

**VERMONT SEARCH AND RESCUE COUNCIL**  
**2019 SEARCH AND RESCUE REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE**

MISSION STATISTICS

In 2019 the Vermont Department of Public Safety was notified of 97 incidents meeting the definition of “search and rescue” as per Title 20: Chapter 112, Subchapter 002, § 1841. This is down slightly from 2018 (110) and 2017 (105).

We continue to break down SAR team activity into two categories – incidents where at least one member of the VSP SAR team responded to the scene to help direct operations, and incidents where there was a report of somebody lost or missing but there was no SAR team response (“notify/monitor”). These latter calls all required screening and evaluation by VSP, but may have been handled by local resources, quickly resolved during the initial investigation phase, or determined not to warrant a response.

VSP SAR Responses: 24 (36 in 2018, 33 in 2017)

VSP SAR Notify/Monitor: 73 (74 in 2018, 72 in 2017)

Vermont had several significant multi-operational period search & rescue responses in 2019:

-3/30-31, Mt. Tabor.

Missing/overdue hiker in Green Mountain National Forest. Located deceased (suicide) after lengthy search in difficult snowy and icy conditions.

-6/22, Somerset.

29 year old woman and her child didn't return from a hike at Somerset Reservoir. Located after 24 hours about 2.5 miles away when another hiker heard calls for help.

-10/30-11/6, Duxbury.

Subject missing from his residence, likely suicidal. Multiple days of searching revealed no clues as to his location.

Total calls by type of incident were as follows:

<b>SUBJECT CATEGORY</b>	<b># TEAM RESPONSE</b>	<b># NOTIFY/MONITOR</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
HIKING	8	24	32
SKIING	2	20	22
WANDERING	4	7	11
DESPONDENT	4	7	11
OTHER/UNCLASSIFIED	6	1	7
RUNAWAY	0	5	5
HUNTING/FISHING	0	5	5
VEHICLE/ATV	0	2	2
SNOWMOBILE	0	1	1
WATER/BOATING	0	1	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>97</b>

## 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.
- Fourth annual September training organized by the SAR Working Group held in Middlebury, with over 80 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.
- The SAR Coordinator taught a 4 day search management class which included VSP SAR members as well as local volunteer SAR teams and two search managers from New Hampshire.
- Sharing of specially created maps for SAR with F&W and local volunteer SAR groups.
- Continued outreach with all Vermont Ski Patrols, including personal visits to Killington, Sugarbush, Smuggler's Notch and Jay Peak.
- Training for seasonal Green Mountain Club field staff for dealing with reports of lost or missing persons.
- Entered into an Memorandum of Agreement with Maine Association for Search and Rescue (MASAR) to license their online Basic Search and Rescue (BASAR) course for use in Vermont. The course is being modified to more specifically address Vermont's needs and is expected to be operational in 2020.

## 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

Lt. Anthony French remains as the commander of the VSP SAR team.

Training in 2019 focused on practicing and improving core skills such as land navigation, search techniques, search management and interagency communication and coordination. The team is also are working to integrate newer technologies into our operations such as smartphone mapping applications and working with UAS. 3 members of the SAR team are licensed UAS pilots and all members have been trained to be 'visual observers' when UAS are incorporated into a SAR mission. The team continues to work on some additional skills training including patient care, packaging and transport, including low angle rope techniques. VSP SAR held their first team snowmobile training in January and have plans to do this each winter to make better use of this VSP asset to support SAR operations. The team continued to schedule training in areas of frequent SAR activity so that members can become more familiar with terrain in different parts of the state. Training was held at Stratton, Middlebury Snow Bowl and in the Green Mountain National Forest in Mt. Tabor and Pittsfield.

### SEARCH AND RESCUE PARTNERS

Much of the on the ground SAR work in Vermont is done by volunteer groups and other professional responders and it is important to acknowledge their contributions. Many local EMS and Fire Departments have received specialized training and are valuable resources. Vermont has several volunteer groups that specialize in SAR response and they provide important expertise to supplement State resources. In fact many issues are resolved solely by local response efforts without a direct State response. This not only results in a quicker response, but also reduces the cost to taxpayers. Other organizations such as ski patrols and State and Federal agencies such as the Vermont Fish & Wildlife game wardens and US Forest Service also play an important role in Vermont's ability to successfully respond to SAR emergencies.

### UAS PROJECT

Vermont State Police received a Homeland Security Grant for the purchase of 6 UAS (drones) for use for locating persons lost in the backcountry. Policies have been drafted, pilots trained and implementation of the program took place in 2019. Several SAR missions were flown, though no 'finds' have been made yet using this new asset.

### PREVENTATIVE SAR

An important component of search and rescue is making efforts to prevent issues from arising the first place. There are ongoing programs such as hikeSafe and issuing press releases during high risk weather events. VSP SAR also worked with Vermont Forests, Parks and Recreation and the Green Mountain Club in preplanning for potential SAR events on the newly opened Kingdom Heritage Trail.

### SUMMARY

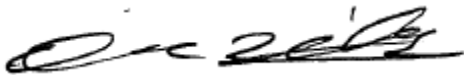
The number of responses to lost and missing persons in Vermont's backcountry continues to be relatively consistent from year to year with no particular trends emerging. Communication, cooperation and coordination between all of the various SAR partners around the state appears to be excellent.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION

No recommendations.

This report was reviewed and approved by the Search and Rescue Council at its meeting on January 28, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,



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Peg Doheny (Ski Patrol Representative)

Marge Fish (Public Representative)

Lt. Anthony French (VSP SAR Team Leader)

Drew Hazelton (Volunteer SAR Representative)

Tate Jeffrey (Volunteer Fire Service Representative)

Maj. George Scribner (Fish & Wildlife Representative)

Neil Van Dyke (SAR Coordinator)