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Pre-summer focus: staff competence

It's that time of year when many of you are hiring staff and checking your team has the skills necessary for the coming season. It's your legal responsibility to ensure that your staff are competent to safely do their job, but what does this actually mean?

Knowing which safety skills are needed - what is good practice for that role?

If there is an [Activity Safety Guideline](#) (ASG) for your activity, check to see what it says for staff competence. Note that the ASG can't tell you any additional skills that may be needed specifically for your operation. Always get expert advice to ensure you have correctly identified the complete skill set needed to safely perform the role.

Using qualifications to measure staff competence

Qualifications are not a legal requirement for most adventure activities. However, for many activities it is industry good practice to hold a qualification. Check the ASGs to see if this is the case for activities you provide. If there is a qualification suited to the role, please use it. Qualifications provide a robust, efficient and industry endorsed way to prove competence in specific skills. Most likely it will save you money too. It can cost a lot to get an expert to come and check the competence of your staff, and it will take your auditor more time to check that you have ensured staff are competent.

If you are using a qualification, you need to know which skills it actually measures; this is sometimes called the 'scope' of the qualification. It is unusual for a qualification to cover all the safety skills and knowledge required to safely do a specific job within a particular operation. Check what the qualification measures against the actual skills needed for each role. If the role requires skills not covered by the qualification, you must ensure they are checked by other means e.g. in-house checks, site-specific training, attestations or statements of competence. These checks must be done by someone who:

- has a qualification to do so, or
- is an expert in the level above the skill set being checked and who understands national expectations on competence standards.

Ensuring ongoing competence

You need to systematically check that staff are still competent to do their jobs. Some competencies may almost never get used, such as emergency procedures or those specific to a certain site, and some will have changed over time as new techniques emerge and equipment evolves.

Some qualifications require regular currency checks. If a qualification doesn't do this, check the date it was assessed and decide how much you can rely on the qualification to verify competence now. Do you need further competence checks? Use expert advice when developing your competence checking system.

More information on staffing

Go to [SupportAdventure](#) for more information including on use of contractors, assistants and staff working alone.

Emergency response for remote areas or specialist technical support

Here are some hot tips on managing emergency response for remote areas or for technical rescue support. You can find more important information [here](#). It can be a good idea to make a plan with your local Police SAR coordinator on how to ensure you get the correct emergency response!

If you can call 111, make sure you ask for Police. Inform the Police Communicator at the start of the call that you are in a remote location with communication difficulties. They do not necessarily have to follow their script and can gather relevant information more efficiently.

While calling 111 is preferred by the emergency services, it may not be feasible in many remote areas. If calling 111 isn't an option:

- Contact Police or Rescue Coordination Centre New Zealand (RCCNZ). The Police numbers are: North Comms (North of Turangi): +64 9 571 2800, Central Comms

(South of Turangi): +64 4 381 2000, South Comms (South Island): +64 3 363

7400. The RCCNZ number is: +64 4 577 8030

- Or contact a third party to relay information to emergency services e.g. via a satellite messaging service

Specialist technical rescue support

If you are an activity provider routinely working in a context that could require a specialist rescue response such as avalanche, swift water, off shore, steep terrain, canyons, glacier or cave environments, you should make a plan with your local Police SAR coordinator on how to mobilise emergency resources quickly.

For providers who need this support but do not usually work in this terrain, in the case of an emergency contact Police before other emergency services - they are best placed to mobilise technical emergency resources if required.

Note that if you set off a Personal Locator Beacon in a location that is obviously a steep, technical environment (e.g. on a glacier or in a canyon), RCCNZ will arrange the appropriate response and support. Beacon registration is important to assist RCCNZ with rescue requirements.

Help share safety information

Mountain Safety Council has a [series of safety videos](#) that can help people make the right decisions – which often means using a guide. Please share these with your clients and encourage accommodation providers and transport operators to promote these to their guests too. It could save lives.

Activity Safety Guidelines

Reviews

The canyoning, caving, coasteering and abseiling [Activity Safety Guidelines](#) have been reviewed. Many thanks to everyone who contributed – you have ensured the sector owns the good practice information and that the results are strong and supported by the regulator.

Where changes are made to ASGs which affect good practice advice, they are noted at the beginning of the document in the 'Document Control' table. Note that the ASGs are now more focused on activity specific information. Some of the generic content has been removed but is available [here](#) on the updated SupportAdventure website.

Anchor testing

The ASGs recently reviewed include information on anchor testing. At this stage, the content has not shifted from the previous versions. However, the reviews showed that there are conflicting views on the topic and no doubt there will be an ongoing discussion. Auditors will need to work to ensure they are consistent. The bottom line remains that you need to be sure that anchors are sound!

Mountain Bike ASG

The Mountain Bike ASG is now online. Congratulations to all those who contributed to the document. The ASG was developed by Skills Active and followed a different development process than that of other ASGs. You can view it [here](#).

Rafting regulation transferring to WorkSafe

Rafting operators regulated by Maritime New Zealand are now regulated by WorkSafe under the Adventure Activity Regulations as of 1 November 2019, with a one-year transition period to 1 October 2020. MNZ certificates of compliance that are valid on or after 1 November 2019 will remain valid until 1 October 2020 (unless revoked by the Director of MNZ).

NZ Rivers Association and TIA are working with the regulators to help ensure industry safety standards are maintained and operators are supported through the transition.

What does this mean?

Once the transition is complete rafting operators will need to have a safety management system that meets the Adventure Activity Regulation audit standard requirements and be audited by one of the approved Adventure Activity audit providers.

The good practice safety standards for running your rafting trip are unlikely to change, but the auditor will look at your broader safety management system.

Go [here](#) for more information including the audit standard, audit providers' contact information, and templates for a safety management plan and supporting forms.

You don't necessarily have to write a new safety management plan, but you should check your existing plan covers everything in the audit standard.

Last but not least...

Don't forget to check out the updated [SupportAdventure website](#). How about a pre-season training task/weather day exercise of getting staff to check out a section and reporting back to the team on the latest good practice information?

All the best for the start of summer,

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