

UNITED KINGDOM SEARCH AND RESCUE (UKSAR) OPERATORS GROUP

REPORT OF MEETING OF 13 OCTOBER 2004

1. The minutes of the meeting of the 8 July were agreed.
2. The contents of the website were again discussed by the members of the Group, members of the Group were again requested to submit items to the site specifically incident reports and news items. It was agreed that the site needed to be reviewed and revamped to make it more accessible. It was noted that the site had received a number of hits and that the down loadable Implementation and Control Document had been well received.
3. The Group discussed the main focus points for the volunteer forum and sought contact details for all the various volunteer groups. It was agreed that details of the forum once agreed would be published on the website.
4. The Group were concerned about the continuing problems with the registration of Emergency Locator Transponders (ELT) and Personal Locator Beacons (PLB). It was agreed that this was a matter that would be needed to be raised with the Strategic Committee.
5. The SAR Communications Working Group had not met since the last meeting of the Operators Group. The next meeting was due to be held on 17 November. It was noted that the SAR Communications Working Group had considered 5 applications for access to the VHF High Band Channels 3 of which had been agreed and 2 rejected. The Operators Group noted that applications had been rejected which they agreed. It was also noted that the licence that Ofcom had granted the MCA for operation of the Channels was to be strictly adhered to. Any alleged misuse of the Channels would be investigated which could result in the withdrawal of the licence. The Implementation and Control document would be revised at the meeting on 176 November.
6. The firefighting at sea project had made good progress over the last 18 months. However it was noted that there were still some major risks to the success of the project. All Brigades had now signed up in principle to the project. It was also noted that the firefighting at sea requirement would be included within the helicopter harmonisation project.
7. The Resource Tasking Working Group had not met since the last meeting of the Operators Group.
8. The next Inland Consultative Committee Meeting would be held on 15 December. The next Maritime and Aviation Consultative Committee meeting was scheduled for 7 December, reports of both meeting would be made to the next Operators Group meeting.

9. The Satellite Communications Working Group had also not met since the last Operators Group meeting. A report was made on the recent Cospas/Sarsat joint council meeting.

10. It was noted that there were still a number of concerns within the volunteer organisations with regards to the costs of insurance. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) had been looking into the costs of insurance with a view to looking for cost effective solutions. A number of volunteer organisations had been lobbying their MPs with regard to making funds available for insurance premiums centrally. The issue had also been raised through the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) with the Home Office. It was noted that volunteer organisations played a key part in Civil Contingency response.

11. The Group looked at the development of the volunteer forum with regard to how they would like to see it develop, potential items for discussion and chairmanship.

12. The Group looked at potential areas of harmonisation for future SAR response to ensure that there was both an effective response and value for the tax payer.

13. The Group were appraised of the current status of the Air Ambulance operations. The Group discussed how Air Ambulances should be tasked to SAR incidents. Concerns had been raised from both sides with regard to Air Ambulance taskings. It was agreed that joint protocols needed to be discussed and agreed between Air Ambulance operators and Mountain Rescue Teams to recognise each others areas of expertise.

14. The Group also discussed where the responsibility lies for the provision of Beach Life Guarding. It was agreed that a consultation paper would be drawn together to look at the various issues and recommendations which would then be submitted to the Strategic group for consideration.

15. The Group discussed the provision of additional helicopter training for the fire fighting at sea project.

16. The Group had been made aware of a trial of on-line route cards which was being undertaken by one of the Scottish Mountain Rescue Teams. The group discussed the merits and draw backs of the system. It was noted that similar trials had been held before, but there were a number of problems with such a system. It was agreed that providing the system placed no obligations on a team to respond to such information then the Group had no objections to the trial. It was noted that at all times the onus for reporting incidents remained with the responsible person on the ground.

17. Concerns were raised with regard to the proposed withdrawal of public telephone boxes in remote areas. It was acknowledged that although these boxes were not used regularly they were often the only means of raising the emergency services in remote locations where mobile telephones did not work. It was agreed that the Group would seek further advice on the proposed withdrawal from BT.

