

Isle of Man Inland Search and Rescue Group

by Michael MacDonald

The IOMISARG was formed so that search managers from Police, Coastguard, Fire and Civil Defence could meet on a regular basis to discuss procedure, equipment, training and joint exercises. Later, with the establishment of a fully trained SARDA dog and handler – a first for the Isle of Man – SARDA IOM was invited to join the group.

In August 2005 the IOMISARG was officially welcomed into Mountain Rescue England and Wales as an 'associated organisation'. Since then, the group has had representation at both the MREW AGMs, and at equipment subcommittee groups twice each year, where great sources of information and help have always been forthcoming from all the other area representatives within the mountain rescue family.

The IOMISARG is made up of five separate services, below is a quick description of their role within the IOMISARG and some of the core responsibilities:

- IOM Constabulary
- IOM Coastguard
- IOM Civil Defence
- IOM Fire and Rescue
- SARDA IOM



IOM Constabulary

The IOM Constabulary have two POLSARs. Their initial function is to gather any intelligence relating to any missing person, ie. profile and area of interest. Subject to the area and terrain, they can call on all four of the other emergency services' search managers to co-ordinate a search plan and assign search areas. The POLSAR retains overall command of any inland SAR incident (Coastguard retain command on coastal and marine SAR).



IOM Coastguard

The IOM Coastguard is part of the Harbours Division of the Department of Infrastructure. The service has three full time officers based at their head office in Douglas. The service also has 80 volunteers based in rescue stations in Ramsey, Peel, Douglas, Port Erin and Castletown.

The Coastguard has a specialist hill search team. The team consists of one overall Officer in Charge, four Search Managers and fourteen searchers from within all the five stations, all of which are trained in search management and field search skills.

The core activity of the IOM Coastguard is to provide SAR for the coastline up to twelve miles out to sea, these range from cliff rescue, beach search, coastline land patrol (over 1000 each year), counter pollution, water rescue (sea or inland), ordnance searches and Bomb Disposal Team liaison. The Coastguard also collects, stores and disposes of out of date marine pyrotechnics.

The IOM Coastguard also provide liaison between RNLI assets and MOD/MCA Rescue Helicopters.

Primary Coastguard communication is on marine band VHF, to talk to other marine assets and casualties. However the hill team uses TETRA radio to enable them to communicate with other land based emergency services.



IOM Civil Defence

The IOM Civil Defence is managed by The Emergency Planning Unit of the Department of Home Affairs. Some of their main functions are to promote, develop, review and exercise emergency plans for all government bodies in support of the emergency services. To provide a corps of trained skilled multi-disciplined volunteers to assist the emergency services when required, such as in Inland/Hill SAR or providing emergency rest centres in civil emergencies.

The Civil Defence currently have 50 volunteers and four search managers.



IOM Fire & Rescue Service

The IOM Fire and Rescue Service has a specialist hill search and rescue team consisting of one overall Officer in Charge, three Search Managers who have been trained to a university degree level, and eighteen highly trained firefighters.

All members of the hill team undergo regular field and classroom training session covering navigation, map reading and communications. The team also undertakes regular night time exercises.

The Service has 50 full time firefighters stationed in Douglas, and another 124 retained firefighters stationed in Ramsey, Kirk Michael, Laxey, Port Erin, Peel and Castletown.



Isle of Man Search and Rescue Group



SARDA IOM

The Search and Rescue Dog Association Isle of Man, (SARDA IOM) is a Manx Registered Charity and is a full member of the National Search & Rescue Dog Association (NSARDA)

The handlers and navigators are unpaid volunteers and members of the Isle of Man's Emergency Services that make up the IOM Search and Rescue Group.

SARDA Isle of Man relies solely on donations from the public and from organisations, both on and off the Isle of Man.

Because of the dramatic contrasts in the Isle of Man, from rugged coastline through to hill and mountain, forestry, beaches, cliffs and lowland rural areas, as many of these different types of terrain as possible are planned into the training to give the handlers and dogs as many search experiences as possible.

Currently SARDA IOM has one fully trained dog and handler and another dog and handler in training.

Isle of Man communications



Emergency Services Joint Control Room (ESJCR)

ESJCR is the world's first TETRA integrated multi-discipline emergency services joint control room.

In 2001, the UK Government launched their 'Invest to Save' initiative, designed to encourage two or more public bodies to jointly initiate new processes to provide streamlined and more effective modes of service. This inspired the Isle of Man Government to look closely at its own Emergency Services. The Isle of Man Government recognised the need to provide interoperability in its communications and replace its separate Emergency Service analogue mobile radio systems by a single communications network.

ESJCR operators will take all emergency 999 calls for the police, fire and ambulance emergency services and dispatches the appropriate resources. They also handle all TETRA radio communications not only for the police, fire and ambulance, but will also handle Civil Defence and TT/Grand Prix Marshall TETRA radio traffic.



The Marine Operation Centre (MOC)

Since March 2009, all Coastguard 999 calls originating from the Isle of Man have been handled by the MOC (previously handled by Liverpool MRCC). This is an additional role to the existing functions of managing Manx territorial water extending out to twelve miles, looking after the ports and harbours and controlling flap gate and bridges at Douglas and Peel.

MOC Officers will take Coastguard 999 calls and, along with the Coastguard Duty Officer, will dispatch the appropriate local Coastguard assets and assist with VHF communications to other marine assets. The MOC also has the ability to communicate on TETRA for land based incidents.

Liverpool MRCC still co-ordinates local RNLI lifeboats and rescue helicopters.