SARCALL SMS RESPONSE FACILITY
JON WHITELEY DCRO RESCUE CONTROLLER/SARCALL SYSTEM ADMIN

The SARCALL system is firmly established across the majority of the mountain and cave rescue teams in England and Wales and the SARCALL support team has a growing list of SAR teams who are considering using the system, including our friends north of the border. We have recently received numerous requests to further develop the system and build in an SMS Response capability into SARCALL... well, we are very pleased to say your wish has been granted!

Many teams currently ask their members at the time of the initial call-out to either text or call the team leader, or other nominated person, to declare their availability. The SARCALL SMS Response facility has taken this principle and we have built a tool to enable team members to simply notify their availability via the SARCALL system using an SMS message.

This is just one of the many tools of the SARCALL system and can be used independently of other aspects of this excellent FREE package. One of our medium-term plans is to link the information generated from the SMS Response tool and other areas of SARCALL system to the MREW Incident Reporting system managed by Ged Feeney.

So, how does the Response system work?

Well, when a team member gets a 'call-out activation (by any means – landline, mobile, SMS or email) he or she sends an SMS from their mobile to a defined number 07937 985005.

Now, this is where the magic starts – when the team member's SMS is received by the SARCALL SMS Response number, the database looks up the sending number and knows exactly who sent it. Note that team members must advise team admins if they have changed their mobile numbers and team admins must maintain an up to-date database of names and phone numbers.
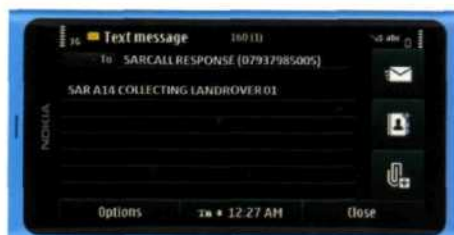
SARCALL then processes the information and constructs a table of members attending. This is presented within the SARCALL web pages, as a simple R-A-G (RED/AMBER/GREEN) status for each member, together with a 'quick show' table. The SARCALL system can then be interrogated by a team leader to see how many team members are attending – either immediately, with limited availability, later or not at all.

The SMS from the team member must start with the activation keyword 'SAR'. The team member then uses one of three letters to define their status: 'A' = 'available', 'L' = 'limited availability/available later' and 'N' = 'not available'.

Once the member has entered one of these letters he/she adds the number of minutes until they will arrive at the nominated RV location; the number of minutes only applies to either the A or L states (maximum number of minutes is 99).

The team member can also choose to enter further information if they wish such as 'Stopping at base to collect equipment'. Also, if a team member is unexpectedly delayed whilst en route to a call-out, he/she can send another SMS and with an update message and SARCALL SMS Response, will automatically update the listing for that person. See below the three examples of a response message sent from a team member.

The big bonus here, compared to many current schemes, is that all the information is available and recorded centrally. Also, it does not tie the team leader up with lots of incoming calls or texts whilst en route to a call-out or during the early critical stages of an incident. The information can be emailed and then downloaded for recording purposes once the call-out is complete. The system can then be cleared of response data, ready for next call-out.
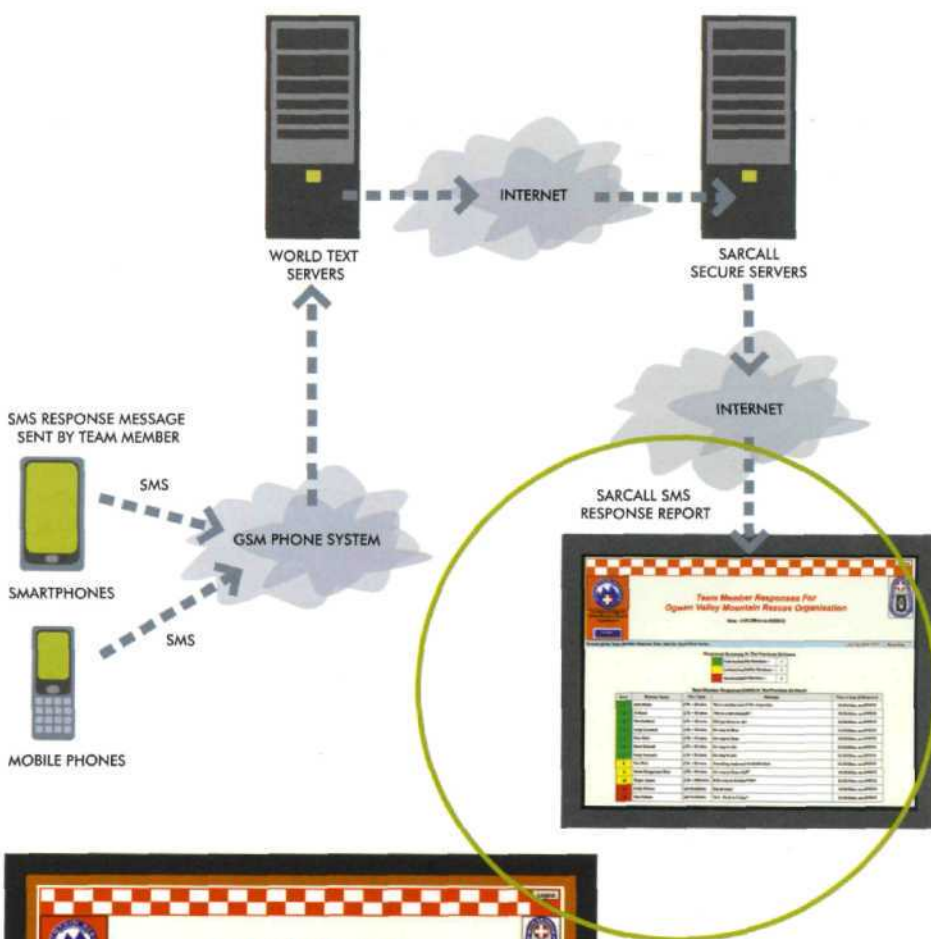
Team leaders/Base will be able to see who is able to respond and their individual response times either on the SMS Response page of their SARCALL web pages, or they can also interrogate the system from their own mobile phone. This facility works on any mobile phone, not only web-enabled smartphones.

This method works by the team leader sending an SMS to SARCALL with the message starting with the activation keyword (supplied on request by the team or regional admin). The system will return an SMS message with a summary of the total numbers attending, those with limited or late availability and those not able to attend. The response information, including a list of names and availability status, is also automatically emailed to the team leader. This enables a team leader who may not be near a good internet connection to get the same detailed information as provided in the SMS Response page within the team's SARCALL page.

This facility will clearly give the team leader a heads-up of the numbers of people available and allow early decision-making, if appropriate, of calling in additional resources from within their own team or neighbouring teams. In the example given below, a team leader of Ogwen MRT would be aware that at that point in time, twelve members had initially responded and that there are three members available and responding, a further three with limited availability or available later, and two not available.

The SARCALL project continues to develop and most of the wish list ideas are being generated from teams themselves. Any team which currently does not use SARCALL and would like to know more and

SMS RESPONSE MESSAGE
SENT BY TEAM MEMBER

SMS

SMARTPHONES

SMS

MOBILE PHONES

WORLD TEXT
SERVERS

INTERNET

GSM PHONE SYSTEM

SARCALL
SECURE SERVERS

INTERNET

SARCALL SMS
RESPONSE REPORT

LEFT: VIEW OF THE TEAM SMS
RESPONSE PAGE ON SARCALL

receive a demonstration is welcome to contact the SARCALL support team at sarcall_admin@ mountain.rescue.org.uk.

The SARCALL side of the system is FREE of charge to all UK mountain, cave and lowland teams and the currently negotiated price is five pence per

SMS text sent from SARCALL with World-Text. This makes the overall system very affordable and realistic. Most of all, it is created and managed by a team of operational mountain and cave rescue people who understand and listen to the needs of our rescue community. ∎