

VERMONT SEARCH AND RESCUE COUNCIL
2017 SEARCH AND RESCUE REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

MISSION STATISTICS

In 2017 the Vermont Department of Public Safety was notified of 105 incidents meeting the definition of “search and rescue” as per Title 20: Chapter 112, Subchapter 002, § 1841. This is similar to 2016 (111) and 2015 (100). 33 of these incidents resulted in a Vermont State Police SAR response, and 72 were notifications that were resolved without VSP SAR response.

The types of subjects who were lost were as follows:

SUBJECT CATEGORY	# TEAM RESPONSE	# NOTIFY/MONITOR	TOTAL
HIKING	9	25	34
SKIING	8	12	20
OTHER/UNCLASSIFIED	2	6	8
WATER/BOATING	4	4	8
DESPONDENT	4	3	7
WANDERING	2	5	7
RUNAWAY	1	5	6
HUNTING	2	2	4
VEHICLE	0	4	4
SNOWMOBILE/ATV	0	3	3
CLIMBING	0	2	2
AIRCRAFT	1	1	2
TOTALS	33	72	105

Of the above incidents, 12 resulted in fatalities and two additional subjects have never been located and are presumed deceased. Of the 12 fatalities, 6 were drownings, 2 were snowmobilers who fell through the ice on Lake Champlain, 1 was a fall from heights, 1 was as result of a plane crash, 1 was a skier and 1 presumed suicide. Of the two still missing subjects one is presumed drowned in the Winooski River, and the other is a presumed suicide in Westmore.

Of particular note was a very complex recovery operation in Westmore of the body of a young man who had fallen off the cliffs on Mt. Pisgah where the body had come to rest in a dangerous and inaccessible location 300 feet down the cliff face. The operation took several days of planning and involved multiple agencies, resulting in the safe and successful recovery of the body.

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Outreach continues to be a focus of the SAR Coordinator's time.

Some highlights are listed below:

- Quarterly meetings of the Vermont Search and Rescue Working Group.
- Second annual September training organized by the SAR Working Group held in Pico, with over 50 participants from a wide variety of volunteer SAR groups and State agencies.
- Continue to conduct search and rescue orientation talks and more advanced training for fire departments, EMS agencies, Game Wardens, and specialized SAR groups around the State. Of particular note was the training done by the Huntington Fire Dept. backcountry rescue team which resulted in all of their members passing the ASTM Level 1 Land Search Team Member standard.
- Conduct SAR training to all seasonal Green Mtn. Club employees.
- Continued outreach with all Vermont Ski Patrols, and conducted joint training at Bolton Valley.
- VSP SAR included local SAR resources in many of their trainings, including a night exercise on Camel's Hump with 7 different organizations represented.

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

Introduction to search and rescue training is required of all newly certified law enforcement officers in Vermont. The SAR coordinator continues to present this class on a regular basis.

SAR DATABASE

The State continues to use DisasterLan to track qualified search and rescue resources. The database is kept up to date by the SAR Coordinator as part of his duties.

VERMONT STATE POLICE SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAM

The training program for the team this year was focused on improving SAR skills and gaining familiarity with popular recreation areas in Vermont that often see SAR activity. Training took place at Stratton Mountain, the new backcountry ski project in Brandon Gap, Bolton Valley Ski Resort, and several locations in the Green Mountain National Forest. The team also continued to train in basic SAR skills including land navigation, computer mapping, grid searching and search management.

Four new team members were brought on in September (to replace others leaving the team) and all completed their ICS and ASTM Level I Land Search Team Member training. On December 1

Lt. Roger Farmer took over leadership of the team from Lt. Mathew Nally who will be retiring in February.

The team received funding through the Homeland Security Grant Program to purchase new backpacks, baselayer clothing and some basic backcountry rescue equipment including a rescue litter. The team reports that they now only lack adequate winter cold weather pants which they hope to be able to purchase in 2018.

SAR COUNCIL

- The Council was scheduled to be repealed on 6/30/17, but the legislature extended the date until 7/1/21.
- As of 6/30/17 the appointed members of the Council's terms expired and had not be re-appointed by the Governor, so the August (3rd quarter) meeting was cancelled, hence the Council only met 3 times in 2017 instead of quarterly.
- Marge Fish stepped down after 3 years of serving as the Council Chair and Derek Libby was elected to the position.
- Tate Jeffrey, Chief of Huntington Fire Department was appointed to the Council in October filling the vacant volunteer fire department representative position.
- Lt. Roger Farmer replaced Lt. Matthew Nally as the VSP SAR Team Leader representative on the Council.

SUMMARY

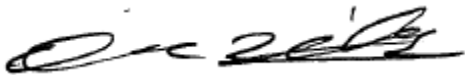
The number of responses to lost and missing persons in Vermont's backcountry seems to be relatively consistent from year to year with no particular trends emerging. There tends to be an uptick in lost skiers during years of heavy snowfall, and a fall off during low snow years which would be expected (see attached graph). The statewide SAR process now seems to be working very smoothly. Seven Days newspaper did an [extensive article](#) in September that highlights many of the changes and improvements that have taken place over the past several years. There are still occasions when the initial notification process to VSP SAR gets delayed for a bit, but those are becoming increasingly less frequent and none have resulted in any delays in response. Communication, cooperation and coordination between all of the various SAR partners around the state appears to be continuing to improve.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION

The Council has always found the November 15 deadline for the annual report to be confusing. It is unclear if this refers to the previous calendar year (11 months after the end of the year seems excessive), or for the current year (which would be incomplete) or the previous fiscal year (all statistics are tabulated on a calendar year basis). **We would like to recommend that in 20 V.S.A. § 1847, e) the date be changed to February 15.**

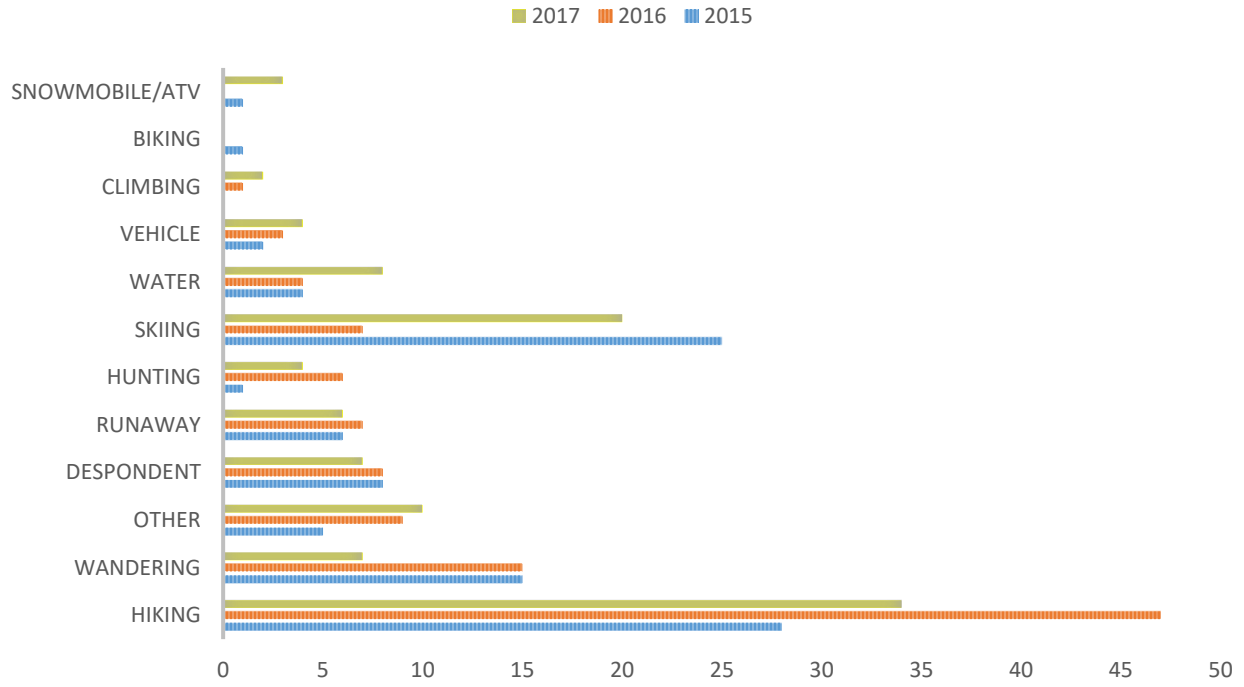
This report was reviewed and approved by the Search and Rescue Council at its meeting on January 23, 2018.

Respectfully submitted,



Derek Libby, Chair (Professional Firefighter Representative)
Marge Fish (Public Representative)
Peg Doheny (Ski Patrol Representative)
Drew Hazelton (Volunteer SAR Representative)
Tate Jeffrey (Volunteer Fire Service Representative)
Lt. Roger Farmer (VSP SAR Team Leader)
Maj. George Scribner (Fish & Wildlife Representative)
Neil Van Dyke (SAR Coordinator)

2015-17 SAR NOTIFICATIONS BY TYPE



2015-2017 SAR NOTIFICATIONS BY MONTH

