



# Valuing our volunteers

A set of guiding principles for the search and rescue (SAR) sector to foster volunteerism was agreed upon at a recent NZSAR Volunteering Workshop, held in Wellington.

**Manager of the** NZSAR Secretariat, Duncan Ferner, says SAR agencies throughout the country are now working to develop or refine their own volunteer strategies based on these guiding principles.

“Volunteers are an essential element of our capability, making up 95% of the people providing operational SAR response nationwide,” he says. “And behind those people in the field are a further group of volunteers, as well as families and employers who are willing to share someone with us for the public good.”

“We have set these guiding principles in response to a recommendation made by Volunteering NZ, following their research into our volunteer base earlier this year. The aim is to ensure our current volunteers are well supported and we retain an ongoing willingness among community members to engage with search and rescue and volunteer in future.”

Held on 3 September, the Volunteering Workshop was well attended by each of the SAR volunteer agencies, along with Police, the Rescue Coordination Centre NZ, Fire and Emergency NZ, the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management and St John representatives.

Some of the common challenges facing volunteerism in the search and rescue sector also fuelled discussion at the workshop, including:

- **Volunteers are required right across New Zealand;**
- **All SAR agencies – along with the emergency management sector – are recruiting from the same pool of potential volunteers;**

- **A large proportion of our volunteers are in paid work;**
- **Our volunteer demographic (mostly men aged 40+) does not match the demographic of the increasingly diverse communities being sourced for volunteers;**
- **Trends in New Zealand show that people who volunteer are shifting to episodic and shorter term volunteering – whereas SAR volunteers are highly trained, requiring a long term commitment;**
- **There are limited resources available to support volunteers.**

Research has shown that the alignment, or otherwise, of organisational and personal values is a key consideration for volunteers. Personal values are a powerful motivator – and values shared between an individual and the organisation they are volunteering for can reinforce volunteer commitment and retention. Conversely, conflicting values can contribute to volunteer turnover.<sup>1</sup>

“If we can demonstrate a culture founded on values of encouragement, respect and inclusion we are more likely to engage and retain the volunteer base that’s so essential for the future of search and rescue in this country,” says Duncan. “We hope the Guiding Principles for Volunteer Involvement will help the SAR sector in this respect”.

<sup>1</sup> Valuing Volunteers: Better Understanding the primary motives for volunteering in Australian emergency services – Bill Calcutt PSM, University of Wollongong Australia, June 2019

## Guiding principles: Volunteers are the centre of the SAR sector and we recognise ...

### Our volunteers

- Bring their place, environment, culture and experience with them
- Feel welcome and valued
- Are celebrated for their unique contribution
- Are here by choice!

### Our sector

- Builds an environment that enables volunteerism
- Is inclusive and collaborative
- Supports wellbeing
- Encourages transferability between agencies



### Our SAR agencies

- Are responsive to the volunteers
- Are responsive to communities
- Make it easy to volunteer
- Have open and honest communication
- Value professional standards

### Our communities

- Are all unique
- Thrive through collaboration
- Shape our volunteer and community engagement



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# Safer Walking Profile will inform searches for wanderers

A new form, called the *Safer Walking Profile*, is designed to capture vital information about anyone who is at risk of going missing while walking. The form is based on the UK's Herbert Protocol and is expected to become a useful tool for the search and rescue sector.

Clare Teague, National Safer Walking Co-ordinator at LandSAR says the form is being progressively introduced to people at risk of going missing and their whanau or caregivers. Many of the organisations advocating its use belong to the Safer Walking Stakeholder Reference Group – such as Age Concern, Disabled Persons Assembly, Autism New Zealand, Alzheimers New Zealand, Police and the Ministry of Health.

“By encouraging people to record (with support from their whanau/carers) detailed information about themselves, we are not only helping to facilitate a more efficient search for that person should they ever go missing, but also greatly reducing the stress associated with others trying to recall this level of information in an emergency situation,” she says. “We also believe that the act of completing the form will help raise awareness within the person’s home.”

The form asks for information like medication required, distinctive features, communication difficulties, favourite walking routes and previous addresses. It also provides a section to record practical tips for the search team, such as whether the person is scared of being touched and what things can make him or her anxious. A recent photograph of the person is kept with the completed form.

If the person does go missing, a 'Missing Now' page is the last to be filled out with critical details (time last seen, clothing, medication last taken, etc) before the document is handed to Police at the earliest opportunity.

“We encourage people to regularly update their Safer Walking Profile, so that all the information is as current and relevant as possible,” says Clare.

On 16 and 17 November, a Safer Walking Workshop was held in Wellington, involving 22 different groups who regularly work with people who have cognitive impairment.

The workshop covered the *Safer Walking Profile*, Police SAR case studies, Wander Search issues, training and other local initiatives.

The Safer Walking Profile can be downloaded from the New Zealand Search and Rescue website: [www.nzsar.govt.nz/SAR-Teams/Wander-SAR](http://www.nzsar.govt.nz/SAR-Teams/Wander-SAR)

For more information about other mitigation strategies employed by the Safer Walking Framework, including the Wander Search tracking system, visit [www.landsar.org.nz/about/safer-walking-wander-search](http://www.landsar.org.nz/about/safer-walking-wander-search) or email Clare on [clare.teague@landsar.org.nz](mailto:clare.teague@landsar.org.nz)



Using a receiver to pick up a specific radio frequency from a Wander Search pendant.

## Benefits of pendant use becoming clear

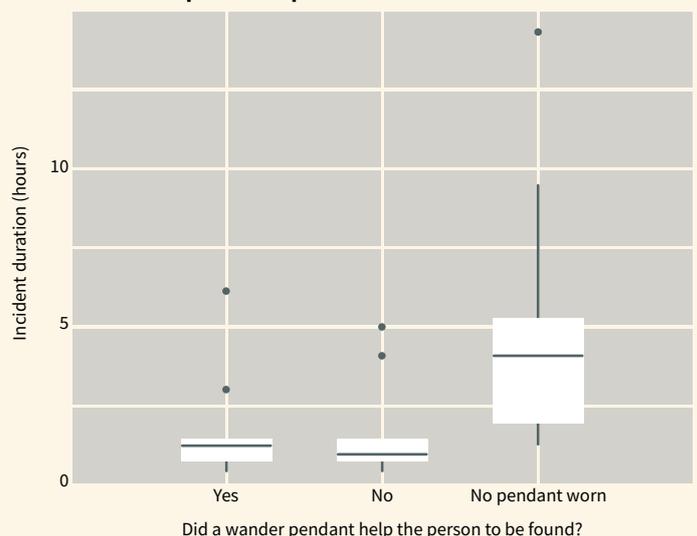
Although it is early days yet for any robust analysis using the SARdonyx information system, a recent snapshot shows that people who wear Wander Search pendants are more likely to be found in less time than those who do not.

The Wander Search Safer Walking programme provides a radio frequency tracking pendant to people with cognitive impairment who are at risk of going missing. Receivers are held by either the local LandSAR group or Police.

An analysis of the 39 wanderer incidents recorded show the impact of pendants on the search:

- Search times are significantly shorter for people wearing a pendant – mean time of 1.8 hours, compared to 4.7 hours for those people who did not wear a pendant.
- Total volunteer hours spent searching are greatly reduced – mean time of 7.7 hours searching for those people who wore pendants as opposed to 18.1 hours searching for those without pendants.

### Comparison of pendant use on incident duration





# Antarctica

RCCNZ's Greg Johnston (right) with colleague Chris Wilson at Scott Base, January 2019.

**The name alone** can give you goosebumps – and that's without setting foot on the vast continent renowned for being the coldest, windiest and driest in the world. It summons up romantic notions of intrepid explorers, emperor penguins, new scientific discoveries and massive ice shelves. Put search and rescue in the picture and we're snapped out of that reverie, back to the reality of Antarctica's harsh and often brutal environment, where safety must always come first.

Antarctica is over 3,800 kilometres south of New Zealand, yet part of it still falls within our Search and Rescue Region, which stretches all the way to the South Pole. For the navigation-minded, that's between 163°E and 131°W and down to 90°S on the Antarctic Continent – approximately five million square kilometres – including the Ross Sea. Flight times from Christchurch to Scott Base can take anywhere between 4.5 to 10 hours, depending on the type of aircraft and the weather. How then are search and rescue emergencies in this corner of the world responded to when we are so far away?

Greg Johnston, Senior Search and Rescue Officer and Lead Antarctic SAR Planning at the Rescue Co-ordination Centre (RCCNZ) says their approach is the same as it is for other Category 2 incidents in and around New Zealand. This covers search and rescue (SAR) incidents that are distress beacon related, aviation-based and off-shore marine vessels in distress.

"We don't differentiate," he says. "Although an emergency situation in Antarctica is compounded by distance and environment, we still follow our standard operating procedures."

RCCNZ's partnership with Antarctica New Zealand, whose role it is to carry out all New Zealand's activities on the continent, is key.

"We have a very close relationship with Antarctica NZ," says Greg. "We couldn't be as effective at what we do without their help, and hopefully vice versa."

Since 2004, there have been 24 SAR operations in the region, 375 people assisted and 33 lives lost.

The two organisations, along with the United States Antarctic Programme, have an agreed Antarctic SAR Response plan, which is updated annually.

"It's not an instructional plan, but more a place we store information to help us make decisions and how to contact the right people," says Greg. "Who can help? What can they do? How do we identify them? Some incidents in the Ross Sea Region can be as far from Scott Base as they are from New Zealand, so we rely heavily on aircraft and vessels of opportunity."

## Collaboration with the United States

Antarctica New Zealand's on-continent crew at Scott Base has collaborated with the US Antarctic Program at nearby McMurdo Station to set up the Unified Incident Command. Together, they co-ordinate all local (Category 1) search and rescue incidents for their supported activities – pooling resources and expertise. The highly trained field team responds under the banner of JASART (Joint Antarctic Search and Rescue Team).

Simon Trotter, General Manager Antarctic Operations at Antarctica New Zealand says this relationship with the Americans is 63 years' old.

"New Zealanders and Americans have worked together here since the origins of Scott Base," he says. "A lot of it comes down to congeniality. We've maintained that mutually beneficial relationship despite differences of opinion in our national politics."

McMurdo is the larger of the two stations – which are just three kilometres apart – and has a small hospital on site. When RCCNZ receives a distress alert from the region, their first port of call is to the Unified Incident Command's communications centre, which operates 24/7. The communications centre will contact the McMurdo Station Manager to report the incident, determine what assistance is required – e.g. supplying a pump to a vessel taking on water – and raise the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC).

Greg, who visited Antarctica with RCCNZ colleague Chris Wilson last summer (pic left), has seen first-hand how efficiently this process works. He took part in a simulated search and rescue exercise during his stay, which mobilised the EOC.

"I was very impressed with the quiet and controlled way it was managed," he says. "They bring the relevant people in with expert

The most recent Antarctic SAR incidents have been medical evacuations from cruise ships in the area. Typically, a tourist with a medical condition is removed from the ship by helicopter, taken to McMurdo for screening, and transported back to New Zealand on the next available flight.

knowledge, i.e. someone from the Air Force to assess what aircraft are available and their capabilities, their station management team to advise what resources are free, a weather forecaster, a doctor. There's about 14 people around the table, all drawn in at short notice to assist."

RCCNZ will liaise with just one Communications Officer on this team to ensure clarity of information.

## JASART training

Each year, the Joint Antarctic SAR team comes together at Temple Basin in New Zealand's Southern Alps to participate in pre-season training. An invitation is also extended to the five different national Antarctic programmes who have research bases within New Zealand's Search and Rescue Region.

This training is a combination of classroom sessions and practical field exercises.

"The technical skills we need in Antarctica are very similar to the skills we'd employ in a high alpine environment in New Zealand," says Simon. "It's just the scale that's different."

He says the practical element includes stretcher rigging, pick off without a stretcher, pulley systems, snow anchors, knots, bends and hitches and rescue belay.

Once their season begins, the JASART come together almost every week to practice their skills. In early November, for instance, the team practiced on Antarctica's Observation Hill, carrying out a stretcher raise and lower exercise. The scenario involved rescuing someone who had slid down a 40 degree snow slope, sitting above a cliff, with no means of communication.

"The technical skills we need in Antarctica are very similar to the skills we'd employ in a high alpine environment in New Zealand."



A JASART stretcher raise and lower exercise in practice.

## Prevention

Everyone who travels from New Zealand to Scott Base must do some Antarctic Field Training. This is provided by Antarctica New Zealand on-continent and customised for different groups, depending on the nature of their work and the terrain they intend to operate in.

"At the most basic level, the focus is on how to stay safe in the unique Antarctic environment," says Simon. "We talk about our 'lifesaving rules' and things like local hazards, radio communication, how to build an emergency shelter and small party self-rescue. As groups move into more high-risk environments, the level of training increases."

Specialist personnel from Antarctica New Zealand work alongside these groups to help facilitate safe travel.

“Some field groups who return every year for a limited period may only ever experience good weather,” says Simon. “Our challenge is not to make assumptions that people have the right experience for adverse conditions. We need to review and ensure we make safe decisions for all operations.”

No-one leaves Scott Base for local travel without at least one form of communication, even if they are only going for a short walk. Field groups must carry at least two forms of tested communication, personal locator beacons and check in daily with Scott Base.

There are five Rescue Co-ordination Centres with responsibility for search and rescue in Antarctica. RCCNZ is one of them.



**32 crew** on board the stricken Russian fishing vessel *Sparta* were rescued in 2011 by an international search and rescue effort. With a hull pierced by sea ice, the vessel was taking on water next to the Antarctic ice shelf and listing dangerously. RCCNZ was alerted by its Norwegian counterpart, who had received a distress alert from *Sparta*. Nearby fishing vessels responded to requests to assist, but even though the closest one was only 20 nautical miles away it could not reach *Sparta* because of the sea ice conditions. Working through the Unified Incident Command, a US Air Force ski equipped C130 Hercules aircraft from McMurdo Station was dispatched to establish contact. The crew needed pumps, patches and timber to help stabilise the vessel, fast. RCCNZ tasked an RNZAF C130 Hercules from Whenuapai air base, who parachute-dropped the much-needed equipment to the vessel. 13 days later, a Korean Ice breaker, which had to travel from port in Lyttleton to the Ross Sea, was able to free *Sparta* from the ice and escort it back towards New Zealand, arriving in Nelson 24 days after the incident began.

## A busy place

**Toothfishing ships** (and in previous years Japanese whaling fleets) operate in the Ross Sea Region, as do tourist ships in the summer months. And, of course, the continent still attracts many independent adventurers.

“Everyone conducting activities down there poses a risk,” says Greg. “If something goes wrong in that extreme environment, survival times are short, especially if you don’t have the right equipment. But conversely, they may have vessels and aircraft that can be resources for us. They could potentially be someone who can help.”

RCCNZ maintains a table called the Ross Sea Region Event Schedule which shows at a glance what aircraft and vessels are expected in the region and when. It is populated by a huge amount of networking with organisations that operate in the area, such as the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources and links with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Industry Toothfishing Committee, for instance, invites RCCNZ along to their pre-season and post-season briefs.

“Simple things like where they’re allowed to fish and how many licensed vessels that will involve is really valuable information for us,” says Greg. “It’s a great opportunity to speak to captains of ships about any safety issues, ice conditions, and what they’ve observed from other vessels down there. If there’s a search and rescue incident, they will also give us access to their tracking systems.”

Antarctica New Zealand and other National Antarctic Programmes keep RCCNZ informed of any other activities they’re aware of that might not be communicated through these channels.

## COMNAP

**The Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs** (COMNAP) is another important network for RCCNZ and Antarctica New Zealand. Each of the 30 member countries have signed up to the Antarctic Treaty and have equipment and people coming and going from the continent to support scientific research each year.

An asset tracking system that all national programmes feed into – primarily to co-ordinate logistics – allows search and rescue officers to identify, at a glance, vessels or aircraft of opportunity should they be needed.

As well as sending delegates to the COMNAP AGM, both organisations also attend a COMNAP Search and Rescue Workshop once every three years. Antarctica New Zealand and RCCNZ co-hosted this workshop for the first time in May this year, running an interesting scenario-based exercise on mass rescue as part of it.

“We had three different scenarios for three different Antarctic regions,” says Greg. “One involved an aircraft crashing into the ocean, another was a research vessel losing power with 50-60 people on board. The last one considered what would happen if there was a viral medical outbreak at a remote scientific research camp. How do you isolate people that are sick? How do you move a large number of people to the airfield and back to hospital? Could we use ski-equipped aircraft? What other options do we have if the weather packs in? Tourist operators with trucks? Other national programmes?”

Heads together, sharing knowledge, building relationships, expecting the unexpected. That’s international SAR collaboration at its best.



## Valuable insights from Avalanche SAREX

**Large scale avalanche** rescue operations are rare in New Zealand, even though our alpine areas cater for many activities on 30-45 degree snow slopes where there is a chance of triggering an avalanche. Search and rescue teams have limited opportunities to experience what can be a complex and high-risk event.

It came as no surprise then to see so many people take part in two NZSAR-funded avalanche search and rescue exercises this year – one at Mount Ruapehu (where a winter storm provided realistic conditions) and another in the Craigieburn Range in Canterbury.

Rhett Emery, National SAR Support Programme Co-ordinator says both exercises were designed to test the readiness plans and responses of participating agencies.

“In a rescue operation, resources can come from the specialist Alpine Cliff Rescue (LandSAR and the Department of Conservation) and search dog teams, staff from local ski areas and guiding companies, along with Police and local helicopter companies,” he says. “SAREXs provide a valuable opportunity for everyone to come together to test systems, processes and people in a safe environment – and to take learnings from these into operational practice.”

Responders were faced with major avalanche scenarios, involving multiple casualties, so patient management and evacuation was the key focus of both exercises.

SAREX patient evacuation times

TIME	ELAPSED TIME	T (min) =	DETAILS
10:30:00	0	0	Initial 111 call made
10:44:00	0:14	14	Whisper call out received
11:15:00	0:45	45	First team on site
11:26:00	0:56	56	Patient 1 – located
11:28:00	0:58	58	Patient 2 – located
11:30:00	1:00	60	3rd helicopter load
11:35:00	1:05	65	4th helicopter load
11:37:00	1:07	67	Patient 3 – located
11:43:00	1:13	73	Patient 4 – located
11:50:00	1:20	80	Patient 6 – located
12:00:00	1:30	90	Patient 6 – dug out
12:25:00	1:55	115	Patient 1 & 3 – flown out
12:35:00	2:05	125	Patient 2 – medic winched
12:37:00	2:07	127	Patient 5 – located
12:43:00	2:13	133	Patient 2 – winched from site
12:47:00	2:17	137	Patient 6 – evacuated from site
13:05:00	2:35	155	Patient 5 – evacuated from site
13:23:00	2:53	173	Patient 4 – evacuated from site

### Recommendations from Evaluators include:

- running regular training on personal transceiver searching skills, digging, probing, visual searching, triage and patient care
- potential responders familiarise themselves with the latest International Commission for Alpine Rescue (ICAR) protocols for handling avalanche/cold injury victims – [www.alpine-rescue.org](http://www.alpine-rescue.org)
- regular training on radio use, including ‘How to use’ check cards and ensuring all radios are compatible with other areas, DOC and SAR channels.
- Incident Management Teams familiarise themselves with the Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) and how it applies to avalanche search and rescue.
- Ensuring readiness plans include communication and Staging Area plans
- Ensuring team members are fully equipped for an avalanche SAR including being prepared for unexpected situations such as having to walk out or spend the night in the field.

“The time-critical nature of an avalanche response requires all parties to get up to speed as quickly as possible,” says Rhett. “Thank you to local Police SAR, with support from Avalanche NZ, helicopter operators, local ski fields and LandSAR for two well-planned events, and to the highly skilled teams that took part.”

# What makes a high performing team?

**Behind every successful** search and rescue operation is the unrelenting efforts of hard-working teams. But does hard work always translate to high performance? What makes a high performing team? Jim Young, one of two team leaders for Search and Rescue at Aoraki/Mount Cook, travelled to Mount Rainier National Park in Washington to find out.

Mount Rainier, a 4,392m active volcano, attracts over 100,000 avid climbers each year. The safety of these climbers is the concern of a close-knit group of rangers, fully trained in search and rescue, who are based at the mountain village and in alpine huts for the entire summer season. Jim joined this team for the month of May 2019, observing their pre-season aviation and helicopter training; and participating in their refresher course on mountain skills.

“It was a great learning experience,” says Jim. “My objective was to interact with a foreign mountain rescue team and exchange ideas relating to training, staffing, risk and asset management. What I came away with was a really valuable insight into how they operate.”

The 16-member team at Mount Rainier benefits from approximately US \$1 million in government funding per year and is consequently well equipped. They share a dedicated short-haul helicopter for the climbing season with nearby North Cascades National Park. Pre-season training takes a full two months, and everyone learns together – regardless of different levels of experience.

But shiny new equipment and comprehensive training aside, it was their philosophical approach to search and rescue that resonated most with Jim.

“The fundamentals of the Mount Rainier search and rescue training programme are deeply thought through, which has helped them to become a very high performing team,” he says. “Their structure, operational discipline, communication and teamwork in general is based on the five principles of a High Reliability Organisation.”

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What is a High Reliability Organisation (HRO)?

An HRO is one that has avoided catastrophes in a high-risk environment where accidents can be expected. Commercial aviation and nuclear power stations are both good examples.

As search and rescue specialists, what can we learn from these types of organisations when it comes to teamwork?

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“They are preoccupied with things being missed,” says Jim. “The rangers interact with about 80 percent of visitors to the mountain at the mid-level huts. If they see someone unprepared or struggling, they will intervene.”

Jim was so impressed by the way these principles were championed in a search and rescue context that he recommended their application to his DOC colleagues when he returned to Aoraki. He also promoted them to a wider audience at NZSAR’s Avalanche SAR workshop, held in Christchurch in June.

“By using the filter of an HRO theory and applying that to a rescue setting, we can be better and safer at what we do,” he says.

At Aoraki, there has already been some positive and lasting change in light of Jim’s trip.

“We have adopted those five points as best we can. For example, we’re trying to promote a culture of recording – documenting more and ensuring we have a robust debrief process after any rescue or training exercise to capture anything we can improve on.”

“We’re not fixed into hierarchy. We have a wide range of skills within the team. Someone might be with us for their first season but is a skilled avalanche forecaster. Whereas someone who’s been with us for three years could be an expert rock climber. It’s about the best person for the job – who has the best skills to equip the task in front of us.”

Jim believes the HRO principles can be applied to all search and rescue teams, regardless of the environment.

“We all operate in complex situations,” says Jim. “In search and rescue not everything is as simple as it seems. We’re going out the door because something has already gone wrong for somebody. We really need to maintain a high level of situational awareness, be resilient as possible and not take anything for granted.”

The team at Mount Rainier are also guided by risk management tools, such as the GAR (or Green, Amber, Red) model and SMEAC (Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration, Command) briefs.

“In the training exercises, a GAR model was run at every junction to assess the level of risk. If something changed, they would learn from that,” says Jim.

“In New Zealand our actions can sometimes be hampered by the kiwi psyche – the “she’ll be right” attitude. The idea that briefings are somehow onerous and take away from just getting on with the job. People may view an ideological approach as being too American, or over the top. But it’s important that we don’t isolate ourselves in terms of search and rescue as a profession. We have so much to learn from the international community.”



## Specifically, HRO's principles are:

### 1. A pre-occupation with failure

Any level of technical, human or process failure is reported promptly and addressed in full so problems can be fixed, learned from and anticipated.

The climbing rangers at Mount Rainier, for example, hold a phone conference at 8am every morning between their base and alpine teams to discuss everything that is happening that day, including conditions and avalanche forecasts. They also keep in touch online throughout the day.

### 2. A reluctance to simplify

Continuously looking at data, challenging current beliefs as to why problems exist, valuing a diversity of experience and opinions.

### 3. Sensitivity to operations

Situational awareness is extremely important to respond effectively to unexpected changes in conditions. There is a recognition that every voice matters, that the best picture of a current situation comes from the front line.

### 4. A commitment to resilience

Developing the capability to recover from errors, without being paralysed by them.

### 5. Deference to expertise

In a crisis, decisions are made at the front line and authority defers to the person who can solve the problem, regardless of hierarchy.

# International SAR Co-ordination

**Did you know** that all Search and Rescue Officers at the Rescue Co-ordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ) are trained to an international standard? This standard is set out in the International Aeronautical Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) Manual – a handy training and reference tool used by Rescue Co-ordination Centres, search and rescue agencies, shipping companies and airlines worldwide.

Like any document of its kind, the IAMSAR Manual needs to be revised and updated regularly. From 9-13 September, Deputy Manager - Operations at RCCNZ Paul Craven attended the International Civil Aviation Organisation/International Maritime Organisation Joint Working Group (JWG) meeting in Vina del Mar, Chile to do exactly that.

Paul is one of 16 JWG members (8 maritime and 8 aviation) who meet with around 50 country observers and other independent experts in their field every year to consider revisions to the Manual's three

comprehensive volumes. Submissions are made by member countries and other UN working groups to recommend changes – and these go before the working group for discussion.

This year, Paul says the meeting was dominated by concerns from the aviation industry over the introduction of the Global Aeronautical Distress and Safety System (GADSS) – the International Civil Aviation Organization's amended aircraft tracking standards.

"GADSS was introduced in response to the unresolved disappearance of Malaysia Airlines MH370," says Paul. "The tracking of aircraft when they are in distress situations has ramifications for search and rescue. So, we spoke at length about implementing the GADSS system and how distress alerts will work."

Other points of discussion were updates to the Global Maritime Distress Safety System and the implementation of new marine search techniques and technology

developments that affect search and rescue.

While Paul was in Chile, RCCNZ also seized the opportunity to run a table-top training exercise with their Chilean equivalent. They used the scenario of a Chilean vessel in distress just within the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region, but very close to the border of Chile's area of responsibility.

"In a situation like that we might have assets coming from both countries," says Paul. "It allows us to anticipate how we might co-ordinate those assets, as well as address things like communication and language barriers to achieve a good outcome."

None of the Search and Rescue Officers at the respective co-ordination centres knew what the scenario would be, so the task was approached as though it was real.

"Chile is effectively our neighbour when it comes to search and rescue," says Paul. "We try to do at least one of these exercises with them each year to ensure we are both on the same page."

## Award-winning collaborative SAR

**A multi-agency** search and rescue operation at Port Waikato this year received high honours at the International Maritime Rescue Federation (IMRF) Awards, held in September.

Congratulations to Coastguard New Zealand (Waiuku, Papakura and the Northern Operations Centre), Surf Life Saving Kariaotahi, New Zealand Police and the Auckland Westpac Rescue Helicopter Trust who collectively won the IMRF People's Choice Award 2019. They were also runners-up in the Outstanding Team Contribution to Maritime SAR Operations category.

Together, they saved a man, woman and child who had been thrown into the water when their boat capsized on the Port Waikato River Bar. The Police Eagle helicopter located the three people in darkness using infrared heat detection equipment. The Auckland Rescue Helicopter positioned overhead, but conditions forced it to abandon a winch



Representatives from Surf Life Saving Kariaotahi, Coastguard New Zealand and Auckland Westpac Rescue Helicopter in London to accept the awards.

operation. It was not safe for rescue boats to cross the bar, so the IRB navigated 1.5 to 2m breaking waves by using the rescue helicopter's landing light and the headlights from Police vehicles parked on the beach.

The evacuation of the patients to hospital also took considerable skill, with the woman and child critically hypothermic and transferred by the Auckland Rescue Helicopter. The woman went into cardiac arrest enroute. The man was taken to hospital by St John ambulance. All made a full recovery.

Outstanding international recognition for demonstrating how search and rescue collaboration works in practice.

## SARdonyx

JOINT SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

### Timely entering of incident records

You don't need to wait until you have all the information about an incident to start a SARdonyx record. SARdonyx allows users to create a new incident record very quickly by just completing the General section of a New Incident and saving. You can come back to that incident later to fill in the remaining information as it becomes available – and edit the original entry if necessary.

Having up-to-date information on the number of incidents by geographic region and environment can go a long way to identifying trends and generating insightful analyses, but that can't happen if incidents are entered months after they occur.



# 10 questions with ...

Megan Dimozantos, LandSAR Rotorua

**Megan is Chairperson** of Land Search and Rescue in Rotorua and an active field team member, often called on for first dispatch. She is also an accomplished mountain bike racer, Director of the annual Rotorua Bike Festival and a self-employed tradie – yet despite her chocker-block schedule, Megan Dimozantos still squeezed us in for a chat.

There are now 60 local LandSAR groups and an additional 11 specialist teams providing land-based search and rescue services across the country. Out there, doing the hard yards, are more than 3,500 skilled volunteers with a shared vision of getting everyone home safe.

38 year-old Megan has volunteered for LandSAR for eight years and says even though she doesn't get paid to do it, "you couldn't pay me to stop."

## What motivated you to get involved in LandSAR?

I think there's always the wanting to give back to the community thing and I'm lucky to have gained a set of skills to allow me to help. But I was also keen to meet new people – finding other like-minded, slightly crazy people to get along with.

## What is your day job?

I own my own business, building decks and fences. A lot of the people on our committee are also self-employed. I enjoy being busy and working hard. I'm one of those people who tends to say yes to a lot!

## How many hours do you spend volunteering each month?

It really does vary – it depends on callouts. Sometimes a search can take place over three days, while others last just a few hours. I'd say around 20 hours a month at an average.

## What do you enjoy most about volunteering for LandSAR?

Without a doubt it's the people I work with – some of my best mates are people that I've met through LandSAR. We've got a really cool team. There is nothing more heartwarming than feeling that you're part of something very special, and the unique experiences we share when we go out on searches is one of the best things about being part of the LandSAR family.

I also enjoy the sense of doing something purposeful. I think a lot of people miss that in their lives. There's still purpose to be found in volunteering. My perspective is this: what do I have at work

that is more important than returning someone to their loved ones, right now?

## Could you tell us about a memorable search and rescue operation that you were involved with?

The one that jumps out for me happened about three years ago, when we went over to help Whakatane [LandSAR]. A woman and four kids were missing in the bush for two nights. We were there at 5am on the third day and got the vibe that things weren't looking too flash. Searchers had already been out all night and the family of the missing group looked at us hoping that we might be the fresh blood that's needed to bring them home.

You might be with LandSAR for 15 years and never be on the team that actually finds someone. And that's OK. It is still just as worthwhile eliminating part of the search area as it is actually finding someone. We didn't find them. But another team did and they were all alive.

## What equipment do you use?

The kit that you'd take for an overnight tramp is pretty much what you need when responding to a callout. You're pretty much throwing together some gear and putting a pack on your back. Your apprenticeship is the outdoors and most people acquire that kit over time.

## Do you participate in any LandSAR training events?

Yep – I do believe in refresher training. Things change, so the learning is a constant requirement. As I've become a slightly more senior member of the team, the way that

I learn has also changed. When you first learn stuff, you learn with fresh ears and fresh eyes. Now I learn through teaching others. As Chair, I try to encourage and inspire others too.

## Are many of your colleagues at Rotorua LandSAR women?

Our group is 50/50. As we're getting younger members in, we're actually seeing more females. I think that's really important as females bring different skills. Particularly when you're dealing with despondents. Without wanting to sound gender-biased, men and women naturally take on different roles. Often a female takes on the caregiving of a victim, while the guys will do the stretcher carrying.

## What impact does your search and rescue work have on your family or partner?

I'm Australian born and bred, so my biological family lives a wee way away. My partner is super supportive and has actually helped out with people challenges along the way. When the flag goes up, I've got neighbours around me who also help, offering to feed the dogs while I'm out in the bush.

## How do you relax?

I love the outdoors... getting the map out and planning a route off track to get away from the crowds. Whether its mountain biking, tramping, climbing, alpine trekking or skiing – it's just great to get out and make the most of what this beautiful country has to offer.

## Nominations for NZ Search and Rescue Awards

Do you know an organisation, a group, or an individual who you think should be acknowledged for their contribution to search and rescue? Send us your nominations for the Annual NZSAR Awards. They can be made for an operational activity that took place during the last calendar year or support activity. More information and nomination forms are available on our website: [www.nzsar.govt.nz/awards](http://www.nzsar.govt.nz/awards)

Nominations for the 2019 Awards close on 31 January 2020.



## Duncan's desk

Kia ora,

Spring is behind us, summer has arrived and with it, we are seeing again our annual uptick in SAR incidents as people get out amongst it across our vast SAR region. The NZSAR Secretariat has been, as always, working hard on behalf of New Zealand's search and rescue sector on a wide variety of projects.

Part of our behind-the-scenes work is to liaise with a wide range of Government departments and put forward the search and rescue viewpoint when it is appropriate. An example of this is Rhett's involvement in helping to develop the new training standards for Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS – 3rd Edition). CIMS is a multi-agency system and as regular users, we have a strong interest in making sure it meets our needs and requirements. Patience is a virtue with these things, as some of these multi-agency projects take quite a bit of effort and time. Compromise is often required to resolve different viewpoints.

We are also improving our outreach to other agencies. The recent NZSAR Council meeting included representation from the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (the Australian equivalent of Maritime NZ). The Council discussion exercise for Nationally Significant SAR included representatives from the Ministry of Health, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. We were involved in arranging Minister Twyford's successful visit to the Rescue Coordination Centre in Avalon. Input from

these people and organisations is important to improve our planning and preparation for nationally significant SAR events and for the sector in general.

In addition to the standard meetings we hold to engage within the SAR sector, in the past few months we've also run (or helped run) workshops for Aviation SAR, Safer Walking (Wander) SAR, Volunteerism and meeting with the Coastguard Regional managers. Members of the NZSAR team have also attended the Coastguard NZ AGM, LandSAR NZ AGM (and Board meeting), Water Safety NZ AGM, Drowning Prevention Auckland AGM, the NZ Safer Boating Forum, Surf Life Saving NZ Awards and a range of other events, meetings, SAR exercises, training events and forums. As we are non-operational but work on your behalf, this engagement allows us to stay in touch with SAR people doing the job and helps us keep it real.

If you have the opportunity, please take the time to inform the people who need to know the right safety advice from the three safety codes (outdoor, water and boating). [www.AdventureSmart.nz](http://www.AdventureSmart.nz) is a great resource and has a lot of safety information which, if followed, will help people stay out of trouble and reduce the need for SAR call outs.

The team and I are looking forward to having a bit of a (hopefully warm) summer break. On behalf of the NZSAR Council and Secretariat I wish you and yours a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

Stay safe,  
Duncan

## Calendar

SAREXs and SAR training:

[nzsar.govt.nz/Calendar/Events](http://nzsar.govt.nz/Calendar/Events)

31 January 2020 – Nominations close for the NZ Search and Rescue Awards

1–2 June 2020 – The Australian and New Zealand Search and Rescue Conference takes place within the two-day 2020 Disaster & Emergency Management Conference, Gold Coast

## Websites

[www.nzsar.govt.nz](http://www.nzsar.govt.nz)

Search and Rescue sector resources and information, including a PDF of this newsletter

[www.adventuresmart.nz](http://www.adventuresmart.nz)

Safety information and tips for people planning outdoor activities

[www.beacons.org.nz](http://www.beacons.org.nz)

Information about 406 beacons, including where to purchase, rent and register a distress beacon

[www.antarcticanz.govt.nz](http://www.antarcticanz.govt.nz)

Antarctica New Zealand

[www.nzsar.govt.nz/knowledge-training/start/SARdonyx](http://www.nzsar.govt.nz/knowledge-training/start/SARdonyx)

SARdonyx training on START – Search and Rescue Knowledge Library