



**Die Bergwacht**  
ehrenamtlich – professionell



## The Future of Mountain Search and Rescue

New strategies for operating and management of Mountain Search and Rescue Operations

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# Volunteer versus Full-Time



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- Head of German Mountain Rescue, a branch of German Red Cross
- Member of Bavarian Mountain Rescue since 1976
- Operations manager at several big missions, such as floodings in Bavaria 2013, Riesending cave rescue mission 2014 and G7-summit 2015 and 2022 in Elmau, Bavaria.
- Member of EU civil protection team

## Mountain Rescue is local

### How it all started

- First steps: comrade rescue
- Next step: mountain guides
- First mountain rescue organisations came up in the 20<sup>th</sup> of 20<sup>th</sup> century
  
- Main topic:
  - first aid and technical rescue of injured hikers and climbers
  - Recovery of corpses



➔ “rescue” was part of a common mountain adventure and voluntarily

## Modern Mountain Rescue

### Rescue and emergency mountain medicine as state of the art

- Rescue becomes more technical and more quick
- Helicopters became “part of the game”
- Emergency medicine was brought to the scene and physicians became part of the team
- Professional rescue standards are expected even in very difficult areas and dangerous circumstances





## Different history – equal challenge

### Mountain rescue developed differently in different countries

- A lot of countries have a long history of mountain rescue with volunteer systems and are working voluntarily until today
- In some countries mountain rescue is performed by employees
- Sometimes private or semi-private organisations are responsible for mountain rescue (e.g. Red Cross, alpine clubs)
- In other countries mountain rescue is part of the governmental safety or rescue system
- **But all of them are doing the same job and are facing similar challenges**



## Volunteer system

### Advantage

- A lot of rescuers available in short time
- Rescuers / rescue bases are near to spots of accidents → short response time
- Rescuers are embedded in local society and have high reputation
- Rescue is not only a job or a business, but a duty for the public
- High potential for larger disasters → back up systems
- Last but not least: “low cost system”

### Disadvantage

- Much time and effort needed to keep rescuers current
- Higher costs on personell equipment
- Availability during “work time” restricted
- High staff turnover due to personal changes (studies, job, family, ...)
- Financing has to be negotiated regularly

## Employer system

### Advantage

- Rescuers are employed and available
- Skills and trainings are part of the job
- High professionalism can be required
- Low performer can be fired
- Chain of command is clear and not negotiable

### Disadvantage

- Bases in larger distances, because of a lower number of bases and staff → longer response time
- Limited capacities for parallel missions
- Perseverance possibly limited → no back up system
- growing up capacities are limited
- what to do with staff unsuitable to rescue job
- more expensive due to personnel costs

## Volunteer vs. employee

### Better or worse?

- is a question of “normality” and national or regional culture
- depends on the expected response time
- depends mostly on general conditions, esp. financing
- depends on legal framework



## But volunteer systems definitely need:



- the possibility for rescuers to focus on rescue-work, not administration, documentation, sponsoring, ...
- a high standard instruction and training
- sufficient and professional equipment and infrastructure
- enough money to run the system
- employers, who let them go, when the alarm is coming

### The way to achieve these objectives

- even volunteer systems need employed supporters
- employers must not face negative impacts, when having rescue personnel in team
- “over-regulation” has to be reduced
- the money needed has to be provided
- professional training opportunities are necessary (e.g. training center, real flight time, online learning, ...)

## because voluntarily does not mean:

- less professional
- unlimited available
- for free



**We are working on that!**

**Thank you for your attention.**

