

MOUNTAIN RESCUE TEAM PLANS CENTRE AROUND NEW TRAINING BASE

Dublin and Wicklow Mountain Rescue Team (DWMRT) has big plans in place to future proof the service it provides over the next few decades. The team recently submitted a planning application to Wicklow County Council for a proposed new 6,000 square foot two-storey mountain rescue centre and training facility. Report by Deirdre O’Flynn.



Mayo Mountain Rescue team members descend the North Reek of Croagh Patrick with a casualty on a stretcher – similar to DWMRT, Mayo Mountain Rescue Team is one of 11 teams represented by the Mountain Rescue Ireland. (Photo courtesy of Mayo Mountain Rescue Team)

The suggested site plan of the proposed development includes training and breakout rooms, operational facilities, storage for equipment and drying and maintenance, including a garage to house emergency vehicles, according to Mark Flynn, DWMRT’s Deputy Team Leader and a member of the development committee.

“We purchased a site from Coillte at Sraghmore in Roundwood and the plan is to build early in 2021 and be ready in early 2022. We learned from bases in the UK to build big and future proof the building so that add-ons are not needed later,” Mark told *Emergency Services Ireland*.

Once planning permission is received, it is hoped to submit a LEADER application to help fund the estimated €800,000 cost of the facility, with the remainder to be raised through fundraising.

DWMRT is part-funded by the Irish Government, but the team’s operational costs far exceed the government funding it receives. The rest of its operational costs are met by donations, grants and fundraising events.

DWMRT is manned by 60 volunteers and responds to emergencies in upland areas of Dublin, Wicklow, and Louth. The team has been based in Roundwood, Co Wicklow since its foundation in 1984. Two



DWMRT is manned by 60 volunteers and responds to emergencies in upland areas of Dublin, Wicklow, and Louth. (Photo courtesy of National Lottery)

CLOSE INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

The team also works closely with the National Ambulance Service, the Irish Coast Guard, the Irish Defence Forces, Dublin Fire Brigade, Wicklow Fire Service, Civil Defence, and other voluntary emergency services.

In Roundwood, the team currently operates out of a two-storey building in the village and still has access to a room next to the Garda Station. "In order to help us provide the best service we can, we hope to provide a permanent base for the team," John told *'Emergency Services Ireland'*: "This will allow for better training of the team, better management of mountain rescues, and indoor housing of two vehicles."

It will also allow for better operational management of incidents. "Most incidents are controlled from the forest car park or the side of the road near the incident. For longer-duration incidents, say two or three days, we need to move inside to properly manage the incident. An operation area in the new facility would allow us to do that. "Indoor and outdoor training facilities are also important to upskill the team."

While the main role of mountain rescue teams still involves helping people who are lost or injured in the hills, it also involves searching for missing persons, severe weather response, and body recovery from remote locations. To perform these

mountain rescue emergency vehicles are parked at Cheeverstown House in Templeogue, in South Dublin, to facilitate quicker access to the Dublin mountains and West Wicklow.

In Louth, the team covers

emergencies on Cooley Mountain on the Cooley Peninsula. "We have a great relationship with the Coast Guard unit in Greenore and have teamed up with them on call-outs," noted John Kavanagh, PRO of DWMRT.



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ABOUT MOUNTAIN RESCUE IRELAND

Any request for emergency assistance in the upland and mountainous areas on the island of Ireland is met by a volunteer response from one of the 11 mountain rescue teams that comprise Mountain Rescue Ireland (MRI).

MRI represents Donegal Mountain Rescue Team, Dublin & Wicklow Mountain Rescue Team, Galway Mountain Rescue Team, Glen of Imaal Mountain Rescue Team, Kerry Mountain Rescue Team, Mayo Mountain Rescue Team, Mourne Mountain Rescue Team, North West Mountain Rescue Team, Search and Rescue Dog Association of Ireland, Sligo/Leitrim Mountain Rescue Team, and the South Eastern Mountain Rescue Association.

Whilst the number of call-outs nationally fell during the first and second quarters of 2020 due to the Covid-19 lockdown (61 and 57 respectively), increases were noted for the rest of the year. Whilst the figures for Q3 were not available at the time of print, "we know from the individual teams of increased call outs and we can correlate those with the lifting of restrictions on movement", said Ruth Cunniffe, PRO of MRI.

What has also increased is the challenge of fundraising. Mountain rescue is a service maintained entirely through volunteer efforts, and each volunteer absorbs the cost of their own contribution in terms of time, sustenance, and other costs such as transportation.

Rescue teams also have to fundraise in a bid to maintain the service they provide. "Each team has an annual calendar of fundraising events, but none of those are happening this year, so fundraising is down hugely," she noted.



duties safely, team members are trained in areas such as low-visibility navigation, search skills, search management, communications, pre-hospital emergency medicine, helicopter operations, crag and rope rescue, and swift-water rescue.

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS

DWMRT is recognised by the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council (PHECC) and its members have first aid responder qualifications. "Most team members are emergency first responders, while a number are emergency medical technicians, or doctors."

DWMRT recruits new team members every year to 18 months. New-member training usually takes six to nine months and covers all of the basic skills required of a mountain rescue team member. These include stretcher packaging, basic crag skills, search skills, poor-visibility navigation, communications, and helicopter safety. Each aspiring team member must pass a number of assessments before being accepted as rescue team members.

The need for a permanent base for the team – and welfare facilities for rescued people – is evidenced by the increase in call-outs over the last number of years. Whilst there was a fall-off in call-outs during the lockdown, the team had already recorded 81 call-outs by early September.



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(Photo courtesy of Mountain Rescue Ireland)

MOST COMMON INCIDENTS

“There were 25 call-outs in August alone. As Covid-19 eased, we became busier as people were coming out to the hills more often. We would average about 100 calls a year – 113 in one year is our record – and we’ve had four simultaneous incidents in different corners of Wicklow. That can be difficult to manage which is why a dedicated facility is so important,” according to DWMRT’s PRO.

The most common incidents remain lower leg injuries, including broken ankles, sprains, and lacerations. Others include people getting lost due to loss of mobile phone coverage while navigating the hills, or getting caught when clouds or mists roll in. The team is also called on for missing person searches and body recovery.

In a significant development, DWMRT is the first mountain rescue team in Ireland and the UK to secure a clothing partnership with Norwegian gear manufacturer Helly Hansen.

“We have secured a five-year sponsorship deal and will help Helly Hansen to develop clothing for mountain rescue teams to be used throughout Europe,” noted DWMRT’s Mark Flynn, who was instrumental in brokering the deal.

“Helly Hansen are keen to work with professionals on their workwear and to use tried and tested gear in the all-weather environment that we work in. They will provide us with some key pieces of work kit and we are delighted with that.”

For further information:

Dublin Wicklow Mountain Rescue Team: www.dwmrt.ie
 Mountain Rescue Ireland: www.mountainrescue.ie

AMBULANCE SERVICE TAKES SARCALL RESPONSE SYSTEM ON BOARD

A single platform that allows agencies to call out mountain rescue teams is being used to great effect by An Garda Síochána to task specific mountain rescue teams of an incident in their area. Significantly Sarcall is now being taken on board by the National Ambulance Service, thereby allowing that service to also task mountain rescue teams.

First developed in the UK, Sarcall is a software package that enables mountain rescue teams to locate incidents, record incident data, and capture debriefing data. Developed by mountain rescue personnel, Sarcall has now been adopted by teams in Ireland.

In Ireland, Donal McNamara and Pat Holland are Sarcall’s Administrator and Development Officer for Mountain Rescue Ireland (MRI) respectively. “Sarcall has been live for over a year and was introduced as a call-out mechanism, issuing texts to activate teams,” said Pat, who is a member of the South Eastern Mountain Rescue Association (SEMRA).

“The use of Sarcall is growing, with a live log being established by the call-out officer, making it an incident command system. And, we’re seeing interactions between An Garda Síochána and the National Ambulance Service, so the use is developing organically.

“The system increases situation awareness – for instance, if I’m driving to an incident, I can stop, read Sarcall, and then I’m fully briefed when I get there. So, Sarcall reduces the time spent briefing individuals.”

A robust logged system for calling out teams, maintaining incident logs, and informing all involved



(Photo courtesy of DWMRT)

agencies, Sarcall is proving popular with teams on the ground.

“We would always notify An Garda Síochána as to what we are doing, but Sarcall allows them to see what is going on,” noted DWMRT’s John Kavanagh. “In our case, we operate as a virtual team on Sarcall with the Glen of Imaal Mountain Rescue Team. So, when the two teams are tasked, the notification comes in via Sarcall.

“Then, team members respond as to who is available, so that the team leader can assess the available manpower for the incident. The call-out officer takes it from there, and the deputy team leader agrees a response to the incident using the information from Sarcall.”