

MEDIA POLICY WITH GUIDELINES FOR GROUPS AND TEAMS



Purpose

The goal of this policy is to ensure that the media are provided with positive comments which enhance the profile of LandSAR and risks are minimised where possible. LandSAR NZ, its groups and teams and members must speak with one voice on issues. This policy seeks to provide clear guidelines for those authorised to speak to the media on behalf of LandSAR.

Background

It is important for all organisations to build and maintain a positive media profile and LandSAR is no exception. A negative public image is far more robust and more difficult to disestablish than a positive one, and LandSAR groups can play a pivotal role in media relations.

Media relations are essential in a search and rescue operation (SAROP) as the media has direct and often immediate access to the public. Individual members may be contacted by the media to comment on activity and incidents in their region, so it is important that media opportunities are maximised and convey consistent messaging.

Media refers to all print, television, radio and online media, including bloggers. A separate *Social Media Guidelines* document will shortly be available to members on the LandSAR NZ website at <https://www.landsar.org.nz/publications-resources/landsar-policies-and-procedures/>

Application

This policy applies to all **LandSAR groups and teams** and should be applied to all LandSAR activities. Group or team chairs should take responsibility to ensure that it is followed by its members.

Adoption

This policy replaces all and any previous policies and procedures. It was adopted by LandSAR Board (Board) on 12 April 2018 for immediate implementation and will be reviewed in April 2023.

Education for LandSAR Members:

LandSAR NZ is developing **an e-learning module on media awareness** for members and this will be available on our website by the end of June 2018. The content will be tailored to 3 groups:

Group 1: Operational members who HAVE NOT BEEN authorised to speak with the media

Group 2: Operational members who HAVE BEEN authorised to speak with the media

Group 3: Non-operational members, who HAVE BEEN authorised to speak with the media, e.g. group executives (committee), staff, board etc.

Communication Process:

The table below provides guidance as to the appropriate LandSAR spokesperson for varying situations, including major incidents.

Subject matter (what the media are asking about)	Appropriate LandSAR member response
General comment on the part being played by LandSAR volunteers during a SAROP of local interest	Can be provided by designated IMT members and Team Leaders with appropriate media awareness (i.e. a working understanding of these guidelines)
General comment on the part being played by LandSAR volunteers during a SAROP that is generating national interest.	Can be provided by designated IMT members and Team Leaders with appropriate media awareness (i.e. a working understanding of these guidelines). Discuss key messages with LandSAR staff, if possible.
All matters concerning the SAR subject, SAROP progress, SAR planning (tasking details), Police or other agency decisions and resources other than LandSAR.	Refer to Coordinating Authority for comment.
Any incidents/accidents involving LandSAR personnel, during a SAROP	Refer to LandSAR Group Support Manager or CEO for comment (see attached NZSAR Guidelines).

Comments on any SAROPs LandSAR which is involved in, including details about the incident itself and the lost party, should be left to the coordinating agency either the Police or RCCNZ. As above any approved comment from LandSAR should be restricted to the part played by our volunteers.

We have close working relationships with NZ Police and Rescue Coordination Centre NZ, (RCCNZ). We keep each other informed about related media so there are no surprises and each of our organisations keeps to our specialist area of expertise. LandSAR and groups should only comment on LandSAR activities and leave the relevant SAR organisation to comment on other areas.

In the event of a severe Health and Safety event, groups and staff should refer to the *attached SAR Media Guidelines from NZSAR*.

Individual groups are encouraged to undertake media opportunities in relation to their own group, although LandSAR staff will appreciate being kept informed of what's being covered around the country so they can offer any support if needed.

GUIDELINES:

- Comments should be limited to the activities of your group. In relation to matters of national importance refer to Process section above.
- If you are a designated IMT member or team leader with appropriate media awareness, ensure any comment you make in relation to your group and operational activities is appropriate to the position you hold. If you're approached by media on a topic where you're not the group's appointed spokesperson, advise the journalist that someone will get back to them as soon as possible and take their key details i.e. name, publication, nature of story and information required.
- Don't make assumptions or comments about operations or activities that your group is not directly involved in. Always be mindful to emphasise the group aspect, as a comment you may make in your local paper may be picked up by national media or reproduced in a digital space.
- Any comment should be from the perspective of your group and not attached to personal views/opinions.
- Be very clear and precise with your comments and don't give any opportunity to be misquoted. You can say a lot, but if your quote has the potential for media to take a 'grab' - sometimes they will choose to use selected words or sentences out of context which can skew the comment. For this reason, it is a good idea to avoid using sensational language and words with potentially negative connotations.
- Be aware that anything you post on your group's social media pages can be picked up, used and quoted by media across national and local media - so always be mindful of what you are writing. Refer to the separate *Social Media Guidelines*.
- Members should wear their LandSAR branded clothing for all photography/ filming/interview requirements. Wearing old, faded or untidy clothing is not presenting a professional image. Alternatively, a group polo or tidy attire should be worn.
- You should remember that your comments will often be available permanently and able to be reproduced in other media.

HELPFUL TIPS:

- Journalists are trained to interview people. If they ask you a question you're unsure about, don't be afraid to make a note of it and tell them you'll come back to them with the answer. It's better than guessing and then seeing your guess attached to an angle you didn't consider.
- If you ever say something you realise you shouldn't have said, or it could be misunderstood or put in the wrong context tell them your quote 'is off the record' – but you must get in quick or it's fair game for them to quote you.
- If in doubt about what to say, just stick to the facts and explain what happened.

Useful media phrases during emergencies:

- I can confirm that LandSAR volunteers have been called to assist and a team has (or is about to be) dispatched. We have no other detail for media at this stage. Please try us again in 30/40/50 minutes.
- We've been asked to refer all media calls to Police or RCCNZ, so unfortunately, I'm unable to make any comment.
- (For photographers) I'm going to have to ask you to remain right here please. We have an operation underway right now, and beyond this area is a no-go zone. We will try to get you closer for a photo once things settle.

Useful media phrases during a serious incident:

- I'm afraid I'm not authorised to talk to the media yet. Please refer your questions to the Coordinating Agency

Sidestepping sensitive questions:

- I need to stop you there because these questions should be directed to our national office/Police/RCCNZ. I'll have to refer you to an appropriate spokesperson.
- That's a matter you should really address with the Police or RCCNZ.
- I'm not authorised to comment on this, I'll have to refer you to our national office.

Dealing with tragedy:

- I am not authorised to make a comment on the situation. Please refer all your queries to the Coordinating Agency.

At the completion of a rescue:

- I'm particularly proud of the way our trained volunteers performed today.
- This rescue is an outstanding example of the professionalism and commitment of our trained search and rescue trained volunteers.
- The public should be very proud of their trained search and rescue volunteers who sometimes put their own lives at risk to find and rescue people.

FREQUENT QUESTION:

Why doesn't New Zealand charge for search and rescue services?

- We prefer to educate and alert people to potential risks. We encourage them to plan and take responsibility for themselves.
- We want people to request help if they are in distress or if their loved ones are missing.
- We don't want people hiding from us to avoid costs.
- Overseas tourists only make up about 10% of SAR incidents each year.



SAR Media Guidelines for use in the event of a severe health and safety event

Purpose

- Agree to a united communications process which will:
 - encourage a consistent response
 - enable agencies involved an appropriate voice
 - provide support to those directly involved
 - align with Health & Safety Committee members' existing crisis communications plans.

Context

Most search and rescue agencies have communication strategies and considerable experience in place to respond to SAR incidents. Longstanding practice dictates that the Coordinating Authority holds responsibility to manage any media response to incidents and operations. However, responding to a severe health and safety event in which staff and/or volunteers from SAR agencies could be adversely affected introduces an extra layer of complexity.

This requires a shared, disciplined, respectful communication process to ensure those handling the incident retain credibility and can provide correct assurances to affected parties, agencies and the public.

Agencies have clearly stated all that is required in this context is a set of guidelines which will align, complement or be integrated into their existing communication plans and processes.

Guidelines

The Coordinating Authority – RCCNZ or Police - has the responsibility to *coordinate* media response.

Coordinating authority will consult and communicate with the agencies involved in incident.

Agencies will identify their spokesperson and ensure the coordinating authority is given their details.

In the case where an agency involved in an incident does not have adequate communication capacity, the Coordinating Authority will manage all media response. The Agency will be responsible for informing the coordinating authority of their capability to respond.

Local coordinators and team leaders will provide details to the Co-ordinating Authority

If approached, SAR individuals are expected to refer detailed enquiries to the relevant Co-ordinating Authority and/or their agency – as determined by agency communication plans. The coordinating Authority media requirements take precedence.

Agencies will encourage - and where capacity allows train volunteers to understand media protocols

Health & Safety committee members with SAR responsibilities will provide the coordinating authority media teams with their media contact.

Agencies will disseminate these guidelines as part of their crisis communications planning.

Key messages

All SAR agencies should refer to their existing key messages to compliment the overarching statement that:

[Name of agencies involved] take health and safety of its people seriously. [The incident] will be thoroughly investigated by [relevant regulators, laws and protocols]

Spokesperson Contact Table

Agencies are responsible for ensuring this list is updated and correct.

Health & Safety Committee Members Media Spokesperson Table		
Agency	Name	Contact
RCCNZ	Maritime NZ General Media line	499 7318 or media@maritimenz.govt.nz
NZ Police	Police Response and Operations on-call duty officer	Police Media 04 463 4410
	Police Media Centre	04 238 5111 media@police.govt.nz
NZSAR	Duncan Ferner Secretariat Manager	04 439 9045 or 021 249 0463
Coastguard	Patrick Holmes CEO	09 973 4980 (ext 2015) 021 486 636
	Julia James Communications Manager	09 905 4762 (ext 274) 021 435 804
LandSAR NZ	Mike Ambrose	DDI 03 443 8242 Mobile 021 274 1027
Surf Life Saving NZ	Lisa Smith	027-488-823 or lisa.smith@surflifesaving.org.nz

Any updates to these contact details should be sent to s.ross@nzsar.govt.nz