

THE CHANGING ROLES OF MOUNTAIN RESCUE

(The following article was written by Tom Miner in August of 1994. What he said then still holds true 14 years latter. Editor) Things have changed over the past 25 years in the SAR community.

Equipment has improved, techniques have become safer, rescuers have become better trained, laws have been enacted to protect volunteers and performance standards have been created and much more. These are all positive things, but on the negative side liability has increased for both volunteers and the responsible agencies. Like it or not, litigation is a fact of life now and the only way to protect ourselves from liability is to train, document the training, establish credible standards, and properly manage our efforts.

Let me talk about management. Back in the good old days there were no trained managers because there were no training schools, no incident commanders because there was no Incident Command System (ICS). We were successful, but not as often as we are today. We managed but there were plenty of incidents of chaos and confusion far greater than what we see today because there were too many managers, confusion about who was in charge, and too many decision makers who contradicted each other. There were too many egos and much too much unit rivalry and jealousy. Today, with liability the way it is someone has to be in charge. The law is very clear in this instance: it is the responsible agency and in the State of Washington is either the Sheriff of the county or the National Park Rangers in the Parks and no one else.

As the responsible agency it is their responsibility to gather information about an incident and develop an action plan to deal with the problem. They decide on what resources to use, when to use them and how to use them. If a manager is smart he won't plan alone, he will gather as much input as he can from as many sources as he can but ultimately one person, the Incident Commander, the SAR manager, makes the decision on who, what, where, when and how.

Volunteers, wherever they come from, TMRU, Seattle MRC, Olympic Mt. Rescue, ESAR, GSSD, etc. are resources. They have the responsibility to

train to meet their stated capabilities and minimum standards, to respond in a timely manner when requested and carry out an assigned task if it is safe to do so. *(You, however, always have the choice of not responding or not participating. The loser in that case is the victim who loses your knowledge and service. Editor)*. Finally it is the responsibility of volunteers to advise the managers of changing conditions that require a change of plans. Accurate flow of complete information is vital to good action planning and sound management decisions.

Over the past many years these rolls and responsibilities have changed from a grey area to a relatively bright line. Volunteers used to be managers who gave direction, made plans and carried them out and sheriff's deputies and rangers stood back and let you do it. This is no longer the case, like it or not. Liability and law has clarified the separate rolls and responsibilities. If something goes wrong during a mission it will be the responsible agency, the "deep- pocket" in civil law, who will have to answer the questions and pay up if found wanting. Therefore the responsible agency, if it is truly responsible, will expect to carry out its roll of manager and it will expect the resources it uses to meet the stated standards and carry out their assignments if safe to do so.

Mountain Rescue resources are used only 5 to 10% of the time. The rest of the time missions are managed without our expertise. Remember responsible agencies invite us to help them because the victim needs our help to speed his/her recovery. Missions need to be carried out in a professional and effective manner with the best interests of the victim foremost in our minds. Mistakes will be made because search managers are human and information is usually inadequate at the time decisions must be made; there will always be room for improvement. Constructive criticism is welcome and expected from both sides. The victim needs only the best cooperative effort that can be provided. Remember why we are all involved in Search and Rescue, "**SO OTHERS MAY LIVE.**"

BOARD MEETING

There was no board meeting held in August due to the lack of a quorum of board members.