



New South Wales Government

The Hon Steve Whan MP  
Minister for Emergency Services  
Minister for Small Business

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## **SES alpine search and rescue bolstered for snow season safety**

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With a million people expected to visit the NSW snowfields this winter, the State Emergency Service is better trained and equipped for alpine search and rescue than ever, Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan said today.

Mr Whan, the Member for Monaro, said the State Government had invested almost \$650,000 over two years to bolster the search and rescue equipment, training and capability of SES units in the alpine territory.

“Our emergency services are geared up to provide a vital support role to the \$500 million ski industry around Mt Kosciusko,” Mr Whan said.

“Tumut, Queanbeyan and Snowy River SES volunteers are prepared and ready to assist the NSW Police Force on alpine search and rescue missions, when a swift response can mean the difference between life and death.

“These volunteers’ skills, endurance and hardiness are formidable. They deserve immense credit for shouldering this responsibility to help ensure people can visit the snow field safely each winter.

“Even well prepared bushwalkers and skiers can find themselves in trouble, especially in a snowstorm, despite having food, water, appropriate clothing and equipment such as an EPIRB, GPS, tent and sleeping bag,” he said.

“The SES now has 32 trained and equipped specialist alpine operators, with another 10 from these three units to be added to their ranks this winter to assist on missions to help find those lost in this challenging environment.

“This year’s record \$59.7 million SES budget includes \$320,000 for a cache of alpine search and rescue equipment, upgraded operations management facilities at the Snowy River unit at Jindabyne and ongoing training.

“This will include \$20,000 for a new state-of-the-art snow mobile, taking the number of these vehicles to six, vital equipment and high-quality personal protective clothing to allow the volunteers to work safely in extreme conditions.

“As part of its continuing program to build its capacity, the SES also will equip the Khancoban SES unit on the western side of the Alps for this role so its members are prepared to start their training next winter.”



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Mr Whan said the specialist operators' intensive training included alpine hazards, navigation in white outs, digging snow caves and other shelters and treatment regimes for casualties suffering from exposure.

"The volunteers also undertake a series of simulated activities involving choosing and establishing a camp site and a mock search and recovery involving casualty treatment and transportation to medical aid," he said.

"The success of this reality-based training was seen late in last year's ski season when volunteers from Tumut, Queanbeyan and Snowy River on a weekend training course were called to assist with a search for a missing snow-shoer.

"The SES volunteers, working in a joint operation with the NSW Police, Fire Brigades, Ambulance Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service, located the missing man, who had suffered a knee injury, at Guthega Creek.

"The SES took him to a back country hut and stayed with him overnight after he received initial treatment from NSW Ambulance personnel, before transporting him out to Guthega the next morning."

Mr Whan said personal protective equipment for the alpine operators included three layers of thermal, polo fleece and gortex clothing, along with gloves and snow boots.

"These volunteers are required to carry all their equipment in a pack, weighing between 20 and 25 kg, at all times when operating in the alpine environment," he said.

"This includes snow shoes, walking poles, a self inflating mattress, a four seasons' sleeping bag, bivvy-bag, snow shovel, change of clothing, gas stove and all their food and water for 48 hours."

Mr Whan again appealed to anyone planning an expedition in the high country to take sensible precautions, carry appropriate equipment and advise family and authorities of their plans.

"This can help reduce the chance that they will get into trouble and spark a full-scale search and rescue operation," he said.

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