

AMBULANCE / AIR RESCUE ADVICE

Having recently participated in an air rescue (21 Apr 12) I thought it might be helpful to write down all the thoughts and questions that crop up during these types of events. It isn't meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather to help you anticipate the types of information you'll be required to provide and the decisions you'll have to make.

If you have mobile phone coverage, make sure you have pen and paper at hand, and write down the time of significant events and the name and contact number of everyone you speak to, so you can ring them again if needed. In the initial three hours after Emergency Services was notified, I was dealing with three different organisations:

- Emergency Services (000)
- State Police – The nearest police station
- Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) Rescue Coordination Centre

When you CALL 000, make sure it is on a fully charged mobile phone that has good reception. Tell them how much battery charge your phone has, and give them a secondary contact number, if you have one, in case your mobile battery goes flat. Make sure though that they mark it as a **secondary** number.

The operator that you first talk to at 000 may have little experience in this type of incident and will be asking for street address and other information applicable to an urban location. They are likely to be located in a major city and may be unaware of PLBs and EPIRBs. Be patient when talking to them.

Be aware that the first operator you contact will record and make available the following info for use by other Agencies. If they don't ask these questions then tell them:

WHAT IS YOUR LOCATION?

- The name of the nearest town, how far you are from it, in what direction, and the fire trails/tracks you came in on. The name of the National Park or State Forest if applicable.
- The name and number of the topographical map for the area
- Your location in longitude /latitude, the units of measure and the datum. The preferred format by AMSA is latitude/longitude with decimal minutes (h ddd° mm.mmm') and the datum is WGS84. On a GPS unit this would be displayed as: S37 31.462 E149 53.548.

Note: this is not the same as:

- *h ddd° mm' ss.s which is in degree, minutes and seconds format and appears as S37 31 27.7 E149 53 32.9 on a GPS, or*
- *h ddd.dddd° which is in decimal degree format and would appear as S37.52436 E149.89246 on a GPS.*

So take some time now to examine the difference on your GPS unit.

HOW SERIOUS IS THE INJURY?

- Airway
- Breathing

- Circulation – Their colour, are they bleeding
- What the problem is
- Level of alertness, pain
- Age and name
- Time of occurrence
- Any known medical conditions or medications the doctors should be aware of.

WHAT IS THE TERRAIN LIKE?

- Can a rescue be accomplished before nightfall?
- Is a ground rescue feasible - if so how long would it take and what is the best route?
- Is there sufficient clearing for a Helicopter to land, or for a winch to be used?



WHAT IS THE WEATHER LIKE?

- What is the wind, cloud cover and visibility?

IS THE PLB ACTIVATED?

- What is the registration number on the PLB unit (Is it on it?!)
- Is it positioned at the spot you want a chopper to pick up the patient from?
- Is it in a clear spot, upright, and with the antenna extended so the signal can get out?
- Have you notified the emergency contact identified on the PLB registration that they may get a call from Emergency Services?

Be aware there can be a delay of up to 2 hours between the PLB being activated and them receiving the signal, depending on whether a satellite is in range. For a Helicopter rescue the PLB should always be activated as the chopper will follow it in.

HOW IS THE REST OF THE PARTY?

- Are they in good condition?
- Do you have enough food/water to walk out?
- Do you have overnight camping gear?
- Do you have adequate clothing for the weather conditions?



- Will you need the patient's pack taken out? There is no guarantee that the helicopter will take it out.
- Will the remaining partner /passengers of the injured person have essential gear for getting out and to the hospital (e.g. car keys, money, phone)?
- If the patient is sharing equipment and/or food with another member of the party, has sufficient of the patient's equipment and/or food been left?
- Do you know which hospital they will be evacuated to?

ARE YOU READY FOR THE HELICOPTER'S ARRIVAL?

- Do you know how long will it be before the helicopter/land rescue party arrives?
- If feasible and if required and if it can be done without aggravating the injury, can you move the patient closer to the pick up site, but at least 30m away from helicopter rotor wash and falling debris?. Keep someone with them to protect them from debris.
- Have you put out camp fires, and moved the patient's pack closer to the pick up site?
- Is everyone else at least 20m from the helicopter pick up site?
- Is your mobile ready if the helicopter rings you?
- Are signalling devices ready: e.g. torches for a twilight rescue or a mirror in bright sunlight?
- Are bright coloured objects (tents or flys) laid out so that they can be seen from the air? These will need to be secured firmly. They may be damaged by the intense downdraft.



Be aware the rotor wash is very powerful and will tear at ground sheets, branches etc.

IS THE PATIENT COMFORTABLE AND READY FOR EVACUATION?

- Are they warm, dry and comfortable?
- Have you administered appropriate first aid?
- Have you considered whether pain relief/sips of liquid are advisable given the nature of their injury, time to medical assistance and the possibility of the need for anaesthesia when they reach medical assistance? Note the time they last had food or drink and tell the rescue crew.
- Do they have their keys, phone, health care cards (including medicare card) and identification on them, in case they become separated from their pack?
- Does the patient want you to contact anyone on their behalf?

- If it's feasible and required, put some clean clothes on them so they have something to wear until they get home!



AFTER THE HELICOPTER HAS LEFT

Have you turned the PLB off? Note: It should remain on while the helicopter is still working on the incident.

HAVE YOU NOTIFIED THE CLUB?

- Have you notified one of the following: the Walks Secretary, Check-In Officer or the Club President?

AFTER THE EVENT

- Have you filled in the Incident Form?