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NEW JERSEY SEARCH AND RESCUE



PRESS RELEASE

New Jersey Search and Rescue Team Sees an Increase in Wilderness Attempted Suicide

SAR team advocates an awareness of potential suicide in the wilderness.

Mahwah, NJ, May 21, 2010: New Jersey Search and Rescue (NJSAR), a search and rescue (SAR) Team in northern New Jersey has seen an increase in call-outs for attempted suicides in the wilderness this year. As National Search and Rescue Week draws to a close, the SAR team wishes to bring to the public's attention some precautions that they can take to prevent a sad ending to the search for a despondent person. Search and rescue teams are often involved in searches for subjects that are not the typical lost or missing hikers. SAR team call-outs can be for missing disoriented people, Alzheimer's individuals, persons with dementia, runaway children, outdoor enthusiasts, and suicide directed individuals.

Suicides attempts can be self-strangulation, overdose of prescription medication, or deliberate falls from high places. Suicidal people often have a history of previous attempts, perhaps even in the wilderness. A despondent person entering the woods with a suicidal intent may not carry out what they set out to do but their circumstances can create a deadly situation for themselves nonetheless. The outdoor elements—terrain and weather—can prove perilous. A person under the influence of medication on a cool summer evening, in a light drizzle can fall asleep, become hypothermic, and not wake up.

According to search and rescue theory, a despondent person's probability of being found alive in the wilderness within the first 24 hours is 75% but decreases to less than 20% after three days. For this reason, anything that can help a SAR team locate a missing person quicker is helpful.

The SAR team advocates that the family and friends of those who have previously attempted suicide and enjoy being in wilderness, know the hiking habits of that person. You can learn about their favorite trails, favorite look-outs or favorite resting places. (It is common for a suicidal person to harm themselves in a previously visited location.) You should know the colors and brands of their outdoor clothing and gear, take note of their eating habits when they go into the wilderness, and pay attention to maps indicating their common areas of outdoor activity. Particular attention should be paid to their boots and shoes: know the brand, shoe type, age of the shoe, and sole tread. The SAR team recommends that an aluminum foil impression be made of the sole by smoothing aluminum foil on the tread and then saving the foil. This helps trackers approximate their direction of travel.

SAR teams train for call-outs and are prepared for the most treacherous weather conditions. Most injuries to SAR responders are en-route and returning from a search. Any time that a search for a despondent person can be avoided is better time for all involved.

New Jersey Search and Rescue is a wilderness SAR team in northern New Jersey. Composed of about 50 unpaid professional SAR responders, K-9, and incident management personnel, the team responds to call-outs throughout New Jersey and southern New York State. It is the only certified Mountain Rescue Association (MRA) SAR team in the central Atlantic region. NJSAR is a registered 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are welcome at its website www.njsar.org. For further information, please contact Gregg Sgambati at (201) 783-5133.

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