

Connecting the Search and Rescue Sector

news

The New Zealand Outdoor Safety Code

As the search and rescue sector enters its busiest period of the year, a new outdoor safety code that applies to all land based outdoor activities has been released in an effort to reduce emergency callouts.

The outdoor safety code is a list of rules based on the philosophy of 'push your boundaries, limit your risks', which encourages people to experience the outdoors and make smart decisions about safety.

The Mountain Safety Council (MSC) has worked with a number of outdoor recreation groups to develop the code, which will be the centre of a safety campaign over the summer.

The Outdoor Safety Code

- **Plan your trip**
Seek local knowledge and plan the route you will take and the amount of time you can reasonably expect it to take.
- **Tell someone**
Tell someone your plans and leave a date for when to raise the alarm if you haven't returned.
- **Be aware of the weather**
New Zealand's weather can be highly unpredictable. Check the forecast and expect weather changes.
- **Know your limits**
Challenge yourself within your physical limits and experience.
- **Take sufficient supplies**
Make sure you have enough food, equipment and emergency rations for the worst case scenario. Take an appropriate means of communication.

Many outdoor recreation organisations have developed their own messages and safety rules, but an agreed set of basic principles of outdoor safety for use by all organisations in the sector has been lacking. This can be confusing for visitors and is an inefficient use of scarce resources.

MSC has also developed activity-specific codes, which will offer more detailed advice to people undertaking different activities.



Boating Safety

Safety messages for the marine environment form part of New Zealand's National Pleasure Boat Safety Strategy, which has led to a 50% reduction in recreational boating fatalities over the last 6 years. This is in spite of increasing boat numbers. The strategy has used a combination of education and targeted legislation to tackle the key risk factors in recreational boating fatalities.

The overarching message is; whether you have a kayak, personal water craft, waka, sail or power boat, you must know the rules, have the right equipment, and be a responsible skipper.

Water Safety Messages

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

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

There are a number of free publications associated with the marine safety messages and the boat strategy. More information about these can be found at <http://www.maritimenz.govt.nz/Recreational-Boating/Recreational-boating.asp>



news continued

NZSAR Runs a Series of Workshops

In late October the NZSAR Secretariat hosted a workshop on land-based SAR communications. This was the first in a series of workshops that the Secretariat will run for the sector, under the NZSAR Council's goal of promoting continuous improvement.



Alan Thompson from the National Rural Fire Authority addressing the land based SAR communications workshop

The workshop was well attended by representatives of many organisations that either provide, or use, communications expertise during land-based Search and Rescue Operations (SAROPs). It included some organisations that are not traditionally considered part of the NZSAR sector, but own and operate significant communications networks that can be used during SAROPs.

It started with a series of informative presentations on the roles and communications capabilities from some of the organisations attending. The Open Forum sessions that followed considered: current networks and capabilities; risks and mitigation; and the future. These sessions generated a high and engaging level of debate on many of the issues and challenges effective communications face. One of the positive outcomes of the workshop was the desire by organisations participating to improve their overall coordination and collaboration; not only when operating together during SAROPs, but also when building and maintaining their communications networks.

Participant Ian Gardiner, Secretary of the Canterbury Mountain Radio Service, summed up the workshop with this view: "The workshop was timely to bring together parties to discuss SAR radio communications, which are so vital to the success of any SAR operation. I was pleased to reinforce the valuable contribution that mountain radio services throughout the country make to prevent SAR operations. The statements decided by the conference will ensure that SAR and mountain radio work closer together."

The Secretariat wishes to thank all the workshop participants for their involvement during the day. Special thanks to John Yaldwyn of Amateur Radio Emergency Communications for his efforts in bringing together the wide and diverse range of

organisations that were involved, and for his role in facilitating the workshop.



Communicators at work with Police and LandSAR staff. Photo credit: Alan Thompson

Hoist Workshop

The Land Communications workshop was followed by last month's Hoist Workshop, which NZSAR co-hosted with 3 Squadron RNZAF, at RNZAF Base Ohakea. Over 100 people from all over New Zealand attended the two day workshop aimed specifically at the operators of helicopter hoist and long line equipment.

As there are a number of SAR helicopters around the country, the NZSAR Council wanted to ensure that participants had the opportunity to discuss the many safety and operational aspects of hoist or long line equipment during SAR operations.

The workshop included a number of briefings and workshop discussions on:

- Hoist operator safety in maritime, land and alpine environments.
- Search and rescue hoist operational issues.
- Ground to air communication.
- Aircraft safety briefings.
- Human load equipment and night operations, including night vision equipment winching.
- Demonstration of 3 Squadron RNZAF equipment.
- Updates on the RNZAF NH90 and A109 programmes.

The efficient and generous arrangements made by the Royal New Zealand Air Force at Base Ohakea were appreciated by everyone who attended. Read about a hoist operator's work in SAR *in Action* on the following page.

More NZSAR workshops are being planned for the new year.

SAR in action

At the End of the Line – Hoist Operating

Noel Watson has been hanging other people off the end of helicopters for 10 years now, ever since the Taranaki Helicopter Rescue Trust fitted its first winch to their helicopter. He is the SAR 'Jack of All Trades', having worked as Police SAR Squad Sergeant in Taranaki before taking up a crewing position once the Trust was formed. Noel is now manager of the Trust and has just recently retired from the operational side.

Noel has not kept a tally of how many SAROPs he's been on, or how often he has operated the winch, "but it is numerous. As technology has improved we've been able to do more, save more lives - especially those we have pulled out of the sea or off the side of Mount Taranaki."

"This year has been amongst the busiest for the crew.

"Ranging from: rescuing kayakers; a number of medivacs off oil tankers and supply vessels, one was 90 miles off shore in 30 knot winds and 6 metre swells; searching for a missing person from a dingy in Port Taranaki; the winch recovery of two people on the same day from the slopes off Mount Taranaki; more mountain winch jobs; a Paritutu rock winch to get two young boys to safety; the list goes on," Noel says.

One that stands out, though, is rescuing a fisherman who had been washed overboard from a boat as it started to go over the Patea river mouth/bar earlier this year. He was washed out to sea with a 3 metre swell and ended up underneath a 40 metre cliff.

Noel describes the rescue: *"Waves were crashing over him, when we arrived, as his luck would have it, he was spotted by our crew before the next wave made him invisible."*

"I was the winch operator for this operation. It was very tricky; a 50/50 call as to whether we continued. The rescuer was winched out into a very dangerous environment where there was no room for any sort of problem. The cliff the person was underneath was more like a small cave, so we needed to winch out onto rocks about 15 metres from the cliff and calculate the time the rescuer made contact with the ground, between the swells rolling through. These swells (higher in size than the rescuer) would have taken him out if he was hit by one of them.

"When he got on the ground he ran and jumped over boulders to reach the fisherman, who at this point was near complete exhaustion, and - as he told us later - thought he was dead. The best sound he has ever heard was the sound of the helicopter approaching. It took our rescuer three attempts to get the rescue harness onto the man (waves crashing over both of them ripped it away on the first two attempts) then the fisherman had to be pulled over rocks so we could quickly winch them both to safety before the next set of waves came. This person owes his life to the skill and bravery of the helicopter crew; this is one operation where all the crew's training and knowledge was put into use."

Taranaki Rescue Helicopter Trust crews must be trained and ready for any emergency that they may be asked to respond to. Given the diversity of their region's terrain this includes medivacs from offshore platforms and ships, as they cover water, mountain and remote bush country. They have ambulance paramedics supplied by TDHB, alpine cliff rescue and Surf Life Saving personnel, who have all been winch trained in their specific areas.

"We train with the teams that we use on a reasonably regular basis. This may mean that we are winching on the slopes of Mount Taranaki, placing our team onto ice, then the next training session we may be boat winching with that team."

"In the early days we learnt as we went, with training supplied by Westpac Auckland. Now the crew get put through a ground school before they fly, and after a period of time they may be considered to be up-skilled and are signed off to night flying to be a winch or a strop operator. Skills have to be of a very high level."

Patea Rescue



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SAR in action continued



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Noel says they work in very well with the other people involved in SAR; local Police SAR, land & marine committees, Coastguard, land and alpine SAR teams, Surf Lifesaving, radio personnel and the air force.

"Really, anyone who is involved in SAR will work with us at some time. We try to be involved in training and meetings as much and often as we can." Like most people involved in SAR, Noel does it "because I enjoy helping others and I also get the chance to meet many people interested in doing the same."

And the best thing about being a hoist operator: "Being able to offer assistance to people who cannot, at that point in their life, help themselves."

awards

Couple's Courage Earns International Maritime Award

The "exceptional bravery" of two American sailors who risked their lives to rescue a New Zealander and an Australian couple from a sinking yacht near Fiji has been recognised with an international bravery award.

American couple Sophie and Maurice Conti were nominated for the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea by Maritime New Zealand (MNZ) on behalf of the New Zealand Government, following the dramatic rescue of the crew of the 10m ketch *Timella* on 12 October last year.

The Contis and their two small children were on board their catamaran the *Ocealy* in a lagoon about 90km from Suva, Fiji, when just before midnight they were woken by something that every mariner fears: "Mayday, mayday, mayday..."

Scrambling from their bunks, the Contis got to their marine radio in time to hear a second message... it was a woman's voice:

"Mayday, mayday, mayday... this is the sailing vessel Timella... we have struck a reef and need assistance... we are hard aground... the waves are bashing us against the reef. We need help..."

With the closest search and rescue resources and other commercial vessels several hours away, the couple braved rough seas and strong winds to rescue the crew of the *Timella*, which had struck a submerged reef 22km away and were taking on water. On board were New Zealander Ali Timms and Australians Cameron Slagle and Liz Schoh. Advice and assistance was provided to the Contis by the Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ) and Mike Randall at the New Zealand High Commission in Suva.

In accepting New Zealand's nomination of the Contis for the award, IMO Secretary-General Efthimios Mitropoulos said the couple had displayed "exceptional bravery" in the rescue of the crew of the *Timella*, "at considerable risk to their own safety and that of their children".

The Contis received the award in person at a special ceremony held at the IMO in London on 23 November.

The couple said they were "stunned and speechless" on receiving news of the award.

"We are deeply honoured. We felt that just being nominated was a huge deal and never even suspected that we would be awarded this honour."

Have you checked out our revamped website yet?

www.nzsar.org.nz has undergone a makeover in an effort to improve your experience and connections with the NZSAR Council and Secretariat. We've added a number of new features, including an online calendar with dates for SAR training and SAREXs.

It's worth a look!

National SAREX Plan to be Established

NZSAR is to begin work alongside SAR organisations to develop a Search and Rescue Exercise (SAREX) plan which will be rolled out over the next few years.

In another key step towards a more coordinated search and rescue sector, this SAREX plan will coordinate major exercises in an effort to use the sector's resources more efficiently and to improve the quality and effectiveness of the exercises. It will also increase our ability to analyse and plan for SAREXs, measure their outcomes, and assist in reducing the risk during an actual operation.

The NZSAR Training Review (2009) identified the need for the SAR sector to undertake more joint training. It outlined some fundamental requirements for SAR organisations to "better communicate, share their expertise and resources, plan and train together and commit to working together with goodwill". SAREXs are recognised as the most productive form of experiential training because they 'mock-up' an expected SAROP enabling people from various parts of the sector to meet, plan, practice, review and evaluate in an environment where time and stress can be controlled. SAREXs are an important part of the NZSAR Integrated Training Framework.

Part of the plan involves the NZSAR Secretariat providing agreed SAREX guidelines, templates and aide memoire for SAREX planning, evaluation and debriefing. These will focus on generic SAREX planning, conduct, monitoring/evaluating and sharing of lessons. Existing material and Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management publications will also be used to prepare these documents.

Multi-year planning, engaging organisations, and managing the resources are all essential elements that will drive this plan.

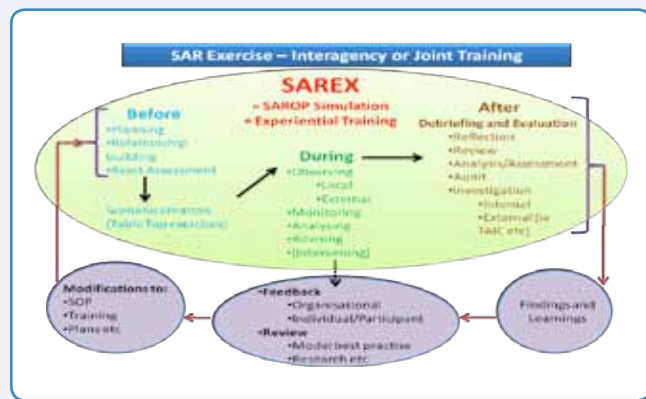
The success of individual SAREXs will rely on completing the four distinct stages known as the Exercise Development Cycle (EDC): analyse the need, design the exercise, conduct the exercise and evaluate the exercise.



The EDC applies to all types and levels of exercise regardless of a SAR agency's size or budget. The process is flexible enough to meet the unique needs of the agency using it.

NZSAR will develop the national SAREX plan using the skills and collective wisdom of the wider SAR sector. It will hold a meeting early next year, involving all national SAR agencies and NZ Police District SAR coordinators. This meeting aims to have a rolling five to 10 year planning horizon. Every year the plan will be updated to schedule major category 1 and 2 SAREXs, taking into account exercise priorities and other requirements as they arise.

Once completed, the plan will be maintained online at www.nzsar.org.nz and be complemented by the NZSAR online calendar.



NZSAR Awards

Do you know of an organisation, group or individual who should 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.

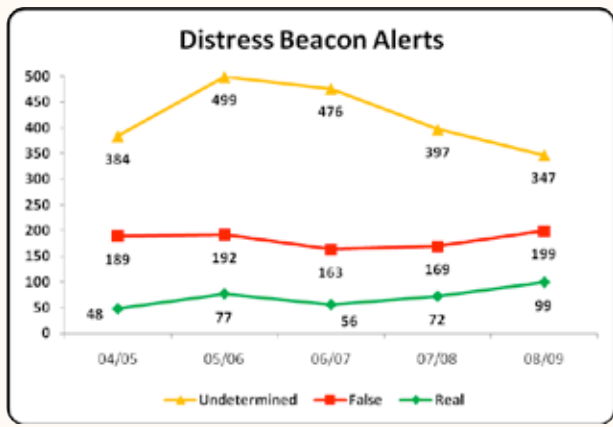
These awards are valuable not only for the contribution they acknowledge but also for raising community awareness about the efforts SAR people go to in this often complex and difficult work.

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 2009 awards close on 31 December.



stats attack



The move towards the 406 MHz changeover date of 1 Feb 2009 is clearly seen in this graph, with the steady reduction in undetermined distress beacon alerts over the last four years. There is also a slow but steady increase in the amount of real distress beacon alerts over the last five years. This appears to be a result of the 406 MHz beacon campaign, as the public have become better educated about distress beacons.

calendar

- NZSAR Council Meeting – 9 December 2009**
- NZSAR Consultative Committee Meeting – 10 February 2010**
- NZSAR Council Meeting – 24 February 2010**
- NZSAR Training/SAREX planning meeting for 2010/2011 – 10 March**

useful website links

- www.nzsar.org.nz – New Zealand Search and Rescue Council
- This newsletter is available as a PDF on this website
- www.antarcticanz.govt.nz – Activities in Antarctica and Southern Ocean
- www.beacons.org.nz – 406 beacon information and online registration
- www.maritimenz.govt.nz – Recreational-Boating Boat safety information
- www.trht.org.nz – Taranaki Rescue Helicopter Trust

Sharing Lessons

There is a section specifically for SAR people to discuss lessons learned on our website. Please submit a lesson you or your organisation has learned. Go to <http://www.nzsar.org.nz/lessons-learned> for submission details.

Carl's corner



'If you don't like the weather in New Zealand, wait five minutes.' This is some common advice often given to international tourists. I am reminded of the truth of this as I write this column. In the space of 24 hours, while on holiday in Canterbury recently, I had my first sunburn of summer, then a late spring storm brought heavy rain and snow to the region. A few days ago the conditions looked ideal for heading into the mountains, or onto the water, for the holiday weekend – but definitely not as I write this. Too often SAR operations are launched to find and rescue people who have been caught out by changing weather.

A focus of this Link is the NZSAR Council's goal of Supporting SAR Preventative Strategies. As we head into summer, we also head into the busiest time of the year for our sector. The more we can do to stop people getting into trouble, the better it is for them and for us. Let's make sure we are all aware of the land safety messages that have been prepared by the Mountain Safety Council (in consultation with other outdoor recreation groups), and the water safety messages that have been prepared by the National Pleasure Boat Safety Forum (see front page). More importantly, let's spread these messages to those people we come across who are about to go on a tramping holiday, or are going to take their new boat or kayak out onto the water. New Zealand is a wonderful country for enjoying the outdoors – but we want people to enjoy the outdoors safely. As we often say, let's try and put ourselves out of a job.

Over the last few months, the Secretariat has run some workshops for the sector – two of which are highlighted in this newsletter. We will be running more of these in the new year. The aim of these workshops is to Promote Continuous Improvement in the sector – another NZSAR Council goal. Lessons and recommendations from the workshops will be available on our website: www.nzsar.org.nz.

Have you checked out our new website yet? It has undergone a makeover in an effort to improve your experience and connections with the NZSAR Council and Secretariat. We've added a number of new features, including an online calendar with dates for SAR training and SAREXs and a section specifically for SAR people to discuss lessons learned. You'll find details of how to submit lessons in the previous column under 'Sharing Lessons'. Finally, a happy holiday season to all of you. And as I finish this column, the clouds are breaking up and the sun is coming out again.

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This column alternates with Secretariat Manager Duncan Ferner