain injury. A flow on from this has been the introduction of an on-line mishap form that provides a level of reporting that allows Units and Regions to be proactive in reviewing near misses. ●

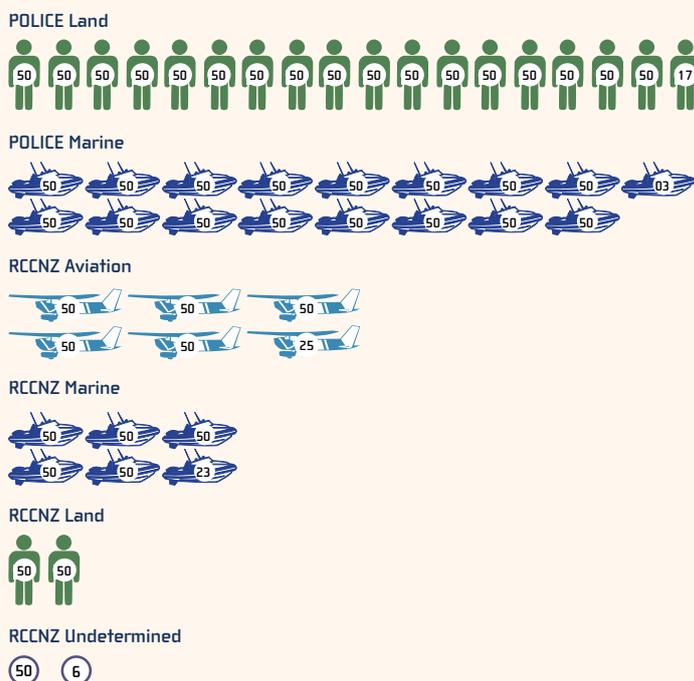
stats attack

During the 2010/11 year the Police coordinated 1,670 Category 1 incidents, and RCCNZ coordinated 704 Category 2 incidents. This is a total of 2,374 incidents, which is an average of 6.5 per day.

There were 1,076 marine-based, 967 land-based, and 275 aviation-based SAR incidents during the year. There was no significant change in the overall amount of SAR incidents between the 09/10 and 10/11 years; however, there was a decrease in land incidents and an increase in marine incidents. There were also 56 undetermined incidents caused by distress beacon activations of a short duration.

POLICE Land	867
POLICE Marine	803
RCCNZ Aviation	275
RCCNZ Marine	273
RCCNZ Land	100
RCCNZ Undetermined	56
TOTAL	2,374

SAR Incidents in 2010/11



Incidents by Coordinating Authorities

Mode	POLICE – Category 1	RCCNZ – Category 2	Total
Land	867	100	967
Marine	803	273	1,076
Aviation	...	275	275
Undetermined	...	56	56

Carl's corner



Labour Day Weekend traditionally marks the start of the warmer weather as New Zealand moves into summer and Surf Life Saving New Zealand start rolling out their beach patrols. For many New Zealanders, it marks the recommencement of outdoor recreational activities that have been put on hold over the winter. For myself, I marked the start of summer with some mountain biking at McLean's Island in Christchurch.

Unfortunately this year, over Labour Weekend and the days that followed, there were a number of preventable drownings. It was sad to see that in many of these cases the individuals involved did not know, or chose to ignore, the safety information that is available. We will continue to work with our partner organisations in promoting the family of Safety Codes and the AdventureSmart website. And we ask that you too continue to help push the safety messages out to the public. Page 3 of this Link has a great article illustrating the benefits of working together to promote safe behaviours.

The year 2011 will be remembered for the February 22 earthquake in Christchurch. Over the last 12 months, members of our sector have provided support to the Pike River Mine and Christchurch earthquake tragedies. These incidents – while unwelcome – have helped raise the profile of our sector within the wider Emergency Management context.

One of the projects that I am currently working on is improving collaboration between the SAR and CDEM (Civil Defence and Emergency Management) sectors. This work will provide a clear policy for the sector, as well as some guidance on how effective collaboration can be achieved. Alongside these there will be the development of policy for responding to Mass Rescue Operations. This is timely with the events in Tauranga – what if the Rena was a cruise ship with 4,000 passengers and crew on board? Do we have a common understanding of how we might respond to such a situation?

These policy projects are not done in isolation. We are working closely with Police, RCCNZ, MCDEM and other organisations as we carry out this work. Duncan and I are also hoping to engage directly with our CDEM partners around the country over the next year. But it's not just them – I will also be getting out and about to meet with regional gatherings of our SAR sector, starting with the Canterbury region in December, thanks to assistance from local Police SAR Coordinators.

In the meantime, have a safe and enjoyable summer.

Carl van der Meulen
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NZSAR

calendar

SAREXs and SAR training – see

<http://searchandrescuecouncil.org.nz/nzsar-calendar>

- 31 January 2012 – Nominations close for NZSAR Awards
- 16 February 2012 – NZSAR Consultative Committee Meeting
- 29 February 2012 – NZSAR Council Meeting

useful website links

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

This newsletter is available as a PDF on this website.

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

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

www.metservice.co.nz – Comprehensive weather reports.

<http://www.watersafe.org.nz/page.asp?page=173> – Information on the West Coast Rock Fishing Safety Project and Rock Fishing Research.

<http://nzsar-resources.org.nz> – This site gives SAR coordinators information about the location, capability and call-out details of SAR resources throughout New Zealand.

NZSAR Awards: get your nominations in now!

Do you know of an organisation, group or individual who should to be acknowledged by their search and rescue peers?

What about someone who has dedicated hours of their time to your organisation or those involved in a courageous rescue or difficult search – do they deserve national recognition?

The NZSAR Awards celebrate the success and effort of people who work or volunteer their time and skills in the field of search and rescue in New Zealand's Search and Rescue Region.

There are two awards:

1. The NZSAR Gold Award honours the person, group or organisation that has made the **most significant** contribution to search and rescue.
2. The NZSAR Certificates of Achievement are awarded for an **important** contribution. More than one NZSAR Certificate can be awarded each year.

These awards are valuable not only for the contribution they acknowledge but also for raising community awareness about the efforts SAR people go to in this often complex and difficult work.

Go to www.nzsar.org.nz. You will find more information about the awards along with details on the simple nominations process.

Nominations for the 2011 awards close on 31 January 2012.