

Search and Rescue Organisation and Facilities

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GENERAL

Overseas Territories Aviation Circulars are issued to provide advice, guidance and information on standards, practices and procedures necessary to support Overseas Territory Aviation Requirements. They are not in themselves law but may amplify a provision of the Air Navigation (Overseas Territories) Order or provide practical guidance on meeting a requirement contained in the Overseas Territories Aviation Requirements.

PURPOSE

Article 7 of the Air Navigation (Overseas Territories) Order 2013 requires the Governor to make appropriate arrangements for the provision of search and rescue (SAR) services to civil aviation in accordance with ICAO Annex 12. The Governor has issued a Direction which will direct a person or organisation to secure the provision of a Search and Rescue Service within the Territory for the benefit of civil aviation.

RELATED REQUIREMENTS

This Circular relates to Article 7 of the AN(OT)O 2013 and the Governor's Direction made under that provision which gives effect to ICAO Annex 12 Search and Rescue.

CHANGE INFORMATION

Minor editorial changes.

ENQUIRIES

Enquiries regarding the content of this Circular should be addressed to Air Safety Support International at the address on the ASSI website www.airsafety.aero or to the appropriate Overseas Territory Aviation Authority.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION3
2 DEFINITIONS.....3
3 NATIONAL SEARCH AND RESCUE COMMITTEE.....4
4 NATIONAL SAR PLAN.....4
5 AVIATION ARRANGEMENTS6
6 CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER STATES7
7 SAR TRAINING EXERCISES7
8 REGULATORY ACTIVITIES.....8

1 Introduction

- (a) Search and Rescue (SAR) is an area where there are multiple responsibilities, for a variety of transport modes. It therefore requires the involvement of a number of agencies (likely to be both domestic and international), including co-ordinating bodies, service providers and the organisers of the SAR effort when required. Therefore, the establishment of a suitable organisational or co-ordination structure is critical to the ability to respond quickly and appropriately to vessels, vehicles or aircraft in distress.
- (b) The Overseas Territories are islands. Many have a significant amount of maritime activity – both commercial and private - within their territorial waters. While this OTAC concentrates on SAR for aviation, it is likely that SAR arrangements will need to include the appropriate aviation elements which support the wider SAR Plan.
- (c) ICAO requires that States “shall, individually or in cooperation with other States, arrange for the establishment and prompt provision of SAR services within their territories.....”
- (d) The AN(OT)O gives the Governor the responsibility for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are made for the provision of aviation-related SAR and will discharge this responsibility through a Direction to the appropriate body or person in the Territory to carry out that function. The Governor will also designate responsibility for oversight of the SAR arrangement to either the OTAA or ASSI in the normal way to provide confidence that SAR provision is being provided adequately in accordance with Annex 12.
- (e) It is difficult to be specific on the requirements for this area of activity, since the arrangements for each Territory will be unique and will be dependent upon physical location, local availability of assets etc. While this OTAC addresses the requirements of ICAO Annex 12 within the context of the Overseas Territories and the requirements of the AN(OT)O, there may well be equally acceptable alternative methods for meeting the requirements of both the Order and the Annex. It is for the Governor’s designated authority to make the final judgement on the acceptability of proposed arrangements.
- (f) Whatever arrangements are adopted, they must comply with the requirements of Annex 12 at minimum, and must be provided to anyone requiring SAR, regardless of nationality etc.

2 Definitions

Definitions relevant to this OTAC are contained in Annex 12, Search and Rescue, Chapter 1, Definitions.

3 National Search and Rescue Committee

- (a) Given the co-ordination required (explained above), it is appropriate for the Territory to establish a SAR Committee, comprising:
- (1) Government agencies:
 - (i) disaster planning
 - (ii) aviation
 - (iii) maritime
 - (iv) police
 - (2) other emergency services
 - (3) SAR asset providers (ships, aircraft etc.)

The organisation designated by the Governor for SAR under the AN(OT)O should be a member of this committee, as should the service providers.

- (b) In the event that a SAR Committee is not established in the Territory, then specific arrangements will need to be made with each of the organisations listed above, and any others involved (or which may become involved) in SAR or may require the services of SAR. This will be a significant task and should include the definition of the services provided/required for each organisation. Experience shows that the establishment of a committee eases the co-ordination process considerably.
- (c) The categories in (a)(2) and (3) may encompass government, commercial or voluntary organisations.
- (d) The SAR committee is then responsible for the establishment of a SAR Plan (paragraph 4 below). Where there is no committee established, then the agencies will need to agree who is responsible for the overall co-ordination task and thus the production of the Plan.
- (e) The committee should also consider how best to make SAR information available to the public, both for reporting purposes and for understanding of the role of SAR.

4 National SAR Plan

- (a) In order to ensure that everyone involved in either the provision of, or the potential need for, SAR is aware of the arrangements, a National SAR Plan should be prepared.
- (b) This Plan should contain a detailed description of the SAR arrangements established for the Territory, including:
- (1) the Territory's area of responsibility for SAR (the Search and Rescue Region), established by agreement with other states and through the ICAO Regional Air Navigation Meetings and in accordance with Annex 12 Chapter 2;

Note: It is possible that the area of responsibility for maritime SAR may be different to that provided for aviation. This will depend on geography as well as local agreements and capability. In this case, particularly close co-ordination arrangements will need to be in place in order to avoid any confusion of responsibilities.

- (2) details of any agreements with other states in the region for co-operation in the provision of SAR and for support to the Territory's SAR effort from, or by the Territory's SAR assets to, another state;
- (3) the SAR assets available, either from within the Territory or by arrangements under (2), which may be designated as SAR Units;
- (4) location and responsibilities of the Rescue Co-ordination Centre (RCC), and the rescue subcentre (RSC) within the Territory where the RCC is outside the Territory and provided by another state (by agreement under (2));

Note: For efficiency reasons and wherever possible, the RCC (or subcentre) should have the responsibility for both maritime and aviation SAR, thus forming a Joint RCC.

- (5) outline requirements, and command, control, co-ordination and communications procedures for the RCC/RSC (these will be expanded in the detailed procedures to be produced for the operation of the RCC/RSC). These should cover:
 - (i) SAR alerting procedures and actions to fulfil its obligations under Annex 12;
 - (ii) national and international assets and facilities available to the RCC and all appropriate details of RSCs;
 - (iii) national and international co-ordination procedures, including the procedure for nomination of an on scene commander;
 - (iv) details, including H24 contact details, for all aircraft operators operating in the region;
 - (v) the authorisation granted by the Government to the RCC or RSC with respect to access to airspace or territorial waters by SAR assets provided by other states in accordance with paragraph 2;
 - (vi) the availability and use of maritime movement tracking facilities (eg marine AIS - Automatic Identification System - and Amver - Atlantic Merchant Vessel Emergency Reporting)
 - (vii) discharge of the Territory's responsibility for COSPAS-SARSAT issues;
 - (viii) the listing of the contact information required by the RCC/RSC, in accordance with Annex 12, and how the accuracy and currency of such information will be maintained;
 - (ix) responsibilities and procedures for the termination, suspension and resumption of a SAR incident including the notification to parties involved in the operation;
 - (x) the maintenance of records, both for review at exercise debriefs and for audit purposes.
- (6) staffing requirements for the RCC or RSC, including numbers, training requirements, responsibilities, authority etc;
- (7) equipment requirements, particularly communications equipment requirements, for the RCC, RSC and SAR Units in accordance with Annex 12 Chapter 2;
- (8) in the event that SAR aircraft form part of the list of assets in the Plan, then their specialist equipment, including communications equipment, requirements shall be defined in the Plan and shall meet the requirements of Annex 12 Chapter 2 at minimum;

- (9) the location and nature of any specific supplies which are available for air dropping to vessels or aircraft requiring such support. The contents of such equipment packs should be determined with advice from specialists in survival in the region;
 - (10) the location and nature of Alerting Posts, where these are required;
 - (11) arrangements for requiring the support of specific emergency services, or vessels or aircraft, not classified as SAR assets, which may have to be called upon to support the SAR effort. This is of particular importance where only certain ships or aircraft have particular capabilities and where there may be a routine presence by aircraft and vessels of another state in the vicinity.
 - (12) arrangements for the support of SAR assets during a SAR incident such as refuelling, the supply of aeronautical information, meteorological reports and forecasts, etc;
 - (13) care of survivors or persons who have been injured or otherwise suffered in an accident;
 - (14) arrangements for co-operating with accident investigation and marine agencies covering the plotting, collection and custody of wreckage and the marking of areas which may constitute a hazard to shipping as a result of wreckage at sea.
- (c) As far as is compatible with national requirements, the Plan should be published/distributed as widely as possible to ensure that everyone with an interest can access the information. Territories may consider the use of the DCA or Government web site as the best place to make this information available.
- (d) The RCC should be staffed H24, or be available and capable of H24 operations at very short notice. In this case, short notice means within a matter of minutes rather than an hour. Where there is an RSC (subordinate to another State's RCC by agreement), then this may be either staffed H24, or be available when required by either the situation or the RCC, ideally at less than 30mins notice. In both cases, available staff must be suitably trained.

5 Aviation arrangements

- (a) The ICAO requirement is for 24 hour availability of SAR. Therefore, where a Territory has a H24 airport or ATS unit, this may be the RCC, the subcentre or the point of contact for aviation related SAR activities. Where there is no H24 aviation unit, then the arrangements will need to be different, with an H24 aviation contact identified and able to provide the required support in the event of an SAR incident.
- (b) Any aviation-specific SAR arrangements should take note of other emergency planning in place. This may include, for example, airport emergency planning. It is important to ensure that the two plans work together.

- (c) Annex 12 places certain requirements on aircraft to report incidents and assist with an SAR effort, whether or not they are SAR aircraft. These requirements are addressed in the appropriate aircraft operations OTARs.

6 Co-operation with other states

- (a) As has been highlighted in the section concerning the National SAR Plan, it is essential that any arrangements made with other states are comprehensive and clearly understood by all concerned.
- (b) Wherever possible, elements of the Plan should be common with adjacent states to ensure that the need for ad hoc co-ordination efforts are minimised.
- (c) Any agreements established with other states (as per paragraph 4(b)) should include suitable arrangements for access to the airspace and/or territorial waters of the states concerned. Wherever possible, and bearing in mind the overriding requirement to avoid delaying SAR efforts, the need to obtain specific diplomatic clearance (as opposed to ATC clearance) during a SAR event should be avoided. Any requests for entry into airspace or territorial waters should be transmitted to the RCC or RSC as appropriate, who should have the authority to permit other states SAR assets to enter the airspace (subject to ATC clearance where required) or territorial waters of the Territory. The RCC or RSC should be prepared to liaise with customs and immigration services as required.
- (d) Consideration should be given to arranging liaison visits by staff of RCCs and subcentres to those of neighbouring states to foster co-operation.

7 SAR training exercises

- (a) One of the most important functions of the RCC/RSC is the co-ordination of the complex range of SAR assets both domestic and international. As a result, it is appropriate to test the effectiveness of the National SAR Plan by regular SAR exercises.
- (b) SAR exercises can be expensive in both time and commitment of resources. Thus it is not appropriate to test the whole of the Plan on every exercise. However, it is important that all aspects of the Plan, and associated arrangements, are tested at periods of not more than three years.
- (c) Therefore, the most appropriate arrangement may be to hold exercises as follows:
 - (1) 6 monthly communications exercise;
 - (2) annual exercise to test a particular element or elements of the Plan;
 - (3) 3 yearly full exercise involving all national and international assets included in the Plan.
- (d) Exercises should consist of:
 - (1) a pre-briefing session for all participants and observers – this should include the clear identification of the objectives of the exercise;

- (2) a realistic scenario exercise involving the assets or element(s) of the Plan to be tested;
 - (3) a post exercise debrief to learn the appropriate lessons and record the changes to arrangements for the future;
 - (4) the production of an updated version of the Plan incorporating the lessons identified at the debrief.
- (e) Detailed notes should be provided by appointed observers and, along with the minutes of the briefing/debriefing sessions, retained for an agreed period. These exercise records, along with similar details for any actual events, will form part of the auditable records for the Governor's designated regulator.
- (f) When a real SAR event has occurred, a post-incident review should be conducted, ideally with representatives of all parties who were involved, to identify improvements in the light of experience. This review should be recorded and shared with interested parties, including neighbouring states and the ICAO Regional Office.

8 Regulatory activities

The Governor's designated regulator shall periodically audit the provision of aviation-related Search and Rescue within a Territory for which it is designated. This is to ensure that the SAR service is being provided in accordance with ICAO Annex 12 and the Direction issued by the Governor to the person or body nominated to ensure the provision of that service. In the event that the audit reveals non-compliances in service provision, the non-compliances shall be drawn to the attention of the person or body responsible for ensuring service provision, in accordance with normal audit practice and the method of rectification agreed.