



SERIOUS INCIDENT GROUP – TERMS OF REFERENCE

(Updated 6 May 2021)

1. Background

This document describes the processes by which the Eagle Ski Club will handle and manage a Serious or Critical Incident. Such incidents may occur to club members whilst on tours in the Club Programme (in the Alps or further afield), or whilst on Scottish or UK Meets.

Incidents are categorised as follows:

Severity	Definition
Critical	Any incident involving death (of any person) or possible permanent disablement.
Serious	Any incident involving serious injury, or possible police action.
Major	Any incident involving an official rescue team, partial or full avalanche burial, or minor injury.
Minor	Minor incidents with no lasting consequences.

Incidents on club tours should normally be reported to the Touring Secretary by the Club Leader or Guide as outlined in "Instructions for Leaders". The Touring Secretary will normally handle any response required for Major or Minor incidents (which may include notifying other members of the committee as appropriate). For Serious or Critical Incidents, the Touring Secretary (or other officer of the club who has been notified of the incident) should initiate the Serious Incident process as described in this document.

2. Group Composition and Formation

Upon notification of any Critical or Serious Incident, the Touring Secretary (or other officer of the club who has been notified of the incident) should attempt to contact the President, Vice President and Secretary. It is acknowledged that ski-touring incidents are likely to occur at times when Club officers are away or difficult to reach, so the composition of the Serious Incident Sub-committee may depend on who is available.

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.

3. Response formulation

Once formed, the Serious Incident Group should agree a statement of facts and a relevant Q&A (see appendix for an example). It should also be agreed who will take the lead in answering any media enquiries. Responses shall follow the agreed Q&A and will ensure that the relevant messages are delivered. The Committee will try to ensure that at least one committee member has appropriate media training.

4. Reactive media handling

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.

The Touring Secretary or other Club officer contacted initially should gather as much information as possible but should not make any comment at this stage. If contacted, the following responses should be given:

Q: A party from your Club has been involved in an incident. Do you have any comment?

A: No, I don't have any details of the incident.

Q: Can I tell you what happened, then?

A: No, we have a reporting process and we will follow that.

Q: This happened x days/hours ago. Shouldn't you know by now?

A: We have a reporting process that makes sure we collect the right information from the right people. We will follow that process.

Q: When will you know? When can I call you again?

A: We will make a statement when we know the details.

DO NOT stray from this script or make off-the-cuff remarks. Be polite but firm. Be prepared to repeat exactly the same answer several times if necessary. If the person is rude or excessively persistent put the phone down.

5. Contacting relatives

For any incident involving serious injury, one of the President, Vice-President, Secretary or Touring Secretary should consider contacting the nominated next of kin to reassure them and to ensure that there are no issues of which the leader is not aware.

6. Some general rules

Follow the script. It will make you confident in what you say and it is OK – often better – to repeat the answer many times.

Most incidents – even ones that seem important at the time – lose their media interest very quickly unless fed by challenges or 'interesting' remarks. In any later follow-up (e.g. by insurance companies) it is the facts that matter: opinions only cloud the issue and can be harmful.

Appendix: Example Q&A

This appendix contains the Q& A which were prepared for the ESC after the ASC incident in Turkey in February 2004, when Alasdair Ross died in an avalanche.

From BBC News at 15:20 on 5th March 2004:

British man dies hiking in Turkey

A British man has died in an avalanche in Turkey when he was hiking in a mountainous region that has seen its heaviest snow fall for seventy years. Four other hikers who were also involved managed to survive unhurt. The man, who has not been identified, was part of a group of nine Britons and Canadians who were trekking near the Palandoken mountain ski resort. The tourist spot is in eastern Turkey in the province of Erzurum.

Facts: The Alpine Ski Club trip to Turkey has experienced very high winds, and the area has seen the heaviest snowfalls experienced in the last seventy years. Some members of the party were caught by a slab avalanche. Although those who were buried were swiftly dug out by the rest of the group, one person was killed. He has not been identified.

Q: Do you know who it is?

A: No, we don't.

Q: Were they not taking unreasonable risks?

A: We can't comment on the conditions on that particular day. Ski tourers always understand that there is some risk. They will minimise the risk through their experience – there are many ways of doing that – but you can never eliminate the risk completely. When you go to a more remote area, you consciously take on more risk. Those on this trip were all very experienced and would certainly have understood that.

Q: Did they have a guide?

A: The trip was organised by a very experienced mountaineer who has successfully led a number of trips in the Himalayas including one to the summit of Everest last year. The members of the trip were all also very experienced and would have made their own decisions.

Q: Shouldn't you always go with a qualified guide?

A: A qualified mountain guide not only has more experience than most amateurs, he or she also has a long training period and they are taught to think and act very defensively. So it is nearly always safer to be with a guide. However, many mountaineers specifically enjoy being with a group of friends and making their own decisions.

Q: Did they have the right equipment?

A: We can't comment on the equipment each individual was carrying. But a group like that would be very well equipped and would all have been wearing avalanche transceivers, which would have enabled the rest of the group to dig out the victims quite quickly.

Q: Will it change your Club's policy on touring without a guide?

A: We will certainly see what lessons can be learnt – we are always trying to improve safety. But it is unlikely to change the whole basis on which our Club works, which is about helping people to enjoy the mountains in their own way – for some people that is with a guide and for others without.