



AAC Publications

Accidental SOS Activation

Alaska, Denali, West Buttress

In the early morning hours of May 29, Denali mountaineering rangers were notified of an SOS activation at 11,200-foot camp. Ranger teams on the mountain at the 7,200-, 7,800-, and 14,200-foot camps were notified and involved in the information gathering process.

Over the next two hours, rangers at these locations made numerous attempts to contact climbing parties at 11,200-foot camp via radio. Talkeenta incident command was able to track down the device owner and his group information. Talkeetna personnel were also able to contact the owner's wife and initiate two-way communication with the device. At 2 a.m., the owner made contact and reported that it was indeed an accidental SOS alert.

ANALYSIS

The prevalence of satellite-based communication devices has increased exponentially in recent years. These devices have both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantages include the rapid deployment of rescue resources when the SOS feature is utilized, the transmission of the incident location, and (for most devices used today) two-way communication capability with rescue teams.

The primary disadvantages are the overuse of the SOS feature for non-emergent circumstances and the issue presented in this incident report—false activation. The latter occurs primarily through user error, and it unnecessarily puts a vast array of resources into motion. It is important for all device owners to know their equipment well, protect their devices from accidental SOS activation, and to only utilize the SOS feature in emergency circumstances requiring outside assistance. (Source: Denali Mountaineering Rangers.)

Images

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