



Connecting the Search and Rescue Sector

news

Volunteer Study

A study into volunteering in the SAR sector shows volunteers gave nearly 550,000 hours of their time to the NZSAR sector from July 2009 to June 2010. This is the equivalent of 264 people working 40 hours a week.

NZSAR Secretariat Senior Advisor Carl van der Meulen recently completed a study on volunteer issues in the New Zealand SAR sector on behalf of the NZSAR Council. Two issues are of particular significance.

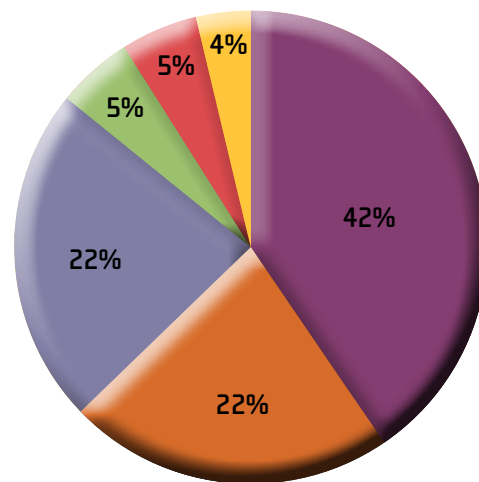
The study found that volunteers in the SAR sector spend most of their time engaged in training and administration activities. Only 5% of the overall time provided by volunteers was used in Category 1 & 2 search and rescue operations (SAROPs). The main reason volunteers leave the sector is usually because they feel they are spending too much time in training and administration activities. Volunteer managers should be aware of how much time they are asking their volunteers to provide.

While volunteers understand that training is necessary, they do not want to be overburdened with excessive training. Training should be tailored to be as practical and enjoyable as possible for the volunteers. Volunteers also feel that they are spending too much time in administration activities (such as SAROP and SLA reporting) without seeing a benefit from this. Volunteers appreciate knowing why they are engaged in reporting activities, and like to see the benefits of their work.

When volunteers are recruited, and in order to lessen retention problems, it is important that volunteer managers are open with their volunteers about how their time will be spent. This is achieved through effective communication with volunteers, which segues into the second item of note – relationships.

It is clear that over the last two years relationships throughout the SAR sector have significantly improved. This includes relationships within organisations (particularly between local groups and national offices) and relationships between organisations (particularly between voluntary and government organisations).

How the volunteers' time is spent



*Coastguard volunteers spend a significant amount of time in preventative SAR activities including coastguard missions and radio watch.

- Training hours
- Administration hours
- Radio watch*
- SAROP hours
- Coastguard missions*
- Maintenance

However, many volunteers report that they would like to see more improvement. Relationships can be maintained and strengthened through regular, clear, open and honest communications. This is best achieved by meeting with the volunteer groups at the local level. The NZSAR Secretariat is striving to ensure that relationships continue to improve across the sector. One way we can do this is by visiting local groups to explain the work that is going on at the strategic and national level. If your group would like to host a visit from the NZSAR Secretariat, please contact us via your national office, or via our website.

A full copy of the volunteer study is available for download from the NZSAR website www.nzsar.org.nz.



RCCNZ launches new SAR database

A new online database that will provide up-to-date information for the search and rescue (SAR) community in a user-friendly and efficient format has been developed by the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ).

The database, which went live on 30 June, has been built for the NZSAR Council with input from SAR organisations, such as Coastguard and LandSAR, as well as commercial aviation companies.

SAR providers around the country were sent letters over the past month inviting them to list their contact details and capability information in the new database.

RCCNZ's Nigel Clifford says the database, built from the paper-based guides currently used by SAR coordinators, is a simple but powerful tool that uses mapping technology to illustrate where SAR resources are located around the country.

"It's a kind of graphical phone book," Nigel says.

"It's incredibly easy to pinpoint any place on the map and see exactly what resources are in the area and how far away they are from any particular search point."



"We are conscious that SAR coordinators around the country have different manuals and guidebooks that may not always have the most up-to-date and relevant information.

"This database will provide current and updated information – and will also provide a complete picture of the resources available, including all capabilities or limitations," he says.

The database allows searching in multiple ways including by region, by type of resource, by name, and by map view.

It is the first database to give a consolidated overview or picture of SAR assets across New Zealand.

Nigel says at a local level people usually have a good knowledge of what SAR assets are available in the immediate vicinity, but they might not be aware of other, perhaps more appropriate, assets in a nearby area.

"With paper-based systems it can be hard to see the bigger picture – the new database will pull together information from multiple sources and provide a very clear picture of where assets are and what they can do."

Nigel says the response from SAR coordinators and providers has been hugely positive and the SAR community is very keen to have the database up and running.

"I encourage all in the SAR community to get online and have a look.

"Not only is the database an incredibly useful tool for search and rescue, it also provides a fascinating overview of our SAR community. We hope the SAR community embraces this tool as a way to provide a more effective service to the people of New Zealand."

New SAR providers can contact RCCNZ to have their resources listed in the database.

The website address is www.nzsar.org.nz – click on the NZSAR Resources tab.



The database lists all types of resources, including search teams and coordinators, rescue vessels and aircraft.

It also includes details of the capabilities of the different resources – for example a listing for a search helicopter will include such things as winching ability, night vision capability, or medical coverage provided. The database can be searched and filtered so that users can find a provider with a particular capability or set of capabilities, and see where they are in relation to any SAR activity that is underway.

RCCNZ will maintain the database, but providers of SAR resources can obtain a logon, which will allow them to edit their records to update contact details and changes in capability – such as the acquisition of new equipment or personnel. This will ensure the information remains current and meaningful.

bringing SAR people together



Avalanche Workshop

Annually we can expect 20 – 30 avalanche incidents with somewhere between 4 and 20 requiring a coordinated search and rescue (SAR) response. A major avalanche incident occurs every 3-5 years, on average, and last season several people lost their lives due to avalanche incidents.

In response to these tragedies, the NZSAR Secretariat hosted a workshop in Twizel to look at the management and coordination of search and rescue for avalanche incidents. Forty-eight highly experienced people came together at the beginning of June, representing a wide range of interested organisations including LandSAR, Mountain Safety Council, ski field operators, heliski operators, NZ Mountain Guides, Police, DoC, NZ Transport Agency, St John and the Rescue Coordination Centre.

They covered a lot of avalanche SAR topics including: Coordinated Incident Management System, case studies, risk management, electronic aids and new technology to assist avalanche SAR, communications, individual training & standards, and avalanche rescue team training and exercising. The workshop culminated with an in depth look at pre-plans for avalanche SAR.

It was a great success both in terms of acquiring and sharing knowledge and also in developing a common understanding about planning for and delivering an effective search and rescue response to avalanche SAR incidents. It also provided a good networking opportunity for the participants, most of whom have significant search and rescue responsibilities relating to avalanche SAR incidents.

The material from the workshop, including the presentations and notes from the discussions, is available online at www.nzsar.org.nz in the *Training and Workshops* section.



On Scene Coordinators Workshop

RCCNZ organised a very successful two-day workshop in June to discuss the role and training of On Scene Coordinators in Wellington. Fifty-three people attended from Police, LandSAR, Coastguard, SARINZ, Surf Life Saving NZ, DOC, the NZSAR Secretariat, Helicopter Operators and RCCNZ.

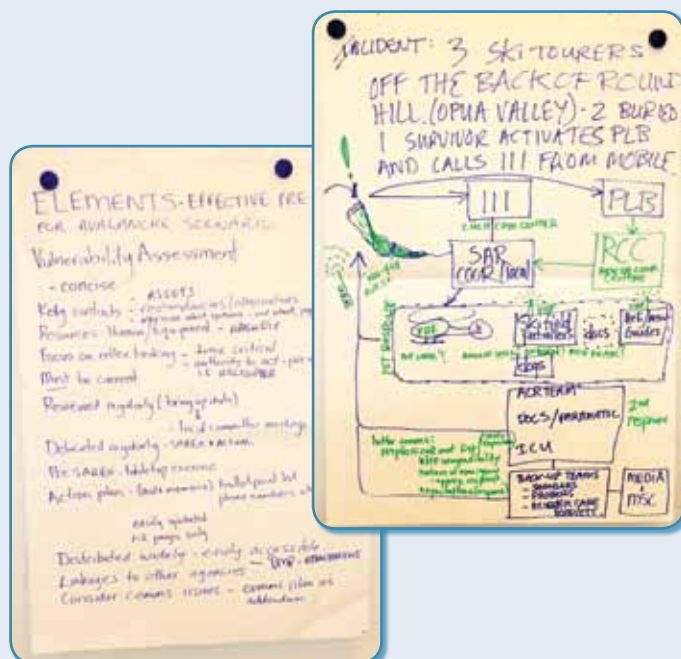
A wide variety of case studies were presented by experienced SAR people detailing how On Scene Coordinators (OSC) are used in land, marine and air SAR operations.

Three working group sessions discussed the competencies, skills, potential training syllabus and future possibilities for OSC development. These working groups reported back to the main workshop, where their ideas were refined and captured for further work.

Everyone agreed that no matter what SAR management structure is put in place, it is essential that it be efficient, simple to understand and easy to operate.

Participants also noted that, for large searches, there may also be a need to appoint specialist air or marine OSCs. They agreed that if an OSC is appointed, that person must be familiar with the area and the capabilities of local SAR operators.

Work is currently underway to develop OSC training based upon the material discussed at the workshop, which is sponsored by the NZSAR Secretariat and RCCNZ. A report from the OSC Workshop is available online at: www.nzsar.org.nz in the *Training and Workshops* section.



news continued



Matt Gunn and Blizzard by RMG van Rooden

Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale

There is only one way to be completely safe from avalanche danger – that is not to go near avalanche terrain. As this will not always be a practicable step to take, a new system for classifying avalanche terrain has been adopted in New Zealand by the Mountain Safety Council (MSC) and the Department of Conservation. This system, called Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES¹), gives the public information on their level of exposure to avalanche hazard when going into uncontrolled avalanche terrain. It also provides advice on the levels of experience people using the assessed areas should have.

As an example, a mountain range may generally be challenging but contain areas that are complex. Therefore, it meets the definition of challenging because people have options for avoiding avalanche paths. If people are using a particular valley in the range where there is no option for avoiding avalanche terrain then that place is complex. On mapping simple terrain is featured in green, challenging in blue, and complex in black.

ATES categorises avalanche terrain into three classes:

Description	Class	Terrain Criteria
Simple	1	Exposure to low angle or primarily forested terrain. Some forest openings may involve the runout zones of infrequent avalanches. Many options to reduce or eliminate exposure. No glacier travel.
Challenging	2	Exposure to well defined avalanche paths, starting zones or terrain traps. Options exist to reduce or eliminate exposure with careful route finding. Glacier travel is straightforward but crevasse hazards may exist.
Complex	3	Exposure to multiple overlapping avalanche paths or large expanses of steep, open terrain. Multiple avalanche starting zones and terrain traps below. Minimal options to reduce exposure. Complicated glacier travel with extensive crevasse bands or icefalls.

The MSC avalanche hazard advisories have five danger levels. These advisories include the ATES system as a consideration and are viewed as industry best practice. See www.avalanche.net.nz for a description of these levels and their advice on recommended action in the backcountry.

As a general rule, people should only venture into avalanche terrain when the danger level is low or moderate. Any travel when the danger level is considerable or high should only be done by experienced people. No travel in avalanche terrain should occur when the danger level is extreme.

You can get more information about avalanche safety and related issues from www.avalanche.net.nz.

¹ Avalanche terrain exposure scale. A system developed in Canada by Parks Canada and the Canadian Avalanche Association.

Communications Review

NZSAR commissioned a review of our communication channels to determine their relevance and effectiveness. It found that, overall, we are meeting your needs.

Conducted by Blair McLaren of Splash Consulting Ltd, the review utilised both quantitative (a questionnaire) and qualitative (phone interviews) measures, and covered the period from early March to late May. The review looked at the following means of communication:

- Link newsletter
- NZSAR Annual Report
- NZSAR website
- Seminars and visits to members
- Phone or email contact with members

Among other things, the review highlighted that Link is the primary means by which people hear about, and keep up to date with, the work done in the SAR sector. Most of those people also access the NZSAR website and find it useful. Nearly two-thirds of respondents have regular contact with the NZSAR Secretariat, and those who do are generally very happy with the relationship that exists.

So, what changes are wanted? Short, easy to read articles were requested (“volunteers are busy people, often essentially holding down two jobs!”). People asked for more international news tips, links, and examples, and more emphasis on “good” news stories.

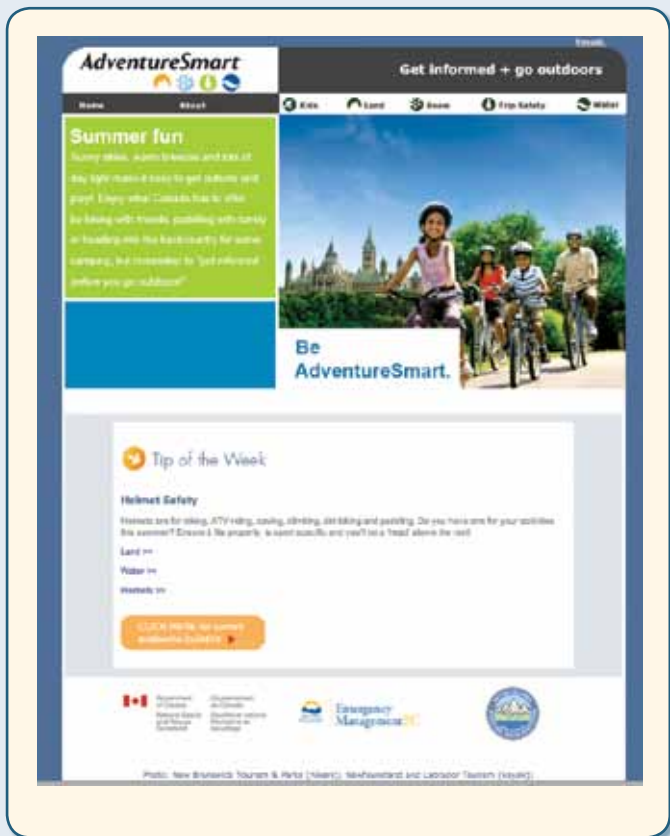
We have already started incorporating many of the recommendations from the review. If you participated in it, we appreciate your assistance and value your input.

international observations

AdventureSmart

Canada runs an outdoor safety website called AdventureSmart. It encompasses a number of outdoor safety programmes and helps encourage new ones. From Hug-A-Tree and Survive, a programme delivered to kids by search and rescue volunteers, to a YouthSafe initiative to teach outdoor safety guidelines to students, to Avalanche Safety, which targets recreational backcountry hikers and skiers.

The AdventureSmart website www.adventuresmart.ca, gives people safety information before they head outdoors. It also provides information and links to outdoor safety and recreational programmes and businesses throughout the province. We are looking at doing something similar for New Zealand.



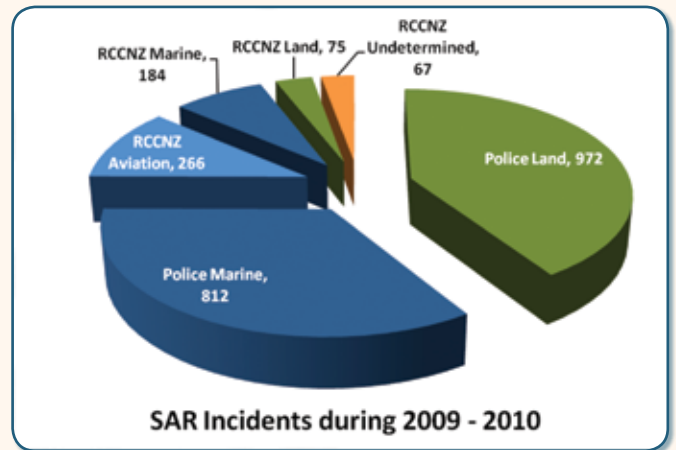
NZSAR Awards

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.

stats attack



NZSAR dealt with a total of 2,376 incidents during 2009/10. Police coordinated 1,784 Category 1 incidents, and RCCNZ coordinated 592 Category 2 incidents. By mode of operation, land based SAR was the busiest with 1,074 incidents, followed by marine based SAR with 996 incidents, aviation with 266 incidents, and there were 67 undetermined incidents (caused by beacon alerts).



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 2010 awards close on 31 January 2011.

Duncan's desk



In the six months since I last wrote this column, Carl and I have made quite a bit of progress delivering on a range of projects important to the SAR community. We've been greatly assisted by the direction and encouragement of the NZSAR Council and the active and enthusiastic support provided by NZSAR Consultative Committee members. We

are also very grateful for the huge amount of assistance we received from many SAR experts across the country.

It was good to see a number of Police Districts make use of the NZSAR Council's SAREX funding. We hope this will improve the quality, measurement and debriefing of major SAREXs. We have also established a national SAREX calendar and developed a set of SAREX guidelines to assist planners and managers better plan, prepare and monitor their exercises. An online SAR "lessons" system has also been created so that we can learn from the experiences of others. If you have a good "lesson" to share please take the time to submit it at:

www.nzsar.org.nz.

Carl's NZSAR Volunteer Study (see page 1) is a great piece of work. It gives us a detailed overview of the voluntary segment of our sector and will assist us to plan for our future. On NZSAR Council direction, we engaged a specialist to conduct an independent review into the Tafadzwa SAROP. We also had someone critique the effectiveness and value of our communications (see page 4).

Perhaps the largest piece of work for us over the last twelve months was running six SAR workshops, each targeted at a part of the SAR sector that required a collective approach to addressing specific issues and risks.

Overall, 403 people attended the workshops and we received a lot of positive feedback about them. Bringing people together has led to a positive shift in the culture of the wider SAR sector. The benefits from simply getting expert SAR people into a room to talk about thorny SAR issues were substantial – even when people agreed to disagree. Each workshop has been documented and each has led to a sizable amount of follow-up action.

As one of the few who attended all six workshops, I have come to think that we have far more in common than we have to divide us. I am also struck by our similarities, no matter what environment we prepare for. An example is the non-obvious similarities between avalanche and marine SAR where time is of the absolute essence and good pre-planning and exercising can be the difference between success and failure. The NZSAR Council and Secretariat will continue to organise workshops and other events to enable us share ideas and experiences (even bad ones) so we can reach our true potential.

You will find more information about all this work and resources on our website at www.nzsar.org.nz.

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This column alternates with Senior Advisor Carl van der Meulen

NZSAR

calendar

- 22 – 24 October, Rescue 2010 Conference, Iceland
- 19 – 21 November, LandSAR Conference, Hokitika
- 10 November, NZSAR Consultative Committee Meeting, Wellington
- 24 November, NZSAR Council Meeting, Wellington

Major SAREXs are planned for the following Police Districts:

- September – Auckland, Northland, Canterbury and Bay of Plenty
- October – Eastern, Canterbury, Northland, Waikato and Auckland
- November – Central, Bay of Plenty, Tasman, Eastern & Wellington
- December – Bay of Plenty & Waikato

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

useful website links

www.nzsar.org.nz – Information and resources for the New Zealand Search and Rescue Community. The Training and Workshops section includes material from all the workshops run to date, as well as the SAREX Guidelines.

This newsletter is available as a PDF on this website

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

www.icesar.com/rescue – Information about the Rescue 2010 Conference, to be held in Iceland.

www.adventuresmart.ca – A clever site which promotes safety messaging in Canada. (We are looking at doing something similar here.)

<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.