

Search and Rescue-Arctic

Search and Rescue operations happen regularly in the arctic for numerous reasons. Time is a great factor when it comes to search and rescue. Finding a lost person has to be done almost immediately due to the extreme cold or other unfavorable weather conditions. The land is also enormously massive. Nunavut alone is 350,000km² of land! The closest help (locals) may be 200 miles away. Emergency air assistance from Halifax is over a thousand miles away. Saving time is essential whenever someone is missing. The present condition of the travelers and the location conditions are important factors that will determine their survival and their chance of being rescued in a shorter time. It may be -40° Celsius when a young hunter does not return in a timely manner. Even experienced hunters occasionally need help. There are many factors that often put people at risk. Lack of experience and knowledge of the land chiefly contributes to disorientation. The present mental state of the individual sometimes contributes to the ability to make the right decisions. Perhaps the 'lost' person is going through hard times at home. Maybe he/she just lost family members, or had a recent break-up of a relationship. Maybe he/she is 'plain stubborn', has a strong ego and does not listen to what others have to say. They may be too tired to make proper decisions. Other people who get lost may not know the land, the present conditions, dangerous parts, windy spots, or are just ignorant of what should be known. Perhaps they know the land very well but the weather contributes to their 'disorientated' state. For whatever the reason, people do get lost.

Technology may contribute as well. Traveling in the North requires vehicles nowadays since dog teams are not preferred. Snowmobiles and motors run by engine power. Parts tend to break after normal wear and tear. Some people simply cannot maintain their vehicles to work effectively causing break downs further down the road. Vehicles have to be properly warmed up to work well. A person cannot simply start a machine and drive. At least a few minutes of warm-up time is required for the machine to be effective before driving, especially when it is cold. Even boat motors require warm up in the summer time. To avoid breakdowns out on the land, having properly maintained vehicles is essential.

Hunters and travelers should always notify someone about where they are going. The numbers in the hunting party should be reported. Hunters should be well equipped with regular and emergency gear. The hunters should be properly dressed for the weather and have extra clothing just in case they should get wet. Hunters should have a good knowledge of the area of where they are going and know the land/sea/ice/weather conditions. Relatives should have a good idea where the party is going, how long they intend to hunt and when they are expected to return. Search and Rescue, RCMP, friends, relatives, or the Hamlet office should be notified of the hunter's intentions. When hunting parties do not return as planned, emergency people are notified. The Emergency Measures Organization will decide if the search and rescue is to be done locally, or if outside help organizations should be notified. It normally depends on the seriousness of the rescue. Most rescues are done locally. When search and rescues do happen, relatives are encouraged not to participate. Unfortunately, some rescues are unsuccessful and turn into recovery of body missions. Search and Rescue is much needed in the arctic, and is

extremely stressful for the people involved. Finding a person well and alive is something to celebrate! There are more success stories than not. Rescue people are very thorough, well prepared, well trained, willing and totally dedicated to saving lives! Most Search and Rescue consists of local Canadian Rangers, RCMP and dedicated volunteers. I take my hat off to all people involved in Search and Rescue in the North! I'm very proud of them!

When dog-teams were popular and the main means of transportation, people hardly ever got lost. Dogs were capable of going home directly, even in a blizzard. Hunters and travelers may have been outdoors for weeks at a time knowing there would be no one to rescue them if they should need assistance. They had to be very careful. High frequency radios were not available at the time. People traveled using their instincts and did not rely on anyone. Some are now using Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and satellite telephones.

Nowadays, people have less patience than before. They spend more time in the community where everything is available at their fingertips. They know much more about community life but very little about survival on the land. People have better computer skills, community life, and speak better English, but they take less time getting to know the land/ice/animals and environment. This is really sad because once they are out on the land; they are less equipped to deal with problems. People who are used to the land, have land\ice knowledge, and are used to being on the land are much more prepared for emergencies.

Today people have better technology but get lost more often. They are encouraged to bring sleeping gear, stove, knife, extra food, snowmobile parts, tent, extra clothing, and whatever they may need for a specific task. For example, when floe edge hunting, a small boat to retrieve catch is needed, as well as a mechanism for traveling. A GPS, a beacon, a satellite telephone, and especially High Frequency (HF) radios are great to have in preparation for emergencies. Emergency beacons are also useful. Emergency beacons are now available from the Hamlet offices for free. People are encouraged to pick one up before heading out on the land. If help or any type of immediate assistance is needed, the beacon indicator identifies the location of the traveler. Beacon indicators are great assets to have, but not really needed if the hunter knows the land and the hunting equipment is working well.

Most people usually know where they are going, but many people never look back when they are moving forward. Always look back to where you have been. You may have to make a return trip.

Be independent when you are on the land, pretend that you are the only person out there and that help is not available. In that way, you will be more careful, take less unnecessary chances and return home safely without outside assistance. Besides being stressful, search and rescues are extremely expensive in the North, especially when air search is required for weeks at a time.

To have a great outing, please use common sense.

**Elijah Tigullaraq,
QSO,
June 2010**