



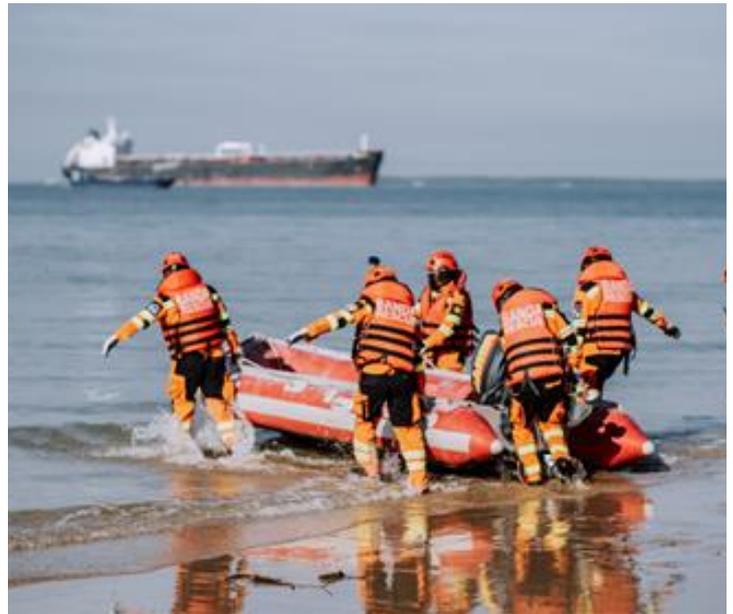
MARITIME
Search and Rescue Council



Briefing and Debriefing Maritime SAR Teams



The concept of briefing in search and rescue (SAR) can be traced back to military operations, where commanders would gather their troops to communicate objectives, plans, and responsibilities. This practice was later adopted by civilian emergency services to improve the efficiency and safety of SAR missions. Over time, the structured briefing process evolved, incorporating lessons learned from various operations and drawing from experience in different emergency disciplines.



Briefings in maritime search and rescue serves various crucial purposes, it:

- Ensures clear communication among all team members regarding the mission's objectives, tasks, and resources, fostering effective teamwork.
- Emphasises safety protocols and risk assessments, which are vital in hazardous environments and unpredictable conditions often encountered in SAR operations
- Acts as a platform for team members to come together, understand their roles, and collaborate seamlessly, thereby enhancing operational efficiency.
- Allows leaders to allocate resources optimally, ensuring all aspects of the mission are adequately covered.

Additionally, a well-structured briefing equips team members with the necessary information to adapt to evolving situations effectively, considering that SAR missions can change rapidly due to new information or unforeseen circumstances.

Different approaches to briefing have emerged to cater to various operational needs. The traditional face-to-face briefing involves physically gathering all team members in one location, enabling direct interaction, immediate clarification of doubts, and fostering team building, which tends to be how the majority of maritime SAR teams will engage in a brief.

The importance of briefing in search and rescue cannot be overstated. It prioritises safety, mitigates risks, and ensures the well-being of SAR team members and those they rescue. By enabling efficient coordination and direction, briefings optimise the use of resources and minimise response time, ultimately increasing the likelihood of a successful mission.



Briefings in a maritime search and rescue (SAR) incident are not limited to just the initial stage; they should be carried out continually throughout the entire incident. These ongoing briefings are crucial for effective communication, coordination, and situational awareness among all personnel involved in the operation. SAR incidents can be highly dynamic, with conditions and information changing rapidly. Continual briefings keep all team members up-to-date with the latest developments, ensuring they are aware of any shifts in the situation that may affect their roles or the overall operation.

As the SAR incident progresses, the objectives may need to be adapted or refined based on new information or changing priorities. Frequent briefings help ensure that everyone is aligned with the current objectives, reducing the risk of miscommunication or pursuing outdated plans. Real-time decision making is often required during SAR operations, where time is of the essence. Regular briefings allow team leaders to share critical updates and collaborate with the entire team, facilitating more informed and effective decision-making in the field.

Resource allocation is another critical aspect that may change throughout the incident. Briefings help optimise the allocation of personnel, equipment, and assets, ensuring that the right resources are deployed to the areas where they are most needed. Given the inherent risks and hazards involved in SAR operations, conditions can become hazardous or change rapidly at sea. Continuous briefings enable the team to identify and address potential risks, plan safety measures, and implement appropriate risk management strategies.

Beyond operational considerations, on-going briefings foster team cohesion and enhance the overall performance of the SAR crew. They provide an opportunity for team members to share experiences, lessons learned, and insights, strengthening mutual trust and camaraderie. Consistent briefings maintain open lines of communication and information flow among all involved parties, including external agencies or vessels assisting in the SAR operation. This helps maintain coordination and prevents misunderstandings.

Continual briefings also provide a platform for evaluating the effectiveness of the SAR operation, identifying areas for improvement, and holding team members accountable for their roles and actions. This plays a vital role in ensuring that all team members are well-informed, well-coordinated, and focused on the objectives. By conducting regular briefings, SAR teams can adapt to changing situations, make informed decisions, manage risks, optimise resource allocation, and maintain efficient communication, ultimately increasing the chances of a successful and safe rescue operation at sea.



During a search and rescue (SAR) briefing, covering various essential aspects is crucial for the success and safety of the operation. One briefing model that has been developed and trialled by the Maritime Search and Rescue Council is **SORTCAS**

- S Situation** Provide an overview of the current situation, including relevant details about the incident, location, weather conditions, and all recent updates and developments.
- O Objectives** Clearly state the primary objectives of the team and asset's tasking for the SAR mission. This ensures that all crew members understand their roles and the overall goals of the operation.
- R Route** Offer an overview of the passage to the incident location, including speeds, Estimated Time En-route (ETE), Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA), and the planned route to follow.
- T Tasks** Assign specific roles and tasks to each crew member, ensuring clarity in responsibilities and fostering effective coordination among the team.
- C Comms** Explain the communication protocols, both within the team and with external parties, including other SAR units and the casualty.
- A Assets** Discuss other assets or resources that may be tasked, already on the scene, or available to support the SAR operation.
- S Safety** Review potential hazards and risks associated with the operation and discuss the approach to safety. Describe the contingency plan in place, both for the SAR operation and the SAR asset.

It is then imperative that the understanding of the briefing is understood by all. By checking understanding, team leaders can ensure that all crew members are on the same page, have absorbed the information provided, and comprehend their assigned roles and responsibilities. This reduces the risk of misinterpretations, misunderstandings, or confusion during critical moments of the operation. Secondly, verifying understanding fosters a culture of safety and accountability, as it allows team members to seek clarification on any uncertainties they may have. It empowers crew members to voice concerns, share insights, and actively contribute to the mission's effectiveness. Ultimately, checking understanding promotes a cohesive and well-coordinated SAR team, enhancing the overall efficiency and safety of the rescue operation. This can be done through a simple asking if the team are happy with the briefing and task at hand, but it may also be suitable to ask certain crewmember specific questions about their roles to ensure understanding. For example, asking the navigator what route they need to plan, or asking the helmsperson what speed and engine RPM the SAR asset should be operated at on passage to the incident.



Debriefs hold a crucial role in the search and rescue (SAR) realm, serving as an essential learning and improvement mechanism for SAR crews. After every SAR operation, the debriefing process offers an opportunity for the team to engage in constructive reflection. It allows crew members to openly discuss their experiences, share insights, and evaluate their performance objectively.

During a debriefing session, SAR teams can examine the challenges faced during the operation, analyse their decision-making processes, and assess the effectiveness of their strategies. The collective exchange of information and perspectives enables the team to gain a comprehensive understanding of the operation's successes, setbacks, and any lessons learned.

Effective debriefs encourage open communication among SAR crew members, fostering an environment where each member feels comfortable expressing their thoughts and emotions. This transparency aids in identifying areas for improvement without judgment, ensuring that feedback is constructive and actionable.

One of the critical aspects reviewed during debriefs is the coordination among team members. Assessing how effectively the crew worked together during the operation highlights areas of synergy and potential areas for enhancement. Understanding how various team roles and responsibilities interacted contributes to the team's cohesiveness and overall performance.

Safety is paramount in SAR missions, and debriefs provide a platform to examine the adherence to safety protocols and risk management strategies. By analysing safety-related incidents and discussing potential improvements, SAR crews enhance their ability to mitigate risks effectively and ensure the well-being of all team members during future operations.

The debriefing process also encourages SAR crews to learn from both successful outcomes and challenges faced. This approach promotes a culture of continuous improvement, where the team consistently strives to refine their procedures, communication, and teamwork based on their experiences.



Ultimately, the insights gained through debriefs empower SAR crews to enhance their capabilities and effectiveness in conducting search and rescue operations. By using debriefs as a tool for learning and development, SAR teams can optimise their performance, increase their efficiency, and, most importantly, save more lives in their critical mission to assist those in distress at sea.



A well-structured debrief should cover several key aspects. One debriefing model that has been developed and trialled by the Maritime Search and Rescue Council is **SOSPS**.

S Situation

The debrief should start with an overview of the situation encountered during the SAR mission

O Outcome

Evaluating the outcome of the SAR mission is vital for understanding the effectiveness of the operation. The debrief should analyse whether the primary objectives were achieved, any unforeseen outcomes, and how the results aligned with the initial plans

S Share

Encouraging each crew member to share their experiences during the SAR mission allows the team to gain different perspectives on the operation. This

P Performance

The debriefing should thoroughly assess the performance of the crew, equipment, assets, and communications during the operation. Identifying areas of strength and weaknesses helps the SAR asset team and wider SAR network involved recognise what worked well and what needs improvement.

S Safety

Safety is of paramount importance in SAR operations. The debrief should include a comprehensive safety review, discussing any safety-related incidents or near-misses and identifying ways to enhance safety protocols for future missions.



The next pages can be printed and used to structure and record briefings and debriefings as required:



BRIEF - SORTCAS

S ITUATION	What is the current SAR situation? What is the location? What has already happened? What are the weather & sea conditions on scene? Any recent updates?	
O BJECTIVES	What are our objectives? What are we being tasked to do?	
R OUTE	How will we get the scene? How far is the incident? What speed will we make? What is our ETE/ETA?	
T ASKS	What will we do on route individually and as a team? What will we do on scene individually and as team?	
C OMMS	What are our communication procedures with the coordinating authority/other assets/individual team members and the casualty?	
A SSETS	Are other assets already tasked/on scene? What other assets are available?	
S AFETY	What are the hazards associated with this tasking? What are the risks associated with this tasking? What is our contingency plan?	



DEBRIEF - SOSPS

S ITUATION	What was the initial tasking? What developments happened on route? What was the situation upon arrival?	
O UTCOME	What was the outcome of the incident? Was this outcome expected? How did this compare to the initial tasking?	
S HARE	Ask all crew to verbally reflect on the incident, their role and the team's performance individual	
P ERFORMANCE	How did the crew perform individually? How did everyone perform as a team? How did the equipment perform? How did the asset perform? How were communications? How did the wider SAR team perform (MRCC etc.)	
S AFETY	How safe was the operation? Were there any incidents? Were there any near misses? Were there any hazardous observations? How did the Dynamic Risk Assessment process function? Were there any new hazards or risks that were identified?	



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