

Presentations Commission for Terrestrial Rescue

Place: Jackson, Wyoming
Date: 11. Oktober 2025
Time: 08.00 Uhr
Present: Members of all Commissions
Chair: Gebhard Barbisch, Charley Shimanski, Stephanie Thomas
Minutes: Fabienne Jelk

Ultra Trail du Haut-Fiffre turns into nightmare - Col. Bertrand Host/PGHM

The PGHM is a police force with military status, specializing in mountain rescue and searching for missing persons.

The ultratrail took place in June 2024 and covered Angolon Peak (2090 m), Haut Giffre, over 128.8 km and 9035 m. The weather was very bad. The route was not adapted to the conditions. A 52-year-old runner fell and did not survive. Three other runners were injured, some seriously. Many runners suffered from hypothermia. The public prosecutor's office opened an investigation to clarify the causes of the accident.

The accident happened at 4:00 a.m., and the rescue services were alerted at 6:30 a.m. The rescue operation lasted until 12:00 p.m. One helicopter and 15 rescuers were involved in the operation.

The risk factors that led to these accidents were as follows: high demand, challenging conditions, inadequate regulation of the ultra trail, and limited capacity of private emergency services. The risk could have been minimized by canceling the race or starting it later. Furthermore, the route could have been adjusted.

The duties and liability of the organizer can be defined as follows:

The organizer should not start a race if, at the time of the start, there is a foreseeable risk that the event will have to be canceled or interrupted.

The organizer should not be held liable for decisions made due to unforeseen or changing circumstances that lead to a change in the route, interruption, or cancellation of the event.

Participants should be aware and acknowledge that there is no such thing as zero risk

in mountainous regions where conditions are unpredictable and should accept the associated risks.

It is important to note that in the mountains, sometimes everything that can go wrong does go wrong.

File: 20251011-0800-Ultra-trail turns into nightmare.mp4

Risk Management and Taking Responsibility to Halt the Rescue Operations - Gregor Dolinar/GRZS

Mountain rescue is dangerous. In Slovenia, there have been seven fatal accidents involving rescuers over the past 30 years.

Various factors influence the risk: training, equipment, experience, organization, decision-making, etc.

Each rescue team has an alarm list. When an alarm is received, it goes to the first rescuer on the list. This person then takes charge of the operation. The rescuers on the list must be well trained. For small operations, the leader accompanies the team; for larger operations, he remains at the operations center and coordinates the operation. The leader is under pressure to push ahead with the rescue. However, he must also be able to decide when to abort the operation. When he is at the operations center, he relies on information from the rescuers in the field to make this decision.

What is needed to make such a decision: a clear command structure, dynamic risk assessment, pre-agreed criteria for abandoning the operation, independent, objective decisions, safety first, documentation, and debriefing.

Case study:

Christmas 2024: Kotliska grapa, Kamnik-Savinja Alps, December 22 to 26

Problems: Extremely bad weather. Avalanche danger. Over five days, more than 100 rescuers were deployed. There was considerable pressure from the media, the public, relatives, and the embassy.

The alarm was raised at 6 p.m. A woman was trapped in a deep couloir, but was

uninjured. Her partner had fallen further down and was injured. The two could hear each other. The exact position of the accident victims was unknown. There was an extreme risk of avalanches. The operation was therefore called off after four hours.

The next day, the snowfall subsided, but strong winds picked up. Contact was maintained with the woman throughout the night. Contact with her partner was lost. The woman was eventually evacuated. The decision on how long to continue and when to stop was difficult. The rescuers could hear the woman, but could not locate her exactly. Time was running out. This caused emotional pressure. So the rescue continued despite the high risks.

The partner was located and recovered the next day. He did not survive.

Second case: Grintovec area, Preddvor, Slovenia, March 2025.

A hiker fell into a deep karst shaft. The problem was that it was difficult to access. The helicopter could not land there. The wall was over 100 meters high. There was emotional pressure because the victim's colleagues were on site. The victim was seriously injured. Two complex night operations were carried out.

The decision of when to abort an operation is difficult. The safety of the rescuers always comes first.

Filei: 20251011-0830-Risk Management and Taking Responsibility to Halt Rescue Operations_ICAR 2025-Gregor Dolinar.pdf

The Good, Bad & Ugly of Rescue Team Cultures - Dave Weber, Mountain Rescue Collective (USA)

There are hard skills and soft skills. You could also call them technical and non-technical skills. You always have to tell yourself that you're not the best and ask yourself if you're ready to be rescued.

What can I do:

1. Do your job. Do what you can, but do the whole job, including the unpleasant parts.
2. Manage stress. Deal with stress. Observe yourself to see what stage you are at. As long as I sleep well and still enjoy my job, I don't need to change anything. As soon as I enter the red zone (higher pulse rate of 145 to 175, etc.), I need to react. If I enter the black zone, I need to do something, no matter what, as long as it helps.
3. Manage human factors. Take the human factor into account. Rescues cannot be done alone.

A good team has the following characteristics:

1. The procedures are standardized.
2. The team is well trained and ready.
3. Team members can trust and rely on each other. Team members talk to each other. They ask themselves what they can do better, what others can do better, and what the team can do better. Ego is bad in a team. In a team, everyone must be able to say whether they are capable of performing a task or not.

How a team works:

Give them a chance, give them standards, give them training, give them equipment, give them feedback. If it doesn't work, stop. Sometimes they're just bad. Then try again.

Other points:

Take responsibility, leave your ego behind, keep it simple, stay focused, strengthen the team.

For questions/comments: davidchristopherweber@gmail.com

Filei: 20251011-0900-Rescue-Teams-CulturesICAR25TeamWeber.mp4

Competition vs. Collaboration: Shaping Safer Cultures in Alpine Rescue - Janna Allen, Dana Kent LLC, Solitude Ski Patrol (USA)

There are different types of dangers: those caused by the environment (avalanches, etc.) and those caused by people (racism, sexism).

Women make up 2 to 15% of professional avalanche rescue teams. The culture that prevails in the teams is often described as “male-dominated” and selfish.

What do I need to stay mentally healthy?

You are healthy when you feel secure enough to show your true self and express yourself when you feel insecure.

Low psychological security leads to poor performance and thus potentially higher risk and unnecessary competition.

High psychological security means openness, better teamwork, smoother decision-making, and good cooperation.

What leads to competition: The belief that others must also have a hard time if I have a hard time, personal prejudices, inner struggle with oneself, prejudices against women in leadership positions.

Women often suffer discrimination (50% of women compared to 3.5% of men) and sexual harassment (30% of women compared to 4% of men).

What to avoid in a team: This starts with inappropriate jokes and posters in the locker room.

What makes a healthy team: The team works with efficiency, compassion, and curiosity. Mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and are not punished. Contributions are heard and appreciated.

What you can do to foster a good team culture: Set up mentoring programs; be aware of prejudices; integrate psychological best practices into the organization's daily and annual training; consider what you would have needed at the beginning of your career and implement this for the next generation; reward cooperative, confident behavior over

competitive behavior; speak up.

For questions/comments:

dana@danakentcoaching.com, j.allen@solitudemountain.com

Filei: 20251011-1000-Competition v Collaboration_Safer Rescue Environments.pdf

**Efficiency Saves Lives: Unifying Norwegian SAR with a Common Digital Platform
Indisziplinary Presentation from Norwegian Red Cross, Norwegian People's Aid,
Norwegian Search and Rescue Dog Association, RNoAF-330SQN - Royal
Norwegian Air Force**

Steps that promoted cooperation between the various organizations involved in rescue operations in Norway:

In 2012, the National Guideline for Search for Missing People was developed. In 2015, a radio system was introduced to facilitate communication between the organizations. In 2020, a digital platform was introduced with information, maps, etc., and in 2025, the Operational Expert Group was founded. This consists of SAR experts from volunteer organizations, the police, and the Joint Rescue Coordination Center, is state-owned, and is funded by the government.

Next, we will show how the digital platform works. The platform provides an overview of the team and tells you whether they are available for new missions or already busy. There is automatic logging and a timeline. Information about the missing person and the mission is provided. Misunderstandings that can arise from radio communication are avoided. There is a mobile phone app with tracking and offline support.

The advantages from an air rescue perspective: planning takes less time, communication is better, the situation can be assessed more accurately, and the overall workload is reduced.

Doghandler receive the necessary information directly so they can immediately head out into the field. They don't have to go to the operational center first.

File: 20251011-1030-Efficiency Saves Lives Unifying Norwegian SAR with a Common Digital Platform.mp4

How Many Funerals Does It Take? Terry Miyauchi, Arizona Dept. of Public Safety (ret.), Bell Helicopters (USA)

How many more funerals must there be?

What does the ideal team look like? Who should be a member? What qualities should team members possess, and which should they not?

Focus on the team or on yourself?

The case of Bruce W. Harrolle, who was injured during a rescue operation, is presented. Two hikers had to be evacuated. They were found relatively quickly. The accident happened while the helicopter was landing (hovering). Bruce got out, bent down, and when he stood up again, he was caught in the rotors.

How could this happen? Despite all the training, etc. Whose fault was this? Was it the pilot's fault? He knew Bruce was there. Everyone on the team, including Bruce, actually knew what to do.

Was it a team failure? Teamwork is more important than any equipment or technique used.

What is the ideal team: Put your ego aside. Foster excellence. Accept bad days. Either manage people to rise to where they belong or weed them out.

`` It's important to be aware:

Every team has a culture, good or bad. Every team member has an influence on the team's culture, good or bad.

For questions/comments: tmiyauchi@bellflight.com

File: 20251011-1100-How Many Funerals Does It Take-Miyauchi.pdf

Near Miss: How Unifying Operational Language Accelerates Cultural Cohesion and Reduces Risk - Laura McGladrey, University of Colorado, Stress Trauma Adversity, Research and Treatment Center (USA); Clayton Horney, Colorado National Guard (USA)

How can a standardized operational language prevent accidents? For example, in the case of an avalanche, various organizations arrive on site. Common communication must be possible.

How is stress awareness related to risk? Stress awareness can improve individual and team performance, facilitate the acquisition of experience for performance and mentoring, and reduce staff turnover in favor of remaining employees.

How is a common language achieved regarding stress? Through colors, symbols, etc., as is done in the avalanche danger scale.

The different stress levels are categorized into four levels: green, yellow, orange, and red.

What does effective monitoring look like? Through the "Incident Report Tool." This tool records the personal stress level. Various criteria are assigned a score, and recommendations for further action are displayed based on the score achieved.

What to do if a stress problem is identified:

- Determine the severity.
- Implement a response plan (3-3-3, counselor, clinic, SOP)
- Effective monitoring.
- Preventive emergency plan.

Key insights into what can be done to identify and address stress-related problems among team members:

- Implement a structured system for identifying acute and chronic resource depletion.
- Promote a common language for recognizing and monitoring stress levels.
- Establish a structure and standardized procedures for stress management.

- Consider stress management as a resource for risk management.

File: 20251011-1130 - NearMiss2025McGladreyv3.pdf

Rescue Mindsets: A new Framework for Response - Michael Ackerman and Jonathan Wilson, Silverton Avalanche School (USA)

AVGAR is a decision-making tool for assessing and planning avalanche search and rescue operations.

AVGAR utilizes eight key areas. These eight categories are divided into two focus areas: fixed categories for the operational cycle and flexible categories within the operational profile.

Supervision: Who is in charge today? Does this leader have the experience and knowledge to manage a complex avalanche search and rescue mission?

Team Selection: Does the team have the experience, knowledge, tools, and skills to carry out an avalanche search and rescue mission?

Team Fitness: Is the team mentally and physically fit?

Environment: Have the weather and avalanche forecasts been reviewed and discussed by everyone?

Planning: This is the most complex category of AVGAR. What type of incident is it, and what is the appropriate response?

Emergency Resources: Does the team have additional equipment, transportation, or personnel resources? Are these resources readily available?

Communication: Two-way communication.

... Task complexity: A comprehensive overview of all aspects of the rescue operation. Certain factors can increase the complexity of the operation, such as unfamiliar terrain, difficult weather, etc.

File: 20251011-1200-Rescue Mindsets.pdf

End of meeting: 12:00