

SARCALL SYSTEM AIDS MOUNTAIN RESCUE ON THE SUMMIT

A new software package, first developed in the UK to enable mountain rescue teams to locate incidents, record incident data and capture debriefing data, is now being adopted by teams in Ireland. The Sarcall system, which was rolled out during 'Reeks Sunday' in Mayo passed the test, according to Donal McNamara, Regional Administrator for Sarcall in Ireland and a member of the South Eastern Mountain Rescue Association.

Reeks Sunday' – the pilgrimage to the top of Croagh Patrick in County Mayo – has been held on the last Sunday in July for the last 1,500 years approximately. With pilgrims making their annual climb to the summit, regular masses are held around the small summit chapel throughout the day.

Even members of my walking club have been known to get married there on quieter days! Scollars believe that it pre-dates Christianity and was originally a ritual associated with the Festival of Lughnasadh. Reeks Sunday even has its own entry in Wikipedia!



The presentation by the Mayo Mountain Rescue Team at the International Congress for Alpine Rescue (ICAR) in Killarney in 2015 really brought home its significance to me.

The assembled worldwide delegations have never experienced such an event like Reeks Sunday before and could not believe the number of people who reach the summit every year, not to mention the response from mountain rescue teams and emergency services personnel to support this annual pilgrimage.

GOOD CHALLENGE

This year Mountain Rescue Ireland, the national representative

body for rescue teams throughout the country, decided that Reeks Sunday would be a good challenge for our new Sarcall system, which is being adopted by the teams throughout the country.

This software package has been developed in the UK for mountain rescue teams by mountain rescue personnel. The web-based package manages everything from notifying members of incidents to recording incident data and capturing the debriefing data. It is GDPR compliant and has all the support services that one would expect from a modern software package.

Members can input data via SMS, smartphone/tablets or a desktop depending on their access level. As some teams were only selecting the basic functionality of the system, we wanted to dismiss the myth that Sarcall was only a glorified 'WhatsApp' replacement.

We wanted to show that it is a full call-out and management system that integrates many of the mapping, asset management and missing person locating services that is used by mountain rescue teams for major incidents.

INCIDENT LOGGING FUNCTION

My own team – South Eastern Mountain Rescue Association (SEMRA) – was very impressed with the incident logging function during the four days of 'big snows' earlier this year; there was a seamless hand-over between three incident commanders operating from home (in geographically separate areas), responding to 27 individual taskings from various statutory bodies.

We also used the task function on a multi-team exercise we organised later in the spring. We felt that Sarcall could be really useful on Reeks Sunday and this would be a good opportunity



to demonstrate the capabilities of the system to fellow team members. A tentative suggestion was made to the Mayo Mountain Rescue Team and the rest, as they say, is history!

Potentially you are looking at multiple individual mountain rescue teams on the hill, voluntary first aid agencies, casualty-clearing stations, HSE ambulances and an Air Corps AW139 helicopter on stand by for the weekend. We're delighted to report that the Sarcall system proved reliable on the day and contributed to the success of Reeks Sunday 2018.

Brief summary from Pat Murphy (Sarcall co-ordinator)

Number of hill parties: 3 hill parties on 3 shifts (additional roles included Operations, Logistics, Catering and Medical tent on the hill)

Operation Time: 3am to 8pm (an additional base, hill and medical team were in place on Saturday night, before operations proper commenced)

Number of Casualties: 17

Number of Carry Offs: 2

Number of Heli evacs: 2

Number of inputs into Sarcall: 498 (186 on the task work-flow option)

Irish Air Corps provided assistance on the day.

VERSATILITY OF SARCALL

So, in summary it was a quite day, with not too many injuries or sore feet! And Sarcall again demonstrated its versatility. For me one of the biggest success stories was our ability to demonstrate Gold, Silver and Bronze command functionality.

The party leader on the hill could directly input data from the hillside via SMS on the progress of their individual task while the mountain rescue base updated the tasking and co-ordinated the other teams on the mountain.

The Gold command function (which entails liaising with other voluntary and statutory services) was fully supported using the various reports available in Sarcall. The situational awareness this provides at the base and remotely has to be seen to be appreciated.



Full credit is due to all mountain rescue team members who gave up another weekend for 'Reeks Sunday', the Sarcall development team and last, but by no means least, Mayo Mountain Rescue Team who had the confidence to let us trial the system on such an operational scale.

For further information on the new Sarcall system email sarcall.admin@mountainrescue.ie

