Collaboration in border areas

Crossborder Exercises in Arjeplog and Kiruna

Foto: Pontus Albertsson
Crossborder Exercises at crash sites

- Welcome to the June 2013 newsletter for the "Collaboration in border areas" project. This newsletter is dedicated two exercises that have been carried out as part of the project. One in Arjeplog on the 7th of May, and one in Kiruna on the 16th of May.

Exercise traffic accident in Arjeplog 2013-05-07
The exercise in Arjeplog was carried out in collaboration between the ambulance service, care centre and emergency services in Arjeplog, and the ambulance in Saltdal.

The exercise scenario
The scenario of the exercise was that a traffic accident had occurred after road 95, by Sandvikens Fjällgård, around 112 km from Arjeplog and around 24 km from the Norwegian border. Two cars had collided. One of the cars came off the road, overturned, and ended upside down. There were a total of six injured in the two cars. The drivers of both cars were trapped. One person from one of the cars was thrown out of the car, and found lifeless in the ditch. The weather was overcast, with a light drizzle. The temperature was 5°C above freezing.

The alarm stage
SOS initially sends out the Arjeplog ambulance, the Gällivare ambulance helicopter, and emergency services from Arjeplog. SOS also sends a request for help to the Norwegian alarm centre (AMK in Bodø). AMK reply that they can send two cars from Norway (Rognan and Fauske), and perhaps a helicopter. Shortly after, SOS also sends out a health care team from the care centre in Arjeplog.

Itemise requirements and establish priorities at the crash site
The ambulance from Rognan was the first to arrive. They made a round of the crash site and itemised the requirements.

Image 1. The ambulance from Rognan is the first ambulance to arrive at the crash site.

The second ambulance to arrive was also from Norway, while the Arjeplog ambulance was the third on site. Once the Swedish ambulance had arrived, Norwegian ambulance staff handed over the medical command and control to Swedish staff. The Norwegians reported that there were 3 red and 3 yellow patients.

When emergency services arrived, it was decided that the roof of one of the cars had to be cut to free the people trapped inside the car (image 3 below).

Image 3. The roof of one of the cars is being cut to free the trapped people.
Work at the crash site

Working with the injured is difficult, as one of the cars has been overturned, and it is difficult to extricate the victims. Once emergency services have stabilised the car, the injured are lifted out through the back window.

The last patient was brought to the collection area around an hour after the initial alarm. The health care medical team that had arrived from Arjeplog care centre were then also working at the collection area.

Collection area for inflatable tent

Incident site management decide to establish a collection area for the injured in the tent that emergency services have use of. The tent was assembled around 40 minutes after the initial alarm (image 5 below).

After around one hour and 10 minutes, SOS stated that two helicopters were on their way to land. One ambulance helicopter from Gällivare and one SAR helicopter from Bodø. The rescue leader designated a landing site on the closed road.

Two of the most seriously injured were sent in with the physician staffed SAR helicopter to the nearest emergency hospital, which was Bodø on the Norwegian side. The third seriously injured person was transported to Gällivare hospital by the Swedish helicopter.

Image 4. Swedish and Norwegian ambulance staff working together to remove the patients through the back window.

Image 6. The health care medical team from Arjeplog care centre arrive at the injury site.

Image 7. Swedish and Norwegian ambulance staff at the management site.
Exercise in the Kiruna mine 16-05-2013

The exercise in Kiruna was carried out in collaboration between LKAB, emergency services in Kiruna, and Norrbotten County Council.

The exercise scenario
A coach with 18 tourists on its way down for a tour of the mine suddenly lost the brakes around 370 meters below ground level. The coach driver tried to reduce speed by steering toward the rock face. The coach bounced on the rock face a couple of times before crashing into a car on its way up. The coach lies down on its side with the roof facing down, slides for a bit, and is stuck between the walls of the tunnel. The car overturns, ends upside down, and slides towards the rock face. A pickup truck on its way down into the mine doesn’t realise that the coach is blocking the road, is forced to turn and runs into the rock face. The pickup driver is trapped in the car. The temperature inside the mine is around 4°C above freezing, and it is damp and completely dark.

Initial work at the crash site
The first ambulance from Kiruna that arrived had to wait for a clearance from the rescue service before they could enter the coach. To gain access to the injured inside the coach and to the car they had to climb over the crashed coach. The rescue service also arranged lightning when it was completely dark at the crash site.

Work in several sectors at the crash site
The crash site was divided into three sectors (coach, car and pickup truck), which put great demands on coordination. The victims on the coach had to be lifted over the roof using scoop stretchers that were pulled up using ladders.

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Contact with DDO and Local Medical Management
In contacts with the Designated duty Officer and Local Medical Management, it was decided that all injured were to be transported up to Kiruna hospital for new triage, and divided according to the division key provided. There were also plans of using ambulance planes for further transport of the injured to Gällivare hospital, Sunderby hospital and Norrland’s university hospital in Umeå, as well as the University hospital in Tromsø on the Norwegian side.

Completing and summarising the exercise
The exercise was ended after around 2 hours and 10 minutes. At that point, all injured had been transported to the collection area. Some of the injured were transported in to Emergency Room in Kiruna so that the staff at the hospital could practice caring for trauma cases.

A meeting was held later on with all involved parties and simulated patients, where experiences were summarised. Some of the reflections that were made were the following:

− Very difficult environment to work in, cold, dark and tight (on the coach).
− Hypothermia became difficult to handle for the victims
− The victims sometimes felt abandoned at the collection area.
− Difficult to collaborate as neither the Rakel radio nor telephones were working, which also made management more difficult.
− Difficult for management to gain an overview of the accident being blocked by the coach.

And finally, we can conclude that collaboration between Norwegian and Swedish ambulance staff worked well, as they work in similar ways. In cases of major accidents such as this one, resources on the other side of the border are a great addition to the resources of the own organisation.

Injury site and collection area
In connection with the injury site on top of the coach’s wheel sides, where the pickup truck that had run into the rock face was also located, a collection point was established, where the injured were gathered. Ambulance staff worked there with controls and stabilisation prior to the transports to Kiruna hospital. The injured showed a number of serious injuries, e.g. open femoral fracture, concussions, multiple rib fractures with blood in the pleura and crush injury to the kneecap.
Future activities

• 17-06-2013
A meeting in Haparanda between NLL, MSB and the equivalent authority in Finland (Erillisverket), concerning the development of the radio systems Rakel and Virve. NLL wishes to connect the positioning servers of the two radio systems to enable SOS Alarm to follow the positioning of Finnish ambulances in Sweden just as they do with Swedish ambulances.

• 17-09-2013
Barents Rescue Barents Rescue 2013 will be carried out in northern Norway between the 17th and the 19th of September 2013. The exercise is planned and led by Norwegian DSB, according to the same planning routines and principles as Barents Rescue 2011. The next meeting between health care managements will also be held in Tromsø during Barents Rescue.

• 28-09-2013
A collaboration exercise at Kallax airport focusing on air disasters. The exercise involves a large number of partners.

• 08-10-2013
An air disaster exercise will be held in Gällivare in collaboration with Gällivare emergency services, the airport fire service, and Gällivare, Jokkmokk and Kiruna municipalities.

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