

NZSAR Guideline for Search and Rescue Operational Debriefing

Search and Rescue operations typically involve more than one operational agency in their response. Ongoing reflection of operational capability and performance supports achieving an aligned coherent and cohesive SAR sector.

Background

This Guideline provides a framework for operational debriefing to support SAR Coordinating Authorities and other stakeholders undertaking hot or cold debriefs.

An operational debrief provides an opportunity to gather and assess learning from an operation, or exercise. Improvement in SAR operation performance and safety can be achieved if learning from incidents can be carried out consistently and the lessons acted on effectively and shared widely. Learning can truly be achieved when some form of change is actually implemented, ensuring actions will be different in the future.

Debriefing an operation supports ongoing monitoring, and should:

- Identify and confirm good practice
- Promote continued learning and assist in developing the experience of individuals and teams
- Identify both team and individual training and development needs
- Confirm if current policies and practices are effective and fit for purpose
- Identify operational learning.

Aim

The aim of operational debriefing is for the persons involved to communicate their experiences of the SAR event (operation or exercise) so that lessons can be identified. The debrief is about improving performance and not about assigning blame.

Principles

- **Learning focussed** – focus effort on learning and improvement activities that explore what went well and what could be improved.
- **System focussed** – examining systems of work rather than individual performance.
- **Adding value** – providing evidence-based information for the sector.
- **Minimising burden** – using existing mechanisms to capture data where possible.
- **Future focussed** – explore events to identify aspects to sustain and areas for improvement for the future.

Ground rules

The debrief is undertaken within a just culture: it is vital that debriefing is carried out in a manner conducive to promoting organisational learning and encouraging a no blame culture.

Debriefing should:

- be conducted openly and honestly
- pursue personal, group or organisational understanding and learning
- be consistent with professional responsibilities
- respect the rights of individuals
- value equally all those concerned.

Key features

Operational debriefing provides a mechanism and process to critically examine an operation. It should:

- ideally be held within 21 days of the operation, and no later than six weeks
- look for both strengths and weaknesses as well as ideas for future learning
- not apportion blame.

Structure the debrief to encourage discussion and feedback on issues, not individuals. Areas for consideration during the debrief may include:

- **Sequence of events**

A timeline of the incident pieced together using all available information.

- **Incident command**

Whether overall command and control was effective and whether the resources available were used to their best advantage.

- **Command and Control**

If the appropriate information was gathered and relayed to the incident commander. If the initial level of response was proportionate and the nearest most appropriate resources used.

- **Operational practices and procedures**

Comparing operational delivery against existing guidance, policy and procedures, and health and safety guidance.

- **Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

Ensure any matter relating to health, safety and wellbeing has been identified and appropriately addressed, including post-operation wellbeing.

- **Equipment usage**

Consider whether and how equipment was used. Was it appropriate and adequate for the task? Identify failure and inadequacies.

- **Communications**

Were appropriate equipment and procedures established for both command and control information purposes?

- **Liaison**

Was liaison with supporting agencies effective? Was liaison with family effective? Was Iwi liaison effective?

- **Public relations**

Were media relations organised and appropriate?

Debriefing Considerations – Dos and Don'ts

DO use formal protocol or structure to help guide the debrief, including an agenda	DON'T ignore the need for structure to guide the process
DO use a dedicated note taker, or form of capturing feedback	DON'T think you will remember what was said or what was covered
DO ensure a just and safe environment for participants to contribute	DON'T use the debrief to apportion blame DON'T allow others to belittle participants

Reporting

Complete debrief reports in-line with Agency policy. Ensure any lessons are shared with relevant agencies.

Reference:

Organisational Debriefing – Information for the CDEM Sector (IS6/05) January 2006 (<https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/publications/is-06-05-organisational-debriefing.pdf>)

Debriefs / Ten One – New Zealand Police Intranet

