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MOUNTAIN RESCUE ASSOCIATION REAFFIRMS ITS POSITION OPPOSING CHARGING SUBJECTS FOR THE COSTS OF THEIR RESCUES

Rescue Leaders Say Charging for Rescues Can Lead to Delays in the Call for Help, and Can Put Rescuers in Greater Danger,

(San Diego, CA, December 16, 2006) — The Mountain Rescue Association (MRA), a coalition of 90 mountain rescue teams throughout North America, reminds the public that it has a long-established policy opposing charging subjects of search and rescue missions for the cost of their rescue.

While MRA member teams Eugene Mountain Rescue, the Hood River Crag Rats, Corvallis Search and Rescue and Portland Mountain Rescue are active in the search for three missing climbers in extreme weather on Mt. Hood, the MRA has responded to a growing number of stories asking “who pays?”

“Charging subjects for their rescues can be dangerous for many reasons,” explained Charley Shimanski, Vice President of the MRA. Shimanski, who served on a U.S. Senate-mandated panel that studied charging climbers on Mt. McKinley for their rescues, added, “Often people will delay calling for help when they fear a cost, and in the mountains, that delay in the call for help can increase the risk to rescuers.” He added that climber rescues are infrequent when compared to rescues of hikers, skiers, mountain bikers and other backcountry users. The vast majority of rescue services in the United States are provided by teams of unpaid professional rescue mountaineers who give up their own time to participate in search and rescue activities.

“The typical search and rescue mission is over within a matter of a few hours, and with the vast majority of the work performed by unpaid professional volunteers, the costs are generally very low. In those cases where military aircraft are used, the military simply charges their costs to training hours that they would have otherwise performed somewhere else,” Shimanski added.

Other Facts about Rescue Cost Recovery

- The United States Coast Guard (USCG) spends \$680 million a year for SAR, 13% of their budget. They perform 82 search and rescue missions a day, assisting 114 people each day.
- When the United States military flies support to civilian SAR operations, it is logged as training time for them, while fulfilling a humanitarian purpose. That time flying, and the costs budgeted for it, would otherwise have been spent doing the same thing -- training -- but under less intense, less realistic conditions.
- Military leaders themselves agree that their crews receive extraordinary experience in often severe conditions when responding to civilian SAR operations. This experience allows them to do things such as combat SAR operations in the difficult military operations.
- The National Park Service, which also does not charge subjects for their search and rescue costs, defrays the cost of search and rescue among all visitors as part of the Park visitation pass. The cost per visitor is 1.1 cent.

About the Mountain Rescue Association

The Mountain Rescue Association is "a volunteer organization dedicated to saving lives through rescue and mountain safety education." (www.mra.org)

For more information

For more information on Rescue Cost Recovery, contact Charley Shimanski, MRA Vice President.

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Mountain Rescue Association Position Statement on Charging for Rescue

The Mountain Rescue Association (MRA) with over 90 teams from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom -- most of which are comprised of expert unpaid professional members -- work through or for a local government search and rescue authority. In an effort to give back to the community, defray public agencies' costs and keep taxes down, the MRA teams have been performing the bulk of all search and rescue operations for the past 48 years and those were done without charge to the victim.

The MRA firmly believes that training and education are the keystones in the solution to this issue. We believe that the individual must accept responsibility for his or her actions and that training in proper outdoors skills and for self-rescue might be the quickest and most effective method of resolving most rescue situations.

However, no one should ever be made to feel they must delay in notifying the proper authorities of a search or rescue incident out of fear of possible charges. We ask all outdoors groups and organizations to join us in sending this mountain safety education message.

We recognize that the National Park Service and other governmental agencies have a need to address defraying their costs and we would welcome any opportunity to be involved in discussion of solutions or alternatives to the charge for rescue issue. The expert volunteer teams of MRA are proud to be able to provide search and rescue at NO cost and have NO plans to charge in the future.