

Exercise Evaluation Report

CENTRAL DISTRICT SAREX

POUAKAI

Location: TARANAKI

Date: 4th and 5th November 2023

**Report
version:** FINAL

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Executive Summary

This exercise was the Central District SAREX, held in Taranaki on the 4th and 5th November 2023

It was attended by Police SAR Squad members from Taranaki and Whanganui, and landsar volunteers also from Whanganui and Taranaki. There was no attendance by either landsar or Police SAR from the Palmerston North area.

The exercise was a well-planned scenario-based exercise in the Pouakai Range of Egmont National Park.

This area was chosen because of the increasing number of SAR operations within this area, higher numbers of hikers using these tracks and an ever-increasing risk to the SAR community and Police.

Despite a number of recommendations, as a whole the capability of the SAR sector in this district was demonstrated to be of a high standard. The recommendations are made to enhance that capability.

Primarily the overarching recommendation would be to continue the IMT training through district desk-top and Cims refresher training.

The support to the whole district SAR organization by the Police was made evident with the attendance of the District Operations Manager. It was refreshing to see this support at Police district level.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

To include the Poaukai circuit track in the Egmont national park Pre-Plan

(See findings and conclusion objective 1)

Recommendation 2

Comms plans completed by AREC under the responsibility of the Logistics function.

(See findings and conclusions Objective 3)

Recommendation 3

Additional IMTEX Desktop training to include CIMS refresher during each year

See Findings and conclusion objective 6)

Recommendation 4

To identify and utilize an Iwi representative for Sarex planning and operational IMT decisions.

See findings and conclusion objective 7)

Recommendation 5

To develop and use large size template forms including,

Risk Management template

Comms template

Field team deployment

Information Collection Plan.

See findings and conclusions objectives 4 and 6)

Introduction

Exercise POUAKAI was held in the Pouakai Range of the Egmont national Park and was designed as a scenario-based exercise, with a lost party deployed early and walking through the intended route as per the scenario. The lost party left sign throughout, with the expectation of finds by the search parties.

The “On Call” Police SAR squad member was briefed with the initial call at 0700 hrs with the first SAR teams expected to be deployed at around 0900 hrs. This initial call was the initial outline of the full scenario that had been developed.

The expectation was that the teams would locate the lost party late afternoon on the 1st day (Saturday) with the other teams then converging and doing a stretcher carry to extract them from the area.

The weather during that 1st day was wet, windy, and cold and this did impact on the team’s ability to complete search areas as expected.

The lost party were not found until late evening on the first day, which left insufficient time for the teams to converge and carry out the stretcher carry exercise.

That aside, the exercise was very successful with a number of key points identified for future development.

Background

Background to the Exercise

There are large numbers of local and tourists who walk the Taranaki crossing (Pouakai Circuit) on Mount Taranaki. The crossing is easily accessed and there have been numerous SAR incidents over the last few years. The number of walkers on the circuit is increasing over time and is well advertised as an alternative to the Tongariro crossing and an attraction to be completed when visiting the Taranaki Region.

Police are asked to coordinate a number of searches each year for injured and overdue walkers in this area.

Pre-plans exist for the main circuit route. However recently a number of pest monitoring tracks have been opened up which a number of hikers are using as a means of getting away from the main track into more adventurous terrain.

This creates a risk of extended search periods, of which many of the SAR managers have little experience.

Despite regular trainings, SAR teams have spent limited time in this area and along the pest control tracks.

The combined SAREX is identified as an opportunity for SAR managers (IMT) to work within a CIMS structure, to test readiness plans and their planning processes as well as having search teams practice their craft in a SAR environment.

Dates, location, organising agency(s), key people

This exercise was held over the weekend of 4th and 5th November 2023 in the Pouakai Range in the Egmont National Park. This forms part of the track system of the Mount Taranaki circuit

The exercise was planned by Snr Constable Vaughan SMITH of the Taranaki Police SAR squad, with the assistance of key landsar advisers.

Participating organisations

Landsar personnel from throughout the Taranaki and Wanganui areas attended, along the Police members of both the Wanganui and Taranaki Police areas of the Central Police District.

Exercise aim

To test the IMT with the implementation of the local SAR pre-plan on the Pouakai circuit, task landsar teams into the sub-alpine environs to put into place and practice their search skills and patient care.

Exercise objectives

Two documents were produced, 1 bearing the SAREX guidelines form, the other being New Plymouth SAREX plan. The objectives listed were not wholly consistent with each other. The evaluator has combined the objectives from those two documents and identified the Objectives as

- (1) To establish an IMT which would activate and manage appropriate pre-plan/ or plan to deploy the appropriate resources to meet the demands of the exercise.
- (2) Tasking of resources by the IMT is in accordance with search management principals.
- (3) Test communication infrastructure in SAR environment between field teams and to the Taranaki Home base.
- (4) Risk Management systems and processes are identified and communicated by the IMT.
- (5) SAR personnel to locate and recover the missing party, with a focus on patient care.
- (6) All agencies operate within the CIMs model and principals.
- (7) Relationships between the Iwi and Local Police and SAR groups are strengthened.
- (8) The IMT utilizes appropriate IT systems to support the demands of the exercise.

Exercise Scenario

The scenario was based on a local resident and experience tramper who intended to walk the Pouakai circuit on Mount Taranaki. He knows this track well. He is well equipped and has taken overnight equipment.,

He did not take his PLB.

He is known to be adventurous, taking alternative routes and seeking interesting points.

He was dropped off 2 days prior and due out on the 3rd November.

He did not appear at the expected pick-up point on the 3rd November. He was reported missing on the morning of the 4th November.

The on-call SAR member received a report from the missing party's wife who was the person reporting him missing.

Injects were available to point teams into specific areas as required.,

Evaluation Methodology

The agreed outcomes of the evaluation activity

It was agreed that the evaluator remain within the IMT environs to evaluate the IMT component of this SAREX and in accordance with the objectives set.

Evaluation scope

The Evaluator was asked to evaluate the exercise as a whole. Any comments made in this report from what was not observed by the evaluator have come from comments made during subsequent debriefs.

Aspects of the exercise observed, what was not observed.

The evaluator observed all the actions within the Incident Control Point. He did not observe any field activities.

The process followed in preparing and submitting the report

It was agreed that this report be sent direct to the exercise director and to the area SAR coordinator.

Findings

Objective 1

- (1) To establish an IMT which would activate and manage appropriate pre-plan/ or plan to deploy the appropriate resources to meet the demands of the exercise.

A Pre-plan doesn't exist specifically for the area of this exercise however one does exist for the main, Mt Taranaki circuit track.

There is a very general pre-plan for the Taranaki SAR area.

Neither of these pre-plans were referred to during the initial response by the IMT to the exercise scenario.

Subsequent response by the IMT used map overlays which do form part of the main circuit pre-plan.

The planned response included the deployment of the appropriate resources to meet the demands of the scenario.

This could be improved with a specific pre-plan for the Pouakai circuit route, including pest control tracks.

Objective 2

Tasking of resources by the IMT is in accordance with search management principals.

Taskings prepared for the field teams were generally of a good standard with a clear start point, finish point and required actions between. While still allowing scope of decisions by team leaders to carry out those tasks. Tasks were all within the scope of the objectives set on the action plans and related well to the strategies to achieve this objectives and ultimately the goal.

Objective 3

Test communication infrastructure in SAR environment between field teams and to the Taranaki Home base.

The comms infrastructure around Mount Taranaki is very sound, with a series of fixed repeaters allowing good communications within the Egmont national Park.

In addition good cell phone coverage throughout the area stands as a secondary comms system.

However during the exercise comms wasn't always successful, with some teams extended beyond the main repeater coverage and being unaware of the 2nd or third options.

This issue was caused by the AREC manager completing the Comms plan, in isolation to the IMT logistics function. Although the AREC manager verbally briefed the SAR teams of the secondary channel option, the IMT itself was not aware. As a consequence the tasking forms did not include alternative channels and when to use them.

Objective 4

(8) Risk Management systems and processes are identified and communicated by the IMT.

A Risk and hazard register was created in an A4 template format and posted within the IMT, adjacent to the Action Plan.

This register, however, was not portrayed to any other responders outside the ICP, other than comments made on the tasking sheets. Not all tasking sheets included hazard and risk identification.

A Risk function manager was not appointed by the incident controllers.

Objective 5

SAR personnel to locate and recover the missing party, with a focus on patient care.

Ultimately, with some additional information injects, the lost party was located by search teams, late evening on the first day. This didn't allow time for additional teams to be deployed for a stretcher carry that was intended for the morning of the second day.

So although the 1 team who found the lost party did carry out a patient examination and identified key issues, there was no ongoing activity such as the stretcher carry, to test the ongoing patient care.

Objective 6

All agencies operate within the CIMS model and principals.

The CIMS model was mirrored by the Incident controllers when setting up their IMT's. However not all those who were appointed to functions understood the roles required. All of those appointed to those roles had been CIMS trained, with some having completed the MTIR and ESP training.

This was evidence by some activities being duplicated by different roles. As an example, the initial response had planning with one action plan, and operations drawing up a second plan.

At a later stage there were two separate Information Collection Plans, completed by different functions.

It appeared that the intel function throughout the exercise was divorced from the full IMT.

The set-up of the room prevented full interaction and information sharing between functions.

The information flow plan did not exist between the radio operators and the IMT. The information was delivered by the radio operators to whoever they first saw within the IMT. There was no central receptacle for incoming information from the radio operators or the field teams.

This did have an impact on decision making and some confusion about the locations of field teams.

This did affect the IMT's ability to make decisions based on current intel.

Objective 7

Relationships between the Iwi and Local Police and SAR groups are strengthened

There was no interaction observed by the evaluator between local Iwi and the SAR groups or local Police.

The Iwi were not involved in the IMT, nor were they consulted with during the exercise.

The Iwi were not part of the SAREX planning group.

Objective 8

The IMT utilizes appropriate IT systems to support the demands of the exercise.

Some confusion exists with this objective.

While identified as an objective, the SAREX director had a clear idea, and gave clear instructions that this was to be a paper based exercise.

As a consequence, there was very limited reference to IT. What was used was SARtrack, but only to the extent of team tracking and by the use of the radio operators as a comms log.

Conclusions

Objective 1

Partially Met

While specific pre-plans for the area of the scenario don't exist, a general one for the Mount Taranaki does. No reference was observed to this general pre-plan.

However Information was held of Trap and hunting tracks off the main track. These were referred to and utilized by the IMT during the exercise.

Objective 2

MET

Taskings were of a good standard with some initial guidance. Taskings described start points, finish points and actions required between the two. The taskings generally left sufficient scope for team leaders to apply the appropriate techniques for the conditions they faced.

Objective 3

Partially Met

The infrastructure of comms around the Egmont National Park is very sound.

However the comms plan was completed by AREC, without consultation with the Logistics Function of the IMT.

Subsequently, the IMT were generally unaware of the full content of the comms plans. This resulted with tasks delivered to teams without alternative radio channels or means of alternative communication's.

Objective 4

Partially MET

A Risk and hazard management template was completed by the initial IMT and displayed in an A4 size on a whiteboard adjacent to the Action Plan.

This was not displayed in an area for the team members in a forthright manner.

Hazards were addressed briefly in the initial briefing. Many of the Tasks were delivered to teams without hazards and risks identified.

No safety manager was appointed during the exercise.

Objective 5

Partially MET

A search party did locate the lost party. The tasking of all the search teams was such that most teams were searching in the right location. Sign left by the lost party was located.

A patient examination was full, and advice sought from the search team through the IMT.

The lost party was located later in the exercise than expected, which resulted in insufficient time to do a stretcher carry, nor ongoing patient care.

Objective 6

Partially MET

Both the initial IMT and the second period IMT set up with CIMS functions identified.

However some of those appointed as function managers were not fully aware of the responsibilities of those functions. This lead to some duplication of effort.

The ICP was set up in a way that created a barrier of information flow. The intel section was separated from the other functions, and the Logistics function also set aside from the Ops and Planning groups. Information from the radio operators to the IMT went to the first IMT member that the radio operator found, whatever their function was. This became a barrier to situational awareness of all IMT members.

Objective 7

Not MET

The evaluator saw no reference to any decisions that supported a relationship with IWI. There was no input from IWI into the IMT decision making.

There was no representative of IWI within the ICP.

There was no representation in the exercise planning team from Iwi.

Objective 8.

Partially MET

The two plans received by the evaluator had slightly different objectives. Only one had reference to IT.

The exercise director made it clear during the exercise that this was to be a paper based exercise.

However SARtrack was utilised in a very small way, radio logs and live tracking.

ArcGIS was also reference to obtain track information where the lost party was

Appendix

<Specifically include evidence to substantiate Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations. Number the Appendices in order, title or caption each piece of information.>