



Adverse Incident Handling

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1. Summary

- Adverse incidents that may occur on official club tours or UK-based meets are categorised in 4 levels (Critical, Serious, Major, Minor), according to seriousness.
- The Serious Incident Group (SIG) is a working group of senior club officers who will help and support the Tour/Meet Leader in handling Critical or Serious incidents
- The club's response to other incidents will normally be handled by the Touring Secretary after the incident, who will notify other members of the Serious Incident Group if appropriate.
- The Tour/Meet Leader may be required to deal directly with police/formal inquiries and may be best placed to establish communications with Next of Kin or Insurers.
- In the event of a fatality, informing Next of Kin is a difficult and delicate task that is best delegated to the police service local to the Next of Kin.
- The SIG will have responsibility for all contact with the press and other media; other club members, including those involved in the incident, should refer any media enquiries to a member of the SIG.
- Critical and Serious Incidents should be reported as soon as possible to any member of the Serious Incident Group (seriousincident@eagleskiclub.org.uk forwards to all members of the SIG) or to any club officer. Reports on all incidents should be made using the official form, which can be found under "Official Forms" on the Club | Administration page of the website.
- Tour leaders should send information about the members participating in their tour by e-mail to touradmin@eagleskiclub.org.uk prior to the tour's departure. The Serious Incident Group will have web-mail access to this information, to assist in their response to any incident occurring on the tour.
- The "Instructions for Leaders" (available on the website under Resources | Leading Tours) provides further information on reporting incidents, for the benefit of tour leaders.
- All incidents will be reviewed and discussed at the following Tour Leaders' Meet.

2. Serious Incident Group (SIG)

The Serious Incident Group (SIG) consists of

- President (president@eagleskiclub.org.uk)
- Vice-President (vicepresident@eagleskiclub.org.uk)
- Touring Secretary (toursec@eagleskiclub.org.uk)
- Honorary Secretary (honsec@eagleskiclub.org.uk)
- Scottish Meets Secretary (scotsec@eagleskiclub.org.uk)
- Communications Secretary (comms@eagleskiclub.org.uk)
- Additional members appointed by the President, subject to approval by the club's main Committee. Such additional members will generally have special skills or expertise, such as media handling.
- **All members of the SIG will receive e-mails sent to seriousincident@eagleskiclub.org.uk.**

3. Categorisation of Incidents

Adverse incidents which may occur are categorised as shown below.

Severity	Definition	Action required
Critical	Any incident involving death (of any person) or possible permanent disablement.	Report to SIG or any club officer as soon as practical.
Serious	Any incident involving serious injury, or possible police action.	Report to SIG or any club officer within 24 hours.
Major	Any incident involving an official rescue team, partial or full avalanche burial, or minor injury.	Report to Touring Secretary as soon as a convenient communication point is reached.
Minor	Minor incidents with no lasting consequences.	Report to Touring Secretary on return to UK, using the incident reporting form.

4. Guidance to Tour Leader in event of Serious or Critical incident

This guidance is intended to cover the procedural handling of adverse incidents involving serious injury or death, after the immediate incident has been managed and stabilised; with completion of appropriate rescue, first aid etc and when there is no further imminent risk to the group.

- **The Tour leader or deputy or most appropriate member should take charge of the situation and coordinate the necessary actions.**
- **Prioritise the safety of the remaining group** and do not put the group at further risk e.g., while attempting recovery of a body
- **Establish the facts** – clarify the details as they are given from all available witnesses and try to compile an accurate diary of events
- **Inform local authorities/Police as quickly as possible after a critical incident**, if not already done so during a rescue phase. In some countries the location of an unexpected death will be considered as a potential crime scene until the circumstance have been confirmed. In continental European countries civil law applies (as opposed to Anglo-American common law) and there may be a formal investigative process beginning with collection of statements. This is aimed to establish whether there has been any professional or gross criminal negligence. The principle of self-responsibility in the mountains applies with duties of care to follow sensible best practice, though there are differences in expected standards between guided and unguided groups where there is joint leadership.
- **Informing Next of Kin** – this should be done at the earliest opportunity, though careful thought should be given as to how and by whom, depending on the seriousness of the incident.
In the event of a fatality, this should be done in person by two people so that the person advising of the death will themselves have some support, and both together have a greater chance of giving support to the deceased next of kin. In most cases, police in the home country will inform the next of kin in person.
In no circumstances should next of kin or any other person related to the casualty be notified of a fatality or critical injury by telephone, text or email. This should be done through the police force for the area where the person being contacted resides.
The family of the deceased should be offered best available immediate access to practical and social support.
- **Informing Consular Staff in the event of a Fatality abroad** - in the event of the death of a British national abroad, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) can give immediate support and information on the telephone at any time. Call +44 20 7008 5000. This would include help in contacting the local UK police force to inform next of kin and country specific advice on local procedures and resources.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-to-do-after-a-british-national-dies-abroad#what-you-should-consider-when-a-british-person-dies-abroad>
- **Inform SIG as soon as possible with details of the event and status of all the surviving members.**
Critical and Serious Incidents should be reported as soon as possible to any member of the Serious Incident Group (seriousincident@eagleskiclub.org.uk forwards to all members of the SIG) or to any club officer. The Tour leader and SIG incident coordinator may then together decide how best to handle tasks. The Tour/Meet Leader may be required to deal directly with police/formal inquiries and may or may not be best placed to speak with Next of Kin or Insurers. The SIG will have responsibility for all contact with the press and other media. Other club

members, including those involved in the incident, should refer any media enquiries to a member of the SIG, and avoid social media speculation or commentary. No information, particularly the name of a casualty, should be disclosed to third parties other than as necessary.

- **Inform Insurers as soon as possible, both the insurer of the deceased/injured members and the Club's insurers.**
 - The individual members insurance should cover Emergency expenses (Search, Rescue and Recovery; Medical; Death benefit etc) and ideally offer a 24-hour assistance helpline with experienced assistance co-ordinators who can co-ordinate local in-country support. They may be able to help with the logistics of repatriation etc. In remote areas the local embassy or consulate may also be able to offer assistance in this process.
 - The club has a Combined liability insurance policy with Howden/Hiscox through its affiliation with Mountaineering Scotland. This provides combined liability for the club's actions and 3rd party liability for all members. They ask that the club should immediately record relevant information concerning incidents involving a fatal accident, an injury involving either referral to or actual hospital treatment, or any circumstance involving damage to third party property. The policy does cover Legal expenses for defence of actions. Any claim and any incident that is likely to give rise to a claim in the future should be reported as soon as possible via the Contact form at [Mountaineering Scotland Insurance Centre](#) or by completion of an appropriate [Claim form](#)
- **Care and debrief of group** – it is important to acknowledge that all the members of the group may have been exposed to intensely traumatic circumstances, and may perhaps hold personal feelings of responsibility, guilt or failure as well as grief and bereavement. There is no single way to best offer emotional support, but an initial debrief to clarify facts or to update the group, should also focus on open non-judgemental and supportive discussion amongst the group. The group is often the best supportive environment until the team can return home where grief reactions or PTSD may need professional help.
More analytical significant event review should follow later at some emotional distance.

5. Duties of the Serious Incident Group

- As soon as any member of the SIG becomes aware of an incident (which may be through media reports), they should immediately attempt to contact other members of the SIG to establish who is available.
- The response to a particular incident will be handled by those SIG members who are available at the time; additional members may be co-opted to assist if necessary. Once the group is formed, the same group should continue to manage the incident through to completion. One of the group should be nominated to take the lead in handling the incident (SIG Coordinator).
- Establish the facts of the incident. This may include communicating with members of the party involved (either directly or indirectly), local authorities or rescue services, and checking reports appearing in the media or on the Internet. Care should be taken in assessing the reliability of media reports, and second-hand information.
- Prepare an agreed statement of known facts and a relevant Q&A to assist in handling media enquiries. One member of the SIG (preferably with appropriate media training or experience) should take the lead in answering any media enquiries.
- Maintain liaison with members of the party involved in the incident and render any necessary assistance.
- Contact nominated next-of-kin of party members if appropriate, to provide any necessary information and reassurance to them, and to pass back any necessary information to the party members.
- SIG Coordinator helps with informing and liaising with Insurers, both the insurer of the deceased/injured members and the Club's insurers.

6. Information Available to Serious Incident Group

Tour leaders have been asked to send details of their **party members** by e-mail to touradmin@eagleskiclub.org.uk prior to departure. This information is intended to ensure that members of the SIG can be aware of who might be involved in an incident if one is reported. E-mails are automatically forwarded to a Google Group called **esc-tour-admin**. Members of the SIG who have been appropriately authorised (see Appendix 2) can view these e-mails via <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/esc-tour-admin> when logged into their personal Google account.

Full **contact details for all club members** are available to those with Administrator or Membership Secretary rights on the club website.

Those with website Administrator rights (President, Secretary, Internet Secretary and some others) can access the online **Tour Application Forms** (which include next-of-kin and recent experience details). This can be done via My Account | Administer | Content | Webforms | Tour Application Forms | Submissions | View (for entries for the relevant individual).

7. Contact with Press and Media

This section provides some general guidelines concerning contact with media organisations, who may be covering the incident, and wishing to obtain statements or comments from the club. The recommendations here have been made by club members with media experience (in particular Bruce Packard and Brent MacGregor) in response to a request from the President in October 2016:

Leaders and party members at the incident should not make comments to press representatives, even in a personal capacity. They should be wary of expressing opinions to others who may pass those views on to the press. They **MUST NOT** make any statements that could imply any liability, culpability or irresponsibility by any member of the group.

7.1. Initial Media Reports

These may derive from a number of sources, which can introduce serious inaccuracies into initial reports:

- In Scotland statements from the scene are usually made by the Police and/or Mountain Rescue who usually protect survivors and witnesses. Scottish journalists are aware of these conventions and the rules of possible Fatal Accident Inquiries. Abroad, local regulations and procedures will vary.
- Survivors and third-party witnesses may be questioned and may be misreported or simply mistranslated by the local press. These comments may be picked up and repeated by news agencies used by UK news services.
- Non-professional websites, forums, blogs, Twitter feeds etc. may include comments and speculation from contributors with no knowledge of the incident but may be the starting point for traditional journalists.

7.2. When contacted by the Press

- If the first news you receive of an incident is from a journalist, try not to let on, but calmly and politely ask for an email address to send a statement to. Ask them for their source (e.g., wire service copy from Reuters or the Press Association) and check it for accuracy before sending the email statement. Even when forewarned of the incident check to make sure basic mistakes are not being made in the agency report the journalist is using.
Q: "Hello Joe Bloggs here from the Daily Press. I understand that a group from your club has been involved in an incident in XXX. I'd like to ask you a few questions."
A: "If you give me your email address, I will send you a Club statement. I would also appreciate seeing the news agency copy in order to verify that it aligns with our reports." (This gives a sensible reason for declining to answer questions on the phone.)
- Be firm and polite and repeat the request for an e-mail address if necessary. If they keep questioning, just say you will send the statement to the Press Association (copy@pressassociation.com) instead. They should give you the proper address rather than miss the story.
- Don't let your guard slip when spoken to on the telephone. After being polite but firm and having been given the email address you requested, beware of any seemingly casual comments/questions that might get slipped in. Refer to the forthcoming statement.
- Beware of journalists who may pose as someone else. One club member has encountered a situation where a (foreign) journalist claimed to be from the Consulate of the country of a person killed in an incident.
- Establish a single point of contact for press enquiries. This will normally be a member of the Serious Incident Group, preferably someone with media experience or training. All press enquiries should be directed to that person as the official spokesman for the club. Other club members, including those directly involved in the incident, should be discouraged from speaking to the media.

7.3. Written Statement

- Ideally a written statement should be prepared by adapting and updating an existing statement along the lines of that shown below. It is likely to be read by the family and by club colleagues, and so comments should be appropriate for an obituary rather than an inquest:
"It is with great sadness that we have heard of the tragic incident involving X. X was a highly experienced ski-mountaineer who loved the sport who will be much missed by Club colleagues. Thanks should be given to the emergency services (Mountain Rescue etc.) for their efforts in dealing with this sad case. At this difficult time our thoughts are especially with the families of those involved. The club's Serious Incident procedure has already begun. This is based on corroborated evidence from all available sources. This procedure will run in parallel to the necessary investigations being undertaken by official bodies and, until it is complete, no further comment can be made."
- Give no other information such as addresses, background details etc. as the Club respects the privacy of all concerned and their families.

- Avoid any attributions of blame, either to third parties or club members.
- Send the written statement to enquiring journalists by email to avoid misquotation. This also makes sure the journalist is genuine (i.e., has a newspaper email address).

7.4. Second Wave of Interest

Usually, the first report of an incident can pass quickly as the news cycle moves on. A second wave of interest may arise later if there are new outcomes ranging from an arrest, an Inquest (Scottish Fatal Accident Enquiries may report 3 years after an incident), or simply a more detailed account of events. In this case, certain facts will have been established and questions such as the following may have to be replied to:

- Should they have been skiing there?
- Did they ignore the forecast?
- Why didn't they have a guide?
- Is it true he didn't have proper equipment?

An official club statement can be agreed in advance. The tendency is still to avoid blaming the dead, but a verdict of misadventure will prompt general questions. If a prepared statement mentions a Club investigation be prepared to give details of its conclusions.

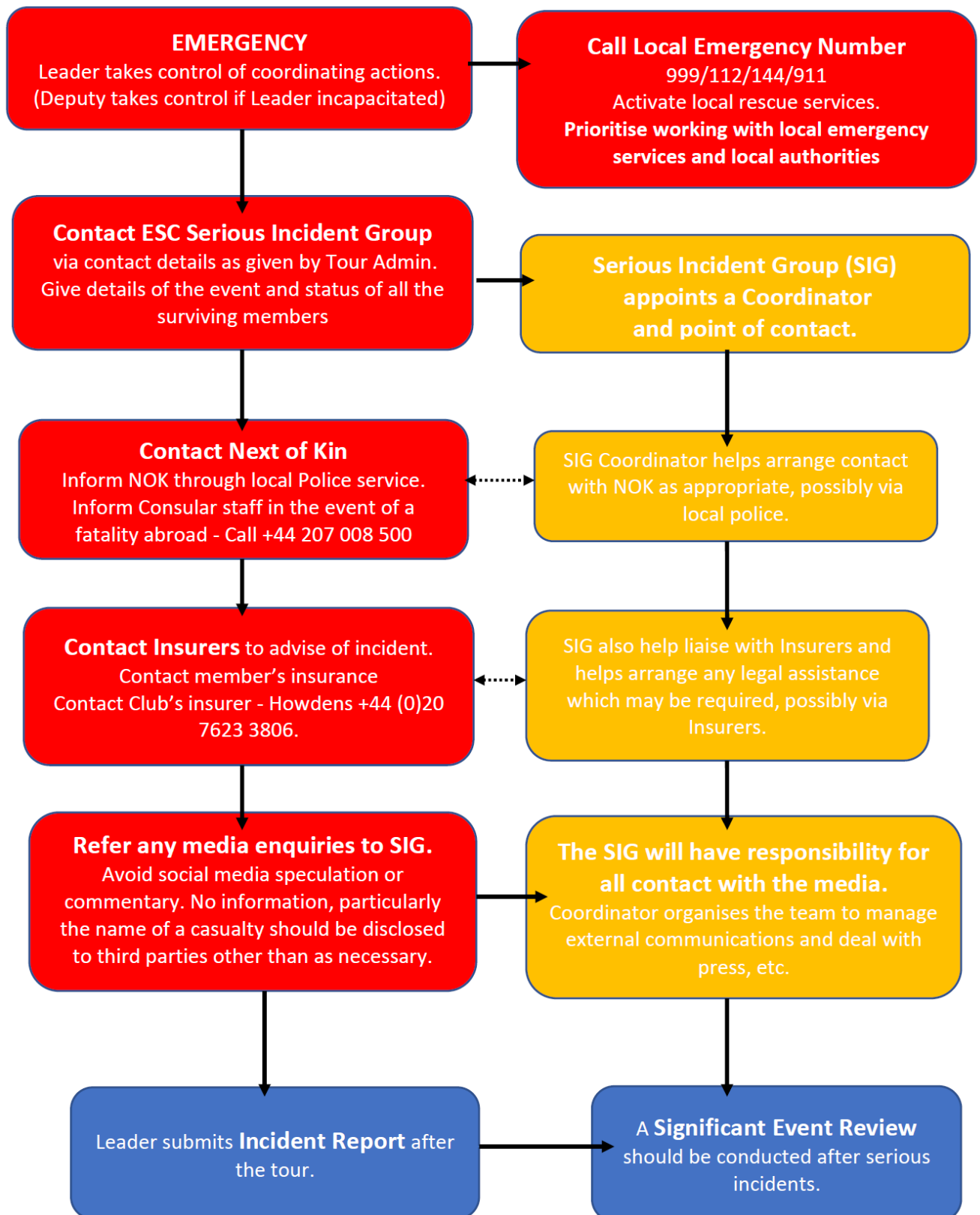
7.5. Interview Responses

As far as possible avoid any attempts to interview you: "Out of respect for the family at this trying time". Prefer to offer written statements "when the facts have been established / investigations have been completed". Where interviews are unavoidable the following notes may be of assistance:

- For unguided tours guide, questions may be along the lines of "why are these amateurs doing this incredibly risky activity, without a professional qualified mountain guide? Surely someone incompetent is to blame?" Appropriate responses (not necessarily in this order) may include:
 - Club members are experienced and understand the risks.
 - Even with experienced skiers and a professional guide, things can still go wrong, and people get hurt.
 - Ski mountaineering can never be 100% risk free.
 - We already provide many subsidised safety courses for members and encourage members to continue to practice safe ski mountaineering.
 - We already review all adverse incidents and "near misses" at the end of each season. This incident will of course be included in that process to see if there are specific lessons that need to be learned, to help prevent similar tragedies occurring in future.
 - The club been organising trips for nearly 100 years, and now has about 1500 members and runs some 60 tours in the Alps and elsewhere every year. This is the first time an incident as serious as this has occurred on a club tour.
 - Our thoughts go out to the families.
- Though it is relatively unlikely that the media will be directly hostile, if a journalist wants to be, a trick they use is to ask easy questions off air to relax the interviewee, then when the cameras are rolling, they bowl an aggressive "bouncer" to see if you get flustered.
- The press are usually reluctant to blame any deceased but always look to find blame. For the most part, they are not mountaineers or skiers and may regard such activities as foolhardy at the best of times.

Appendix 1: Emergency Action Flow Chart

Emergency Action Flow Chart - Eagle Ski Club



Appendix 2: Examples of Media Reports of Mountaineering Fatalities

1. Condolences:

"A member of the Red Bull family since 2013, Matilda will be missed by the ski community, her fans and her supporters. Along with her many friends, our thoughts are now with her husband Mattias and her family," her sponsor announced in a statement. (<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2016/07/19/extreme-skier-dies-from-injuries-in-chile-avalanche.html>)

2. Very detailed post-event coverage:

"The avalanche warning for Glencoe was 'considerable' – two levels down from the most serious. The investigation into the tragedy will look at whether the group had assessed the risks properly. Northern Constabulary chief inspector Derek Paterson said: 'The evidence suggests this was a group of experienced walkers.' He added: 'There is no shortage of information out there from the mountain rescue service website to the information service which gives practical tips and safety skills. We would appeal to everyone to use this information.' Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond called it an 'appalling tragedy'. He added: 'Our immediate thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who have been lost.'" (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2265471/Glencoe-Avalanche-First-pictures-climbers-died-devastating-avalanche-Scottish-Highlands.html>)

3. Condolences from University:

A university spokesman said: "The university is extremely saddened at this tragic accident. Our thoughts are with Rafe's friends and family at this difficult time," but there is a hint of blame from local ski patrol: "The chief of the Ski Patrol for Safety and Rescue, Jean Louis Tuaillon, told BBC News: 'There were two brothers snowboarding off piste. When they go down, they make an avalanche.'" (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/south_yorkshire/4548510.stm)

4. Internet forum free speech where anything can be said

<http://snowheads.com/ski-forum/viewtopic.php?p=2945213>

Appendix 3: Instructions for Access to esc-tour-admin Google Group

- **esc-tour-admin** is a private **Google Group**. Only members of the Google Group can view the e-mails that appear in it.
- The “Owners” (administrators) of the **esc-tour-admin Google Group** are currently Declan Phelan (President) and Stuart Cunningham (Internet Secretary).
- Members of the Serious Incident Group are added to the **esc-tour-admin Google Group** by one of the Group’s Owners, using a personal e-mail address. This generates an e-mail to the member in question, with a link to the Group’s web page.
- The e-mail address used for each member should preferably be one which is already associated with a Google Account (you will already have a Google Account if you use things like Google Mail, Google Calendar, etc.). For this reason, the “officer@eagleskiclub.org.uk” addresses are not used.
- You can access the **esc-tour-admin Google Group** at <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/esc-tour-admin>.
- In order to access the **esc-tour-admin Google Group**, you must be logged in to the Google Account associated with your e-mail address.
- If you do not already have a Google Account, you can create one associated with your e-mail address when first trying to access the **esc-tour-admin Google Group**. This can be done by clicking on the “sign in to view this group” link, and then clicking on the “More options” and “Create account” links. You can use your existing e-mail address, and you do not need to create an “@gmail.com” e-mail address.

Updated by Declan Phelan – 2nd November 2022