

Timaru Marine Exercise

16th August 2015



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On Sunday 16th August 2015 Mark Whitehouse, Operations Manager, Coastguard Southern Region evaluated elements of a marine search and rescue exercise in the Timaru area. The aim of the exercise was to test how multiple search and rescue agencies can work together effectively. How their Standing Operating Procedures work together and identify any changes needed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the local response as a Forward Operating Base (FOB) commanded remotely from a command point located in Christchurch.

KEY FINDINGS

1. SARNET was used at the IMT and FOB. This is an excellent communication tool and well utilised by all users once users grasped how simple the system was. I understand the Police identified some issues with it back at the IMT using Police computers though.
2. Even though Tracplus was not utilised throughout the exercise thought needs to go into its use at the FOB, suggest that the projector is used to project it onto a whiteboard for all FOB personnel to view.
3. Wet crew gained valuable experience from working within the FOB or ICP.
4. Tracplus 2 software needs to installed on all Laptops in the FOB.
5. Remotely managing an incident using SARNET works well
6. Internet coverage throughout the exercise was poor. The Port Company needs to be approached to ask if we can tether into their Wi-Fi.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. All FOB Laptops to be loaded with TracPlus 2 software.
2. Police need to add a mobile printer to their SAR box in Timaru for the FOB.
3. The Port Company needs to be approached to ask if we can tether into their Wi-Fi.
4. Police need to write a tether to the Port Company personally thanking them for the use of their building for the SAREX and for use during other SAROPs / SAREX's in the future.

BACKGROUND

Periodically Coastguard and other SAR agencies participate in exercises that consider or simulate a real life situation. The aims of these exercises are to improve operational readiness and identify any gaps or weaknesses in all SAR participating agencies. They also clarify roles, demonstrate agency capabilities and provide a sound training platform.

The scenario was initiated by a flare sighting off Timaru. This constituted a Category I SAR Operation which was led by local Police in Christchurch commanding a FOB located at the Port Company in Timaru.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE EXERCISE

The three main objectives for the exercise which were:

- To enhance multi-agency and inter-group coordination between the Police and Coastguard and their support agencies and personnel within the area in the event of a marine search and rescue incident and run an incident remotely from a distance location.
- To provide all participants the opportunity to refresh and practice their search and rescue incident management knowledge and skills during a full scale operational exercise. To identify gaps in training and knowledge and procedures and areas that require further development.
- To ensure value is delivered for all personnel involved.

OBSERVATION

Mark Whitehouse who was also the Exercise Coordinator observed parts of the exercise and participated in running the scenarios for the exercise and was situated in Timaru. Observations were made at the FOB at the Port Company building in Timaru. Paul Beaver who was Exercise Director also observed and ran the exercise from the designated ICP which was situated at the EOC at Christchurch main Police station.

The scenario: A flare was sighted off Timaru and after further info was gathered it was identified that potentially a vessel could be in distress.

The IMT assembled at the Police station in Christchurch at 0800hrs and the FOB was set up and operated from 1015hrs. No vessels were deployed due to a risk assessment carried out the night before around the weather. Two vessels were notionally launched and crew manned radios and spoke direct to the Radio operator at the FOB. One was the local Coastguard vessel and the other a vessel of opportunity a local fishing vessel.

The FOB was manned with x2 Police one acting as IC, also from Coastguard a Radio Operator and designated SARNET operator, also a Marine advisor. The ICP in Christchurch was manned by x 3 Police and x 6 Coastguard personnel. SARNET was the main form of communication however cell phones were used also to communicate.

Tasking were sent via SARNET to the FOB from the ICP which were printed off then actioned. All info received and transmitted on the FOB radio was logged on a pod on SARNET.

Even though taskings were initially slow as the FOB worked out how the process worked, once up and running the system worked well.

ENDEX was then called when the system had been well tested and SARNET was used at the Port Company for the IMT to debrief individual vessels crew and then as a joint SAREX debrief.

SUMMARY

To summarise this was an excellent exercise to test how a SAR incident could be managed remotely and was very successful. If Timaru get an incident they will manage the initial actions then call in support from Christchurch if it looks like a protracted incident like the 'Journeyman' incident.

The Port Company is an excellent facility to us as the initial ICP then as a FOB. The more personnel get to use SARNET the easier it will become. Thought needs to go in to setting up TracPlus to be viewed by all members of the FOB during an incident that has vessels deployed.

Even though the exercise was changed due to the poor weather overall the exercise went really well and shows how much the area and supporting areas have moved on over the years with SAR incident management.

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Operations Manager

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Abbreviations

CIMS = Co-ordinated Incident Management System

COMMS = Communications

CRV = Coastguard Rescue Vessel

DS = Exercise Directing Staff

FOB = Forward Operating Base

GSMEAC = Orders format: Ground, Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration and Logistics, Command and Control

HELO = Helicopter

IAP = Incident Action Plan

IC = Incident Controller

ICP = Incident Control Point

IMT = Incident Management Team

LOGM = Logistics Manager

MLSO = Managing Land Search Operations

OG – The Other Guy which is a term used for a person who fulfils the roles of P&I and Ops and Logistics at the start of an Operation

OPSM = Operations Manager

OSC = On Scene Command

P&I = Planning and Intelligence

PIM = Planning/Intelligence Manager

POA = Probability of Area

POD = Probability of Detection

POS = Probability of Success

RCCNZ = Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand

SAR = Search and Rescue

SAREX = Search and Rescue Exercise

SAROP = Search and Rescue Operation

SMART = (normally used in conjunction to setting goals) Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Reasonable, Timely

SME = Subject Matter Experts

SAP = Stop Assess and Plan