

## NLSARA Submission for Ground Search & Rescue Inquiry

Throughout discussions during the ongoing Newfoundland and Labrador GSAR inquiry, the Newfoundland and Labrador Search and Rescue Association (NLSARA) raised a number of concerns in regards to the capacity to respond to GSAR incidents within NL. Although previously discussed, the NLSARA feel it necessary to document changes necessary to ensure the teams and members are sufficiently prepared to respond to search and rescue, emergency management, and disaster response within their respective regions. These measures would improve response and prevention capabilities, ensure best practices are followed, increase training capacity, allow for equipment upgrades and most importantly, provide a means of protection for our professional volunteers. Provided the Department of Justice and Public Safety is willing to work closely with the Association to increase and expand the current funding and partnership model, the NLSARA could then achieve the support and level of collaboration required to improve the response and prevention capabilities.

To facilitate these improvements, the Association is seeking the consideration and implementation of the following items:

- Proper consultations within Government and other Emergency Services Agencies when making decisions which directly or indirectly effect GSAR. Too often the Association is not consulted when decisions are being made which affects our membership and we are typically left fighting to make changes after the fact. The Association should be provided the same level of respect as any other first responder agency within the province.
- Sufficient funding to hire a full-time Administrator, who would answer to the NLSARA Board of Directors and give direction with regards to the administration and logistical activities within the Association. The individual hired would have the knowledge and skills required to comprehend and effectively coordinate with GSAR, partners and stakeholders.
- Adequate funding to hire two training officers who would take direction from the NLSARA administrator and the BOD to ensure the members receive the most current training.
- Removal of the Radio License fees (Industry Canada) which we are required to pay each year.
- Funding commitment to provide an Algoma Insurance policy to cover Commercial General Liability (CGL), Accidental Death & Dismemberment (AD&D), and Directors and Officers (D&O). The Algoma insurance policies were designed for SAR by professionals in GSAR. Currently NL is the only province in Canada that doesn't provide the policy, as the Government of NL has self-indemnified the risk. Property and equipment coverage for ALL vehicles and assets should also be provided. Insurance protects the GSAR volunteers when called out by the RCMP, RNC, Canadian Coast Guard, Municipalities, Department of Health, FESNL, etc.
- Each team should have access to an operating grant through the Association for expenses related to operational costs, licensing, maintenance and repair of vehicles, equipment, and infrastructure. The grant should be proportional to the size of the team as well as the

infrastructure and equipment being maintained. The NLSARA teams are required to have yearly inspections of vehicles and road equipment under the Traffic Services of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, which creates a large financial burden to the teams.

- Funding for team, regional, provincial and multi-jurisdictional training and exercises. Teams are struggling with the increased costs to conduct weekly or monthly training activities. This funding will coincide with the implementation of the training officer positions.
- Funding for subscriptions, purchasing and renewal of imperative communication pieces such as: In-Reach satellite tracking units and satellite phones.
- Sustainable money for data management (Emwerx Data and ID Management, ESRI mapping systems) licenses and upgrade requirements.
- Funding to support a conservative Remotely Pilot Aircraft System (RPAS/Drone) program including equipment and training following certifications under Transport Canada regulations.
- Funds to upgrade dated automated external defibrillators (AED's) needed for all teams.
- Sponsorship of a mental health education and prevention program/training for SAR teams. This training would be for the responders to ensure they are provided important prevention and response training to cope with critical illnesses and stress. There should be a EAP type program implemented so that members can easily obtain any professional assistance to deal with stressful situations they encounter while performing SAR duties. We would also like to see mental health first aid courses provided to all members to ensure they are prepared to aid victims requiring intervention during a response.
- Financial support for prevention activities within the province such as the national SAR prevention program AdventureSmart which encourages Canadians and visitors to Canada to "Get informed and go outdoors" and other individualized programs such as Project Lifesaver (dementia and autistic prevention program) and SAR Autism (prevention program for first responders in dealing with autistic individuals).
- Consultations regarding the use of helicopters in SAR response as well as other issues in SAR. We would like to see helicopter deployment as follows:
  - o Four helicopters stationed throughout the province – Eastern NL, Central NL, Western NL and in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, as presently stationed
  - o We suggest the use of a Bell 407 or A-Star with the capability to use highline operations known as the Human External Cargo (HEC) system, for efficient and effective rescues as used in Western Canada. Parks Canada in Banff & Jasper AB have been using this system for years.
  - o The Association presently have 7 helicopter rescue teams in the province of NL. They are placed in St. John's, Bay Roberts, Clarenville, Grand Falls-Windsor, Deer Lake, Bonne Bay, and Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

- We recognize the need for a helicopter for night time flights with Hoist, Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) and spot light capability such as the Bell 412 or 212 etc. which are available through helicopter contract. Otherwise, the DND 103 Rescue Squadron (Cormorant) based in Gander would need to be called to respond.
  - In the interest of saving money, the Bell 407 or A-Star are much more economic to operate per hour and these smaller machines can be used effectively during a SAR mission, whether utilized for searching or for rescuing. These machines have more maneuverability than the bigger machines and are used around the world as the workhorse for SAR. If we only had one helicopter available with hoist capability, it significantly impacts response times and as it would have to travel throughout the province to respond to calls of service and impose increased risk on the casualties due to delays in extractions. You also must account for down time including maintenance and weather at base and along route to scene which also negatively affect response time.
- Funding to upgrade specialized equipment including but not limited to:
    - Ice Rescue equipment and replacement
    - Rope rescue equipment and training
    - Zodiac boats and replacement
    - ATV/ Snowmobile Training
  - Implementation of a province-wide communications - i.e. Radio system with no dead zones, internet and wi-fi access
  - Implementation of free vehicle license/registrations for GSAR volunteers.

The Association feels that in order to continue to respond and operate as the professional Search & Rescue Association that we are, substantial funding would need to be put into place. It is the opinion that we would need \$2,000,000 for the first two years in order to bring all teams up to the same operating standard and equipment. This will mean that the 20+ year-old vehicles, boats, Argos, etc. can be replaced by newer or more efficient models. However, \$1,000,000 a year after the first two years would provide sufficient sustainability to ensure teams remain stable and effective without the need to spend significant time fundraising to keep equipment running, continue training, and ensure teams keep operating.

NL Search & Rescue teams currently provide an average of 125,000 volunteer hours per year, having value of \$3,125,000 - the federal value of a SAR volunteer is currently \$25 per hour. If sustainable funding was established to reduce current fundraising burdens and also impact the retention of volunteers, as we lose good trained professionals each year due to burn out from fundraising and other unnecessary time commitments.