



Search and Rescue Helicopter Statistics: Notes and Definitions

About this document

This document relates to the publication of quarterly and annual data from civilian Search and Rescue Helicopter (SARH) operations in the UK. The purpose of this document is to provide users of the statistics with information about the variables that are included in the statistics.

All SARH statistics are published through the DfT SARH collection web page: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/search-and-rescue-helicopter-statistics>

Introduction

The Search and Rescue Helicopter (SARH) statistics uses data originating from the Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre (ARCC). ARCC are responsible for the co-ordination of the search and rescue helicopters, from answering the initial request through to the conclusion of the tasking. Previously, data was derived from the helicopter operators recording system, and provided to DfT by the MCA. Further details of the two data sources can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/618846/sarh-changes-to-data-series.pdf

A separate background quality report for SARH statistics has been produced by DfT, with the purpose of providing users of the statistics with detailed information about the quality of the outputs, measured against different dimensions of statistical quality. As a result, this document helps to demonstrate how the Department complies with the Code of Practice for Statistics principle on quality. The document can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/search-and-rescue-helicopter-statistics-july-to-september-2017>

Variables used

Following a tasking, the ARCC records incident data which gets validated and verified by the MCA and DfT on a regular basis and signed off at the end of each month. It is unlikely that data would be revised at a later date therefore figures published in the SARH release will be carried forward for use in future publications (for time comparisons, etc.). If there are any revisions, they will be clearly signposted to users.

Variables in the current data source include:

Tasking count

A tasking is defined as the response of a UK SAR helicopter to an emergency as notified by the ARCC. If an emergency occurs where a helicopter is called out more than once, this is usually counted as one tasking. If helicopters from different bases are called out to the same emergency, this is counted separately - once for each base.

This means that the definition of “taskings” is slightly different to the definitions of “callouts” and “incidents” used by the Ministry of Defence. The statistics also include those taskings which have been stood down before lift-off. This is due to a lot of activity taking place prior to the actual lift-off whereby time and resources are being used.

Currently, the ARCC data can be compared to the old data source used by the helicopter operators to validate the number of SARH taskings every month. Therefore, the number of taskings is believed to be accurately recorded.

Tasking category

The tasking category (rescue or recovery, pre-arranged transfer, etc.) is derived from a free text field completed by the ARCC and coded by database administrators at the MCA using the description of the tasking. In addition, the tasking narrative derives information which DfT use to cross check information received by the ARCC.

Tasking narrative example:

Tasked by UK SAR Helicopter of a rescue of a male who had fallen down	➔	Tasking Category, Coded as a rescue or recovery
some stairs on-board a cruise liner in	➔	Location type: Coded as a (leisure) vessel tasking
Plymouth. Communications established		
with vessel who advised that incident		
involved two casualties . Winchman	➔	Number of people rescued: Coded as 2 persons rescued
Paramedic and equipment lowered		
to vessel. First casualty recovered to		
aircraft with winchman before returning		
and recovering second casualty in		
stretcher and returning back to	➔	Tasking outcome: Coded as a completed tasking
Plymouth for medical care.		

Tasking location and location type

If a rescue or recovery takes place then the location is recorded based on the coordinates of where the persons were found. If a pre-arranged transfer occurs, some operators may record the midpoint of the tasking in the database, which could mean the tasking will have been recorded to take place over maritime when in fact, should be classed as coast or land. There are checks in place to make sure all taskings involving pre-arranged transfers are consistent and uses the final location of the tasking. For other tasking types, the initial location (e.g. for where a search will take place) is recorded, as supplied by the tasking authority e.g. the police force. It is not possible to assess whether the original coordinates provided to the tasking authority for a search were accurate.

The coordinates of the tasking location are also used to define the location type (land, coast and maritime). The latitude and longitude of the tasking location are overlaid onto a map of the UK, and distances between the taskings and the outline of the map are used to categorise the data.

The definitions of the boundaries between land, coast and maritime were chosen based on other widely used definitions, what was sensible given the nature of the topic and what was possible using the data. This breakdown is only as accurate as the coordinate data. If latitude or longitude are recorded inaccurately then this may also impact upon the location, although the risk of such inaccuracies is perceived as low.

The location type of a tasking (i.e. whether the tasking took place on a beach/cliff, mountain, vessel etc) is based on the tasking narrative and standard definitions used by the ARCC. This gets validated by DfT whereby the co-ordinates of each tasking are overlaid onto a map of the UK to ensure the location type is recorded as accurately as possible (e.g. we would expect most beach/cliff rescues to take place around coastal/ land areas of the UK.)

Confidentiality

The published statistics does not reveal any private information about any individual or organisation and confidential information will be kept securely where access to data is controlled in accordance to departmental policy.