

Rescue in the Severn Estuary

This is SARA (Reg.Charity №.:505504)

Mention the word "lifeboat" and most people will immediately think of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (R.N.L.I). Whilst the R.N.L.I. has approximately 225 lifeboat there are also approximately 163 independent life boat stations in the UK..

Funded almost exclusively by public donations, the Severn Area Rescue Association (SARA) is the largest independent lifeboat service in the UK with 10 operational boats and approximately 150 personnel. The crews, all volunteers, are on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



SARA provides emergency rescue-boat assistance in the swift-flowing tidal estuaries of the Rivers Severn, Wye, Usk and Avon: from Avonmouth and Cardiff to Gloucester and beyond. The Association has its operational headquarters at the Rescue Station at Chepstow and bases at Sharpness, and Arley (Wyre Forest). A new facility will become operational at Tewkesbury later this year.

Crews train twice a week (day and night) to develop skills in seamanship, casualty care, navigation, and rescue techniques for a whole spectrum of disaster - from aircraft crash to stranded fisherman: from missing canoeists to vehicles in the river.

As well as the rescue cover provided by the boats, SARA is a member of the Mountain Rescue Council providing - in close co-operation with statutory services (Police, Fire, Ambulance) - emergency land-rescue capabilities to the ten counties and county boroughs in the Severn Area. Land search-and-rescue services include fell, mountain, swift-water, flood and mud-rescue, recovery of injured persons from difficult terrain, and searching for missing persons in both rural and urban environments.



SARA is considered to be unique as a voluntary multi-discipline rescue organisation and has been in operation for over 35 years during which many, many lives have been saved.

The disastrous flooding at Tewkesbury in 2007 saw SARA in action over the entire seven-day period of the inundation with crews from all stations particularly active in the early stages rescuing over 200 people from flooded houses and care centres.

More recently, SARA rescue vehicles (mostly stalwart Landrovers) and crews braved the blizzards of February 2009 to assist Great Western and West Midlands Ambulance Services in getting Paramedics to emergencies and evacuating casualties. For four days and nights crews were tasked to areas such as Forest of Dean, The Mendip Hills and Bath where conditions were the worst in living memory.

During 2008 SARA responded to 114 emergency calls: brief details of which can be viewed at www.sara-rescue.org.uk

*Merv. Fleming - Chairman, Beachley (Chepstow) Lifeboat and Rescue Station
(All photographs © SARA)*