

VERMONT SEARCH AND RESCUE COUNCIL
2018 SEARCH AND RESCUE REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

MISSION STATISTICS

In 2018 the Vermont Department of Public Safety was notified of 110 incidents meeting the definition of “search and rescue” as per Title 20: Chapter 112, Subchapter 002, § 1841. This is similar to 2017 (105) and 2016 (111).

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. Numbers remained very consistent from the last two years.

VSP SAR Responses: 36 (33 in 2017, 36 in 2016)

VSP SAR Notify/Monitor: 74 (72 in 2017, 75 in 2016)

Vermont had several significant multi-operational period search & rescue responses in 2018:

-3/15-16, Hancock.

Missing hiker in severe snowstorm. Located early a.m. on 2nd day, lengthy extrication due to distance and deep snow conditions. Subject recovered from minor cold weather injuries (hypothermia and frostbite).

-5/20-21, Woodford.

Plane crash on Bald Mountain. Located by ground teams during overnight search. No survivors. Body recovered the following day.

-8/29-30, Morrisville.

Glider crash on Sterling Mountain. Plane spotted by air, then ground teams had to locate in remote and rugged terrain. 3 fatalities. Responders stayed with the bodies overnight. The recovery operation the next day involved over 50 responders from many different SAR agencies and organizations from northern Vermont.

Total calls by type of incident were as follows:

SUBJECT CATEGORY	# VSP SAR RESPONSE	# NOTIFY/MONITOR	TOTAL
HIKING	6	29	35
SKIING	11	15	26
WANDERING	6	12	18
OTHER/UNCLASSIFIED	3	4	7
DESPONDENT	3	4	7
RUNAWAY	2	5	7
HUNTING	2	2	4
AIRCRAFT	2	0	2
CLIMBING	0	2	2
WATER/BOATING	1	0	1
VEHICLE	0	1	1
TOTALS	36	74	110

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.
- Third 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.
- Multi-agency 'locator beacon' training in the Green Mtn. National Forest, with VSP SAR, USFS, Fish and Wildlife and Civil Air Patrol.
- Continued outreach with all Vermont Ski Patrols, including personal visits to Stratton, Sugarbush and Magic Mountain.
- Negotiations have been started with Maine Association for Search and Rescue (MASAR) to license their online Basic Search and Rescue (BASAR) course for use in Vermont. An MOA has been drafted, and the hope is to implement this as an online training class that would be available for SAR volunteers and others in Vermont. Some customization will be required, but the hope is to have this up and running in 2019.

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 took over leadership of the team from Roger Farmer who was promoted to Captain.

Training in 2018 focused on continuing to practice and improve core skills such as land navigation, search techniques, search management and interagency communication and coordination. The team also started to inject some additional skills training for the team including patient care, packaging and transport, including low angle rope techniques. Team members also completed the VSP Snowmobile Safety Education course and have additional snowmobile training scheduled early in 2019 to be able to make better use of snowmobiles as a SAR resource. 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 Sugarbush Ski Resort, Middlebury Snow Bowl, Mt. Mansfield, Bolton Valley and Mt. Tabor in the Green Mountain National Forest.

The team received funding through the Homeland Security Grant Program to purchase new cold weather pants.

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, and RFP prepared, and implementation of the program is planned for 2019.

911 PROJECTS

The SAR Coordinator worked on several projects related to improving the process for handling 911 calls from persons who are lost or missing in Vermont's backcountry.

-Continuing to add 'technical rescue trails' to the e911 mapping system. The goal is to provide first responders with mapping information on the quickest and most efficient access to locations along the Long Trail. This project will take several years to complete, but much progress was made in the southern part of the State, and most of the access routes south of Route 4 have now been identified and mapped.

-Modifying Emergency Service Zones (ESZ). These zones identify who the responsible first response agency is for every geographic location in Vermont, which determines which agencies are notified when a 911 call is received. In some backcountry areas this can result in significant delays when an incident may occur in a particular town, but other agencies may be much closer. Suggested ESZ changes were identified by the SAR Coordinator who worked with the towns involved to implement them with e911. The changes were in Stowe/Underhill along the ridge of Mt. Mansfield, in Rochester/Chittenden near the new Brandon Gap backcountry ski area, and one was completed in January 2019 in Waterbury/Stowe in the Cottonbrook area.

-Updating 911 call handling for lost persons. 911 call takers at the PSAPs use 'cards' to direct how they handle different types of calls. It was discovered during an incident with a lost hunter in Middlesex that these instructions were very much out of date and needed revision. Working with the e911 Board these procedures were updated so that future 911 calls from persons lost in the backcountry should be handled much more efficiently.

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, and several new initiatives with new and improved signage in areas in Killington and Stowe to try to safely direct lost skiers to 'self-rescue' when skiing out of bounds.

SAR COUNCIL

-The only change in 2018 for the council was Lt. Anthony French taking the place of Roger Farmer as the VSP SAR team representative.

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

Our recommendation from last year to change the date for the annual report to February 15 from November 15 in **20 V.S.A. § 1847**, was not acted on, and we would like to resubmit that request to eliminate confusion on the reporting period as explained in last year's report.

This report was reviewed and approved by the Search and Rescue Council at its meeting on January 30, 2019.

Respectfully submitted,



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Marge Fish (Public Representative)
Peg Doheny (Ski Patrol Representative)
Drew Hazelton (Volunteer SAR Representative)
Tate Jeffrey (Volunteer Fire Service Representative)
Lt. Anthony French (VSP SAR Team Leader)
Maj. George Scribner (Fish & Wildlife Representative)
Neil Van Dyke (SAR Coordinator)