

Norsk Grotte Rednings Tjeneste (The Norwegian Cave Rescue Service, NCRS)

Norsk Grotte Forbund (The Norwegian Speleological Society, NSS) was founded in 1980, but even before that a cave rescue service was organised. The NSS now have approximately 200 members in Norway, out of a total population of a little more than 4 millions. Every member of the society is obliged (within reason) to participate in a rescue when called for. For difficult rescue operations there is recently organised a “First Response Team”, which practices together at least once a year. The Service covers the whole country, but local groups may do simple operations with the Service on hold.

In 1994 an “umbrella organisation” Frivillige Organisasjoners Redningsfaglige Forum (The Voluntary Rescue Organisation’s Forum (VROF) was founded to take care of organisational questions regarding all the voluntaries, payment, insurance and so on. There are now 9 organisations attached, including The Rescue Dogs and The Radio Amateurs. The VROF has recently entered an agreement with the government about recovery of bodies. In case of a major accident, a pre chosen member of VROF is called into the police’s staff. When in action or at a scheduled training, voluntary organisations in Norway are insured by the government. In action the police also repays lost income. An implication of this is that the rescuer, in practice, is employed by the police. Therefore working regulations have to be observed. This is especially important when it comes to cave diving rescue. The rescue diver is seen as a working diver, and has to observe all regulations regarding work diving, including the demand for continuous communication.

In Norway the police are in charge of rescue operations. They also call out whatever voluntary organisation needed. At the site of a cave accident, a member of the cave rescue team is the leader of the underground activities and in charge of the operation underground. This person will work from a temporary headquarter set up by the police. Here will also, if needed, be representatives for other organisations: Ambulance, Red Cross, The Civil Defence and others.

The NSS receives a yearly sum from The Department of Justice, last year approximately 6000 Euro. This is supposed to cover new equipment, training courses, travels and paper work. Of course a lot of personal effort is to be put in as well.

Most of the caves in Norway are situated in the north of the country, whereas the main population lives in the south. This applies in some extent also to the members of the NCRS, and therefore some time may pass before there can be a full callout. However, there will always be enough manpower locally to start an operation. Also the equipment is stored in the same hangar as the army helicopter that supply transportation in emergencies in the region. This is a very time saving solution. This helicopter has every main cave area in Norway (and northern Sweden) within its reach.

When it comes to skills and possibilities, we have to remember that there is very few cave accidents in Norway. This is in turn a paradox; the cave rescuers have to motivate and train for something that occurs very rarely. Therefore few persons in Norway have much experience from real action.

The Response Team includes:

- Two medical doctors, both with vertical experience, and one of them a cave diver.

- A nurse with special training in psychology who is supposed to take care of post action debriefing, to help the rescuers deal with traumatic experiences.
- One person with certificate to handle explosives.

There is also a close cooperation with the Alpine Rescue Service and reasently 6 HeyPhones are built. The Cave Rescue Manual is on the Internet. (Yet only in Norwegian)