

UNITED KINGDOM SEARCH AND RESCUE (UKSAR) OPERATORS GROUP

REPORT OF MEETING OF 22 FEBRUARY 2005

1. The minutes of the meeting of 13 October 2004 were agreed.
2. The Group discussed the format and content of the UKSAR website and discussed ways to look to improve the site. One of the ideas discussed was the provision of video streaming to enhance the information on the site. It was also noted that the site was now hosted by a Department of Transport (DfT) server. The members of the Group were asked to provide ideas and items of what they would like to see on the site.
3. The Group noted that the Home Office were in the process of looking at establishing a volunteer forum and agreed that it would be inappropriate for the Group to establish a forum at this time. It was agreed that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) would seek to try to establish what format the Home Office forum would take.
4. The Group noted that BT were in the process of undertaking a consultation exercise to look at the feasibility to remove certain public telephone boxes, but it was expected that the proposed withdrawals would go ahead.
5. The Communications Working Group had met on 17 November 2004 at which it had been reported that a number of teams were making good progress to become fully compliant with the National Band Plan. It was noted that there had been some interference on some of the new Land SAR Channels in a couple of small areas. The Working Group were now looking to establish standard radio operating procedures across the UK to improve communications. It was noted that following the introduction of the new Land SAR Channels 81 teams had been granted approval to use them. The revised version of the Implementation and Control document had been approved and placed on the UKSAR website in December. The Working Group had also discussed what methods could be used to inform the public on how to contact SAR services to obtain the most appropriate response. The Group discussed what options were currently available and agreed to look at issuing advice through the UKSAR website as a first step.
6. An update was provided on the Firefighting at Sea project. There were still some financial challenges to overcome but the project was progressing well. The Group were also provided with an update on the helicopter harmonisation project, which was also progressing well.
7. The Group discussed the status of the Resource Tasking Working Group which had not sat for nearly two years. It was agreed that the Group had probably gone as far as it could with the current system and it was agreed that the Working Group would be dissolved but could be reformed if required. It was also agreed that the Consultative Committees would be requested to provide evidence of incidents where inappropriate assets had been tasked.

8. The Inland Consultative Committee had met on 15 December 2004; the main areas of concern had been the use of postcodes by some of the emergency services when responding to SAR incidents. The Committee acknowledged that for non SAR incidents the use of postcodes was not an issue, but when responding to a lost or missing person in mountain or lowland areas grid references would be more appropriate. Concerns were also expressed with regard to health and safety legislation, in particular the working at heights directive, it was however noted that advice had been provided to the Mountain Rescue Council that the directive would not apply to Mountain Rescue Teams.

9. The Maritime and Aviation Consultative Committee had met on 7 December 2004. Discussions had been held with regard to what was the appropriate level of helicopter representation on the Committee. The Committee had also agreed that under its terms of reference that the membership should consist primarily of users of SAR. In the event that SAR operational issues were raised by the Committee the Chairman would refer them to the Operators Group.

10. The UKSAR Satellite Communications Working Group had not met since the last meeting. Concerns however were raised with regard to the maintenance of the Emergency Location Transponders (ELT) database.

11. The Group agreed the formation of the Immediate and Emergency Care Working Group, and ratified the TORs for the Working Group.

12. Following the announcement by the Transport Select Committee of a further investigation into search and rescue the Group discussed what evidence had been submitted to the Committee and the potential areas the Committee may focus upon.

13. Discussions were held on introducing a process for vetting potential SAR teams. It was agreed that a process was already in place; new teams should approach the national governing body in the first instance to achieve the necessary accreditation.

14. The Group discussed volunteer issues, in particular the impact of employment legislation and the legal status of volunteer teams.

15. The Group discussed SAR co-ordination on inland waters, although MCA provided co-ordination on some high risk inland waters where invited other areas were not covered. The Group discussed ideas for what improvements could be made, but agreed that further discussion should be held at the next meeting.

16. The MCA provided the Group with a copy of their action plan under the Civil Contingencies Act. The MCA also clarified their policy on Auxiliary coastguards acting as First Responders.

17. The Group discussed the response to the inland flooding incident in Carlisle.

18. The Group were informed that the UKSAR Framework Document was due for revision, amendments had been received. A final draft would be circulated to all members for approval prior to the final publication of the revised document.