

VERMONT SEARCH AND RESCUE COUNCIL
2021 SEARCH AND RESCUE REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

MISSION STATISTICS

In 2021 the Vermont Department of Public Safety was notified of 131 incidents meeting the definition of “search and rescue” as per Title 20: Chapter 112, Subchapter 002, § 1841. This is up significantly from 2020 (88) and 2019 (97).

The VSP SAR team activity is broken down 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: 28 (21 in 2020, 24 in 2019)

VSP SAR Notify/Monitor: 103 (67 in 2020, 73 in 2019)

Total calls by type of incident were as follows:

SUBJECT CATEGORY	# TEAM RESPONSE	# NOTIFY/MONITOR	TOTAL
HIKING	5	45	50
SKIING	1	22	23
WANDERING	10	12	22
DESPONDENT	3	6	9
OTHER/UNCLASSIFIED	1	5	6
HUNTING/FISHING	3	3	6
RUNAWAY	2	4	6
WATER/BOATING	2	5	7
SNOWMOBILE	1	1	2
TOTALS	28	103	131

OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Outreach and education continues to be a focus of the SAR Coordinator's time, however some activities had to be scaled back this year due to COVID19 restrictions on in-person gatherings.

Last year's development of the online Basic Search and Rescue (BASAR) class was followed up with creating the next level of Search Management training. This will be a combination of online learning and remote group live sessions. The first class is being offered in January of 2022 and the Council approved the use of this course in lieu of the NASAR Managing the Inland Search Function course that had previously been required for VSP SAR members.

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

Due to the discontinuation of the use of the statewide 'DisasterLan' software, the database is now being maintained manually by the SAR coordinator and is kept current and distributed to the appropriate VSP SAR team leaders for their use when requesting qualified resources and making notifications as required by statute. The council also acted this year to require that EMS organizations have a minimum training requirement of the Vermont Basic Search and Rescue class (or equivalent) in order to be included in the SAR database. To date only one EMS organization has declined to undertake this training and has requested to be removed from the database

VERMONT STATE POLICE SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAM

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

4 team members left in 2021 and 3 new members were added. An anticipated 4 vacancies are scheduled to be filled in January 2022.

Training in 2021 continued to focus on practicing and improving core skills such as land navigation, search techniques, rescue and first aid, and use of snowmobiles and UTVs. The statewide joint SAR training in September was held at the Camp Ethan Allen Training Site and had over 100 registered participants from all over Vermont with a variety of training opportunities.

SAR COUNCIL

The SAR Council membership remained unchanged in 2021, however due to the sunset of the 2017 re-authorization of the Council it technically expired on 7/1/21. The Council is working with the Dept. of Public Safety to explore different options to continue operating, either through statutory re-authorization or perhaps by executive order. Until that process is completed the Council plans to continue to meet quarterly unless directed otherwise.

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, Fire Departments and Ski Patrols have received specialized training and are valuable resources. Several of these have adopted the new BASAR class as required for their members. VSP continues to also work closely with State and Federal partners.

PREVENTATIVE SAR

An important component of search and rescue is making efforts to prevent issues from arising the first place. There continue to be efforts this area this year with increasing outdoor use during COVID being observed throughout the country. The SAR Coordinator continues to work closely with the Green Mtn. Club, Vt. Forests, Parks and Recreation and the US Forest Service to present consistent safety messaging.

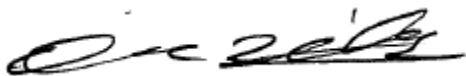
SUMMARY

The number of responses to lost and missing persons in Vermont’s backcountry saw a significant increase this year (not only at VSP, but also by our partner agencies and organizations). Statistics indicated that outdoor usage was up, and most of our neighboring states also observed an increase in backcountry SAR activity. Communication, cooperation, and coordination between all of the various SAR partners around the state continues to be excellent.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION

IF the recommendation is for re-authorization of the Council then legislative action will be required to accomplish this. Alternatively, it may be decided to establish the Council by executive order. At this time the Council does not have a recommendation as to which approach is preferred, though it does strongly recommend that the Council continue in place in order to monitor search and rescue operations in Vermont.

This report was reviewed and approved by the Search and Rescue Council at its meeting on February 1, 2022.



- Derek Libby, Chair (Professional Firefighter Representative)
- Marge Fish (Public Representative)
- Lt. Anthony French (VSP SAR Team Leader)
- Tait Germon (Ski Patrol Representative)
- Drew Hazelton (Volunteer SAR Representative)
- Tate Jeffrey (Volunteer Fire Service Representative)
- Maj. Justin Stedman (Fish & Wildlife Representative)
- Neil Van Dyke (Dept. of Public Safety SAR Coordinator)