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Kia ora koutou,

In this edition, we take a moment to reflect on the power, and the responsibility we have as a sector to learn from the past and act before tragedy forces change.

Lead Auditor Mark Smith kicks things off with a piece on incident learning, inspired by his reflections on the Mangatepopo tragedy. He challenges us to look beyond simple compliance and work towards a culture of genuine reflection and proactive improvement, not just after serious harm, but by learning from our near misses too.

We've also got updates on two big developments:

- A landmark High Court decision and proposed law change that will help protect and encourage recreational access to private land in Aotearoa.
- The recognition of outdoor instruction as a trade which is a huge win for workforce development and the long-term sustainability of our sector, thanks to the leadership of AdventureWorks and sector partners.

And finally, we share an update on the redevelopment of the Activity Safety Guidelines (ASGs), with ROSA soon kicking off a thorough process to ensure they reflect current good practice across a wide range of adventure activities.

We hope this edition sparks some great conversations in your organisation about safety, learning, and the future of outdoor adventure in Aotearoa.

# Incident learning

*Mark Smith, Lead Auditor, ROSA*

A while back I was asked to present my reflections on the Mangatepopo tragedy to the Board of one of NZ's leading outdoor organisations.

At a personal level it was sobering to remember being part of the External Review Team charged with identifying what happened when six high school students and a teacher lost their lives in the Mangatepopo Gorge. But professionally I was impressed that an organisation would reflect on an incident that happened more than 15 years ago. This Board wanted to understand what they should have done, both before and after the incident, had they been the responsible governing body. They were looking to uncover every learning opportunity that they could identify.

But do we all do the best that we can to learn from the past?

## Fatal Incident Analysis

Fatal incidents tend to be well studied – usually either to learn how to prevent similar re-occurrence, or in order to establish legal fault. Such thorough analysis can result in the identification of:

- Critical systemic, operational or human factor failures
- New or overlooked risks and vulnerabilities
- Measures that could prevent re-occurrence
- The development of safer equipment and infrastructure
- Improvements in emergency response protocols
- Improved safety standards, and
- Regulatory changes aimed at improving safety standards.

In New Zealand we have seen this pattern of 'learning after the fact' repeated. At various times fatal incidents have led industry groups to work more closely together to improve standards – think rafting and heliski operators. While the spate of outdoor activity fatalities through the 2004 – 2014 decade prompted the development of the Adventure Activities Regulations regime; and the 2019 Whakaari/White Island Tragedy resulted in WorkSafe's current focus on improving risk communication and the management of risk from natural hazards.

While the improvements are important, does it have to take catastrophic harm to prompt us to look more closely at failings, and to drive change to safety standards and performance? Can't we also look at, and learn from, our 'near misses' (that should really be called 'near hits') too?



### **Incident Reporting (should really be called Incident Learning)**

The adventure activity safety audit criteria (Ref 1), requires operators to establish a process for investigating and reviewing incidents, understanding the underlying causes, identifying improvements to the SMS, and analysing trends. But as auditors we sometimes get told that "we haven't had any incidents"?; and often there is little analysis of the incidents that have happened.

Instead, operators should find a way to encourage reporting. Focus on learning and improvement, rather than on reporting errors and 're-direction'. Keep the process simple, so that staff don't see it as a paperwork hassle, and be sure to follow up to show that there is a point to it all. An operator I worked with renamed their incidents 'beeps' – being the sound of a feedback mechanism prompting you back onto the right path. While others use '1 liners' – a quick 1 line notification, that can then be either escalated in more detail, or remains captured in case it is part of it a trend or bigger picture.

Online forms and app's are also becoming more commonplace – enabling ease of input in the field via smartphone.

The more incidents that get reported, the greater the opportunity for learning, and the more likely the organisation is to have an open and engaged safety culture.

A more thorough incident record (often the 'written' stage) should capture enough detail and encourage the writer to consider why the incident occurred. It can be helpful to ask "what could you have done to help prevent reoccurrence?", as well as "what should be done...". This helps those involved to consider what steps they could take another time, rather than focus solely on what the participant or organisation should have done.

Incident reports should be reviewed by the 'next level up' Manager, as well as by someone who has responsibility to view them all. Actions to prevent reoccurrence should be identified, and communicated to those affected, before being signed off once complete.

### **Analysing Trends**

To assist with trend analysis, it is useful to create a summary list of all the incidents for a season or year, noting information like: activity, venue, programme type, incident severity, injury. Colour coding this data can



help you to identify trends.

Common trends with outdoor education providers include:

- Unsupervised activities
- Cooking
- Mountain biking activities

While at the local mountain bike park we see:

- Males under 16 over-represented in injury statistics
- Most injuries happen on a riders first run of the day
- Most commonly on a Sunday, and around 2pm.

Clearly that information can help an operator decide whether to alter an activity or programme, provide more supervision, improve safety information and briefings, or increase staffing levels.

Capturing data about incident levels and severity can show an operator how they are doing over time, or compared to other operations. Without a national standard reporting tool, it is difficult for organisations to do this well in New Zealand, but there are a few sources of comparable data. The Australian UPLOADS (*Ref 2*) project provides some relevant data from the last 4 years, including an average across all operators of:

- 6.5 injuries / 1,000 participant days
- 1.9% incidents while camping
- 5% of injuries being serious or severe, 74% being minor.

### **Very Significant Near Misses**

A valuable facet of incident analysis is to identify and focus on the incidents that nearly result in a significant or notifiable injury. Where an incident is 'one step away' (ie. if one thing had been different) from being a notifiable incident, then it should be looked at very carefully, so as to prevent re-occurrence. Fatal incident investigations, including the Mangatepopo tragedy, often identify the existence of an earlier very similar near miss. Had the causal factors of the initial near miss been identified and appropriately addressed then the later actual fatality could have possibly been avoided.

Clearly, it is important that we learn from the tragedies, where things go very badly wrong, but equally we can prevent further tragedy by looking at when things nearly go badly wrong, or go wrong 'nearly badly'.

Your incident learning processes are a key component of a healthy safety management system. They can help you to improve safety, reduce risk, and create a proactive safety culture within your organisation.

Finally, by remembering and reflecting on previous tragedies like Mangatepopo and Whakaari/White Island, and implementing the changes that follow, we can all salvage something from the sadness, honour those affected, and ensure there is an element of growth and learning.

[Click here for more information](#)

*Ref 1: Safety management system requirements for adventure activity operators, version 2.0. This is the Safety Audit Standard for the purposes of regulation 19 of the Health and Safety at Work (Adventure Activities) Regulations 2016.*

*Ref 2: Understanding and Preventing Led Outdoor Accidents Data System, from the Australian National Incident Dataset*

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## Recreational access to private land



We have some significant updates regarding recreational access in Aotearoa. Firstly, the High Court has overturned the conviction of Whakaari Management Ltd (WML) in a decision with far-reaching implications for climbing and other recreational access on private land.

The Aotearoa Climbing Access Trust (ACAT) intervened in these proceedings to advocate for a judgment that would allay landowners' liability concerns regarding recreational access, as these concerns tend to create a chilling effect on recreational access to private land. The Court agreed with ACAT's submissions, finding that merely providing access to their land does not make landowners responsible for managing the risks associated with recreational activities or liable for any accidents, even if they charge an access fee or set reasonable conditions. This decision is significant as it clarifies the law and should resolve liability concerns for most landowners, reassuring them that they take on no risk of liability if they permit public access for activities like tramping, hunting, mountain biking, and kayaking, which involve inherent natural hazards.

In further positive news for outdoor recreation, Workplace Safety Minister Brooke van Velden has announced a change to the Health and Safety at Work Act that clarifies the law for landowners. This reform means that landowners will not be responsible if someone is injured on their land while doing recreational activities; instead, health and safety responsibilities will lie squarely on the organisation running the activities. This change will hopefully address the anxiety amongst landowners worried about their legal liability if someone gets hurt while recreating on their land. The new legislation will apply to both public and private land, from farms and forestry to school grounds, local council land, and regional and national parks.

Both of these build upon the WorkSafe Policy clarification that Recreation Aotearoa and the New Zealand Alpine Club lobbied to achieve in 2019.

## Outdoor instruction recognised as a Trade: A sector milestone led by AdventureWorks



### Advocacy that made a difference

A significant breakthrough for the outdoor adventure sector has been achieved this year, with outdoor instructor qualifications now officially recognised as part of the Trades funding category by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). At the heart of this transformative change is AdventureWorks, whose leadership and advocacy were instrumental in driving the reclassification forward.

For too long, outdoor instructor training had been undervalued in the Tertiary funding system, sitting under Humanities despite requiring extensive practical competence, technical knowledge, and a strong safety focus. Recognising this mismatch, AdventureWorks initiated and led a coordinated sector-wide advocacy campaign. Working alongside Recreation Aotearoa, Education Outdoors New Zealand (EONZ), the Tourism Industry Aotearoa, and the Workforce Development Council Toi Mai, the team gathered compelling evidence and presented a unified voice to both TEC and the Ministry of Education. Their case demonstrated that outdoor instructors complete training that is every bit as rigorous as that undertaken in traditional trades, making the reclassification both logical and overdue.

The change has important and far-reaching effects. It ensures more sustainable funding for training providers, supports the long-term viability of outdoor instructor career pathways, and promotes the growth of a skilled and professional workforce. The reclassification represents more than just a funding shift — it is a public statement about the value and professionalism of outdoor instruction in Aotearoa New Zealand. With the foundation now in place, the focus turns to building on this success: continuing to refine qualifications, strengthening industry connections, and ensuring training remains relevant, robust, and respected.

AdventureWorks has an agreement with NZOIA that allows graduates to gain a NZOIA qualification when completing their NZQA Level 4 (Leader) & 5 (NZOIA 1) assessments. This provides a seamless and recognised pathway into the industry and the professional association. AdventureWorks training model blends flexible, video-based online learning with practical, in-person training, thorough assessment, and dedicated tutor support. This approach keeps learning accessible and responsive while maintaining the highest standards of professional practice.

For more information on how AdventureWorks' leading training initiatives can benefit your staff and elevate the profession as a whole, reach out to Mark at [mark@adventureworks.co.nz](mailto:mark@adventureworks.co.nz).

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# WorkSafe Adventure Safety Guidelines update

The Register of Outdoor Safety Auditors (ROSA) is finalising the detail of a WorkSafe contract to redevelop the Activity Safety Guidelines (ASGs) and document current good practice. There will be 3 new ASGs (Climbing, Open Water, and Whitewater), along with revision of 9 existing ASGs. Each of the new ASGs will bring together various activities with similar hazards. As always, the key to the success of this project will be technical experts determining what is good practice for each activity. This requires a rigorous development process focused on ensuring sector ownership, which you can read [here](#). There will be a call for members of Working Groups and Consultation Groups. It's planned for the full set of ASGs to be completed by May 2026.

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## Upcoming Recreation Aotearoa events

### **Webinar: New Zealand Mountain Bike Design Guidelines Deep Dive**

**When:** Wednesday, August 27, 1pm – 2pm

**Cost:** Free for members, \$25 for non-members. Recreation Aotearoa has teamed up with key industry and mountain bike community experts to revise and update the New Zealand Mountain Bike Design Guidelines.

Developed with input from land managers, trail designers, builders and auditors around the country, the aim of the guidelines is to support the ongoing development and management of safe, consistent, sustainable, enjoyable mountain bike trails across New Zealand

The updated guidelines are supported by a new concise Trail Builders Handbook developed for use in the field.

Join our New Zealand Mountain Bike Design Guidelines Deep Dive online webinar for valuable insights on:

- Key changes to the guidelines including additions and updates
- New signage guidance developed alongside the New Zealand Land Safety Forum
- New auditing guidance and templates.

[Click here to register](#)

## **Event: Recreation Leaders' Summit**

**When:** 20 & 21 November at the Town Hall in Ōtautahi / Christchurch

Leading together: Innovation • Inclusion • Impact

The Recreation Leaders' Summit is a reimagining of our national Recreation Conference — created especially for leaders and aspiring leaders in our sector. Expect to connect with peers passionate about shaping the future of recreation.

As the recreation landscape in Aotearoa evolves, so too must the way we lead, plan, and respond. This November, our new Recreation Leaders' Summit embraces this momentum with a powerful metaphor: the braided river, he awa whiria.

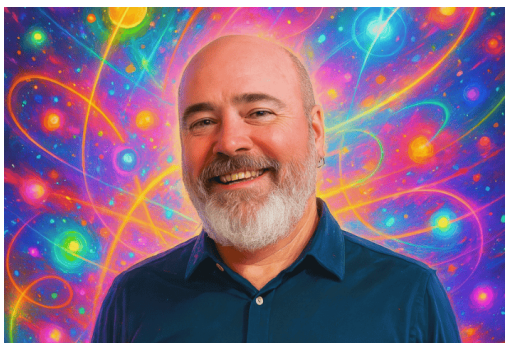
Like the braided rivers of Canterbury, the future of recreation is shaped by many strands. At the Recreation Leaders' Summit, we'll explore the dynamic currents and connections between the key drivers of affordability, social impact, technology and leadership.

The first day will include Keynotes, breakout sessions and our Awards Gala where we present our National Recreation Awards. The second day is a MasterClass focused on Planning for Spaces and Places in Challenging Times.

[Learn more and register here](#)

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## **Upcoming TIA webinars and events**



### **How do you get found in a world where AI designs the itinerary**

**When:** 27 August, 2pm - 3pm

AI tools like ChatGPT and Google Gemini are dramatically changing how visitors plan and experience their trips; influencing where they go, what they do, and where they stay. These shifts call for new approaches to marketing your tourism business.

In this practical one-hour webinar, C.A. Clarke from Miles Partnership will:

- Explore how AI is reshaping search and discovery in the marketplace
- Explain how AI "search" differs from traditional search engines
- Equip you with practical steps to improve your visibility in AI-driven platforms

Along the way we'll share real tourism examples, cover key do's and don'ts for protecting your content, and wrap up with an open Q&A so you can get answers to your specific questions.

Ideal for TIA members who want to understand AI's impact on travel behaviour and how to evolve their strategies to meet how travellers are now searching.

[Click here to register](#)



### Tourism Summit Aotearoa 2025

**Date:** Wednesday 29 October – [Tākina Wellington Convention and Exhibition Centre](#)

Join industry leaders and influencers at Tourism Summit Aotearoa 2025.

Widely regarded as tourism's must-attend thought leadership event, Tourism Summit Aotearoa is a key event on the annual tourism calendar, bringing together more than 300 business and industry leaders from around New Zealand.

The theme for this year's Summit is **New Zealand Tourism 2030: Being dynamic in a global marketplace** - will be sure to provide a platform for productive and thought-provoking discussions.

Attendees will explore the bold strategies, innovations and partnerships that are shaping the future of the tourism industry in Aotearoa New Zealand. With a forward-looking focus on 2030, we'll dive into what it means to be agile, sustainable, and competitive in an ever-evolving global marketplace. The Summit will be followed by the prestigious New Zealand Tourism Awards Dinner in the evening.

[Click here to register](#)

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