



19 August 2021

Public Inquiry Respecting Ground Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons

Ground Floor, East Block
Confederation Building
100 Prince Philip Drive
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

On behalf of Bay of Islands Volunteer Search and Rescue, I would like to include the following as a submission to the Public Inquiry Respecting Ground Search and Rescue for Lost and Missing Persons.

1. There appears to be confusion in our area regarding deployment of GSAR resources specifically, for remote rescues. While police do not hesitate to deploy GSAR resources for calls involving a lost or missing person, the same cannot be said for calls involving a person that is injured in a remote area but is not lost. As a trained GSAR team we have the skills and equipment to efficiently and effectively rescue injured persons from areas where paramedics, fire, and police agencies can not access. In one instance, a police agency initially denied a request from Eastern Health to deploy GSAR resources to carry out a remote rescue, as 103 squadron was unavailable. GSAR was deployed several hours later when Eastern Health insisted that there was no other agency available and capable of carrying out this rescue. A potential solution to this issue is to enact a policy within police agencies clearly outlining when GSAR resources should/must be deployed.
2. In our opinion, there is an issue with the protocol for remote rescue dispatching within the NL911 system. As you are aware, GSAR in Newfoundland and Labrador can only be deployed by the local police agency. In remote rescue cases in our area only EMS and volunteer fire departments are notified, not the police. This delays the deployment of specially trained and equipped GSAR members until hours later. This puts our members and other responders at risk and has the potential to adversely affect subject outcome. In one case involving an injured hiker in a remote area, EMS and firefighters were dispatched without GSAR support. After a helicopter extraction was unsuccessful and a ground extraction wasn't feasible with the available equipment, GSAR was deployed after a call to police from EMS. A solution to this issue

would be inclusion of a method for NL911 operators to determine if the call is remote in nature; if so, police should be notified to deploy GSAR resources.

3. GSAR teams are required to fundraise to maintain an annual operating budget. Before a team can purchase specialized equipment or engage in specialized training, they need to fundraise just to maintain any current assets including a headquarters building, assuming they have a building. Individual GSAR teams across the province are not all equal. Access to funding, equipment and support varies greatly across the province, as do the protocols for initial integration of GSAR resources into SAR or emergency management operations. GSAR teams in areas with limited fundraising options are at a significant disadvantage over teams in larger urban centres. These regional differences must be accounted for when considering ways to improve the provinces SAR response capability, and for including the volunteer GSAR teams across the province in remote search and rescue activities as well as for other emergency situations.

I appreciate you taking the time to consider our submission, we look forward to contributing further during the inquiry process. I may be reached at the phone number and email below if you should require additional information.

Respectfully,

Shawn Street
Coordinator
Bay of Islands Volunteer Search and Rescue
709-639-1637
shawn.sar@gmail.com