

Political statement C16

Rescue services and first aid

Norwegian People's Aid crews dedicate their free time to being there for others when they need it. They do not ask for fame, recognition or even payment for doing so. These voluntary rescue crews find sufficient motivation in the thought of being able to contribute to taking care of other people in situations where they are unable to look after themselves.

The landslide in Tamokdalen that claimed four lives; the forest fire in Sokndal which threatened the local settlements; and the shipwreck off Hustadvika are all accidents where catastrophic outcomes were barely avoided. These are all examples of major rescue actions where Norwegian People's Aid made a contribution in 2019. These events drew a good deal of media coverage and demonstrate the sheer breadth of assignments tackled by the voluntary rescue services.

However, our crews are in action every day, dealing with local incidents that are dramatic for the people involved, and where lives are sometimes at risk. The calls they receive may concern a dementia-sufferer who has wandered out of a nursing home, an experienced hiker lost in thick fog, or a tourist who injures his leg while skiing.

More and more people are looking to outdoor activities as the source of improved health and well-being. Increased use of nature also means that more and more people find themselves in need of help in the mountains, and the number of rescue actions completed by the voluntary rescue services continues to increase year by year.

Forecasts prepared by the Voluntary Professional Rescue Organisations' Forum indicate that the type of task will also start to change. More and more people are choosing to take higher risks in their interaction with nature, resulting in increasingly demanding actions. This naturally makes demands on the skills the voluntary rescue services must possess. Over the course of the past few years, various professional aspects of the work of first responders and rescue service personnel have undergone remarkable development. Landslides, search and rescue, first aid, digital resources, first responder and ambulance courses for voluntary crews are all examples of professional areas in constant flux.

Norwegian People's Aid believes that increased focus on training and skills development is the key to tackling the challenges of the future. To make this happen, we need the authorities to step up and help boost the voluntary emergency response organisation.

In recent years, the cooperative principle has been reinforced through the coordination of planning and steering documents for shared use in rescue services and emergency response. Norwegian People's Aid is committed to ensuring this work is continued and reinforced so as to underpin the working relationship between the government agencies and the voluntary organisations.

Voluntary crews make a contribution in the field of social economics, saving society millions of kroner every year. At the same time, voluntary crews invest thousands of kroner in clothes and equipment so that they can properly handle their assignments. The local organisations collect money for equipment to contribute to safe, effective rescue actions. Norwegian People's Aid believes that an increase in the framework subsidy is important in providing secure, predictable conditions for operating the voluntary rescue service. Increased subsidy would allow the rescue service to focus on its core task: helping keep local communities safe throughout Norway.

Norwegian People's Aid demand that the government must:

1. Provide more support for the voluntary members of the Norwegian rescue service and thus strengthen the Norwegian emergency response organisation.
2. Increase the framework subsidy paid to the voluntary organisations in the rescue services to NOK 65 million.
3. Continue to work to ensure full VAT reimbursement and exemption from all other duties – such as the one-time fee on vehicles – for all rescue equipment and material.
4. Ensure that voluntary crews can participate in rescue actions without suffering financial losses.