

LESSONS MUST BE LEARNT FROM MANGATEPOPO INCIDENT

Lessons must be learnt from the deaths of six students and their teacher at the Mangatepopo Stream while participating in a canyoning activity.

Following yesterday's release of the Coroner's findings into the incident, New Zealand Mountain Safety Council Chief Executive Darryl Carpenter said the inquiry provided important recommendations for both the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuit Centre (OPC) and the wider outdoor education sector and participants.

"We will be studying the Coroner's findings in detail and working with industry, training providers and the education sector to ensure that any recommendations are incorporated into ongoing outdoor safety education for those providing an experience as well as those participating in an outdoor activity."

The report recommends steps be taken to ensure that minimum standards are met and all reasonable steps be taken to reduce the chance of serious injury, including proper risk identification and management.

Specific to the Mangatepopo Gorge incident and OPC, the Coroner commented that there needed to be an awareness of the environment, identification of hazards, proper assessment of adverse events occurring, and that plans are prepared if an adverse event occurs including regular emergency exercises.

"From a sector-wide perspective, New Zealand Mountain Safety Council supports the Coroner's recommendation that Government consider ensuring minimum safety standards are met in outdoor education and adventure operations."

"If we are to reduce the risk of such tragedies recurring, the focus has to be on prevention and education. We support any moves to ensure robust standards exist across the outdoor recreation sector and that operators and participants receive adequate training and education in how to best manage the risks inherent in outdoor activities."

"We would go further and urge that Government consider requiring all activity providers undergo regular, external review of their operations to ensure minimum standards are met and that there is continual improvement in safety standards across the sector," said Mr Carpenter.

New Zealand Mountain Safety Council made similar recommendations in its submission to the Department of Labour's current review of safety in the adventure tourism sector.

"New Zealand Mountain Safety Council also welcomes the Coroner's recognition of the importance of outdoor adventure in youth development," said Mr Carpenter.

"Outdoor education enriches our lives as individuals and as a community. We fully support the Coroner's view that all reasonable steps must be taken to minimise the chances of serious injury. While safety can never be absolutely guaranteed, parents and families should expect that the risk management approach adopted for outdoor activities organised for youth avoids serious injury or death."

"The outdoors is a dynamic environment. Safe participation in outdoor activities requires constant vigilance, careful preparation, a thorough understanding of best practice, robust processes and access to the right skills and experience.

"We encourage schools, parents and students undertaking outdoor activity to seek appropriate reassurance from their activity provider that their skills, knowledge and processes and standards are both adequate and up-to-date.

“We recommend the following guidelines as a source of information before undertaking outdoor activities:

a. EOTC Guidelines: Bringing the Curriculum Alive - the ‘blue book’ was recently reviewed and re-launched but had limited implementation support due to limited funding being available

b. Outdoor Activities: Guidelines for Leaders (ONZ, 2009) – the ‘red book’ received a minor review recently but is due for a major review

c. MSC manuals and resources such as Outdoor Safety: Risk Management for Outdoor Leaders. Most resources are due for review of their content as well as developing alternative media (such as DVDs and online resources) but there is limited funding available for this purpose.

“In addition, for individuals and groups intending to participate in an outdoor activity (and not delivered by a commercial education provider) we recommend that they initially consider the Outdoor Safety Code (plan your trip, tell someone, be aware of the weather, know your limits, take sufficient supplies, www.outdoor-safetycode.co.nz) and supplement this with the activity specific information,” said Mr Carpenter.

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