

# The role of volunteers in surf rescue emergency response groups

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## Background Introduction

Emergency services rely on lifesavers as experts in white water surf related emergencies to assist in rescue of those in life threatening situations. Whilst adequately covered during patrols there has been a long established need for after hours call out services. SLSQ & SLSA have set up regional dedicated emergency response groups. Volunteers from surf clubs, utilise gear and equipment to provide an emergency response. Utilising this equipment and trained lifesavers can greatly improve the chances of rescuing a drowning victim.

## What is the practice?

The system allows for volunteer members of surf clubs across Queensland and Australia to respond in emergencies via a call out system in surf related or other emergencies including natural disasters.

## Aims and Objectives

To decrease drowning rates on Australia's coastline and improve response capabilities and times. To provide expert white water rescue and response to emergency services. To provide assistance in natural disasters.

## Target Stakeholders

We are trying to target those who do not understand the drowning chain. The drowning chain incorporates:

1. A lack of knowledge, disregard or misjudgement of the hazard
2. Uninformed or unprotected access to the hazard
3. Lack of supervision or surveillance
4. Inability to cope once in difficulty

Target stakeholders are

- Visitors
- International tourists
- People from country areas
- Young people
- Persons from different ethnic backgrounds
- General Public
- Persons who Rock Fish
- Not familiar with a beach environment
- All beach goers

Statistics taken from SLSA 2010 National Coastal Safety Report show 82 coastal drowning deaths in 2009–2010 of those 80% were male and 20% were female, majority occurred in December, January and May and occurred between 4pm and 5pm. 50% occurred at beach locations. With 43% of the incidents less than 1 km from a life saving service. These statistics show that we should target the male population after hours at beach locations less than a kilometre from a life saving service to decrease the drowning rates.

## Methods implementation

The single call number is 137873. The introduction of the '13SURF' number will nationalise the system and allow it to be implemented across Australia. The emergency services no longer need to look up a host of directories. In the event of an emergency the number is called and a life saving service responds, the phone is manned 24/7 after hours by volunteers who have dedicated call out groups that can attend. It can also be utilised in other catastrophic disasters including flood and cyclone.

## Results of evaluation

Results are evaluated by quantity and examples we have been tasked to. Fifty foot trawler boats ashore, strokes, broken bones, floods, SARs, near drownings, multiple drownings, assisted police in apprehending offenders, shark alarms and suicides. Emergency services now rely on the system and makes their job easier by only having to call one number.

### **Discussion**

The system utilising volunteer lifesavers in emergency response groups is a low cost, efficient, skilled resource that can prevent and reduce drownings on Australian beaches. It utilises existing equipment and value adds to the community. Those in a life threatening aquatic emergency will now have an increased chance of survival thanks to quicker response times and prevent drownings along our coastline.

### **Conclusion**

We believe this offers an insight as to how volunteer lifesavers are going above and beyond the call of duty to help prevent drownings on Australian beaches.

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SLSA – 2010 National Coastal Safety Report

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