

From: Committee, Economics & Industry Standing
To: John Jacoby
Subject: RE: Kimberley Ultramarathon event fire inquiry



From: John Jacoby [<mailto:john@rapidascent.com.au>]
Sent: Sunday, 1 April 2012 5:13 PM
To: Committee, Economics & Industry Standing
Subject: RE: Kimberley Ultramarathon event fire inquiry

Hi Tim, further to our phone conversation please find below a submission to present to the Inquiry into 2011 Kimberley Ultramarathon Event.

The submission is of a more general nature as I do not know all the details around the Kimberley incident apart from what has been written in the press and trail running publications and thus I am probably not in a position to judge the actions of event organizers and stakeholders of the Kimberley Ultramarathon event.

Sorry if the structure is not great but I just tried come up with some of the things we have adopted and some of the barriers we have encountered over the years. It certainly has been a dynamic industry, esp since the likes of Black Saturday. Feel free to contact me if you want more info or need any clarification.

Rapid Ascent(RA) is an adventure event management business that organizes adventure races, MTB, trail running, road cycling and road running events across 5 different states and territories in Australia. Rapid Ascent was founded in 2004.

Risk management planning (RMP) is a key component to all our events and RA are the primary formulators of the plan. The RMP can at time be formulated, varied and/or adapted following consultation with key stakeholder groups such as local council, DEC, rural fire service, ambulance, medical contractors etc. Very rarely, if ever does an organization who maybe a sponsor or financial supporter of an event such as eventscorp, private sponsors, govt. tourism bodies have any influence or control over the RMP and neither they should. It is NOT their role or responsibility to scrutinize the RMP. That responsibility lies firmly on the shoulders of the event organizers. Having said that, it is in the event organisers best interests to gain input and local expertise from local agencies such as DEC, fire service etc. to gain insight into assessing event risks such as fire, flood etc.

In Victoria at the Kona Odyssey event (large MTB event involving 1,800 riders in the Otway Ranges) we worked very closely with DEC, local council and fire service to formulate a fire management plan and evacuation plan and a n event cancellation/postponement policy. Much of this was a result of the post 2009 Black Saturday fires. We were careful to try and NOT adopt a blanket policy that could jeopardise the life of the event but instead implemented key milestones that if triggered meant further consultation between event organizers and DEC/fire service/local council to consider all the parameters before making a final decision about whether to stage the event.

Adopting "shoot from the hip" type policies such as "no event should be run in the Kimberley if a fire is burning within x distance of the event location" could cause serious negative impacts on the event and tourism industry. A more detailed and localized approach should be adopted so each event is assessed relative to its own set of circumstances. To achieve this, accurate data of local conditions need to be available and need appropriate expertise to be accurately assessed. This can usually be done by emergency service type organizations and DEC type organizations but in close consultation with the event organizer.

Every opportunity should be made to provide a flexible platform for event organizers to modify their events if a risk is deemed to high to conduct the event as planned. Rather than a blanket policy to cancel an event, in many situations a modified race course or format can result in achieving a manageable risk profile.

Another large factor to consider is communications and many of RA events are held in remote areas where 100% comms coverage is extremely difficult to achieve. Sat. phones are often a poor means of comms. i.e. sat phones

hate trees, valleys, gorges and other environments where limited exposure to the sky is encountered. Radio networks are often hard to establish if a large coverage area is required or if topography is extreme, however if a sound comms network can be established then this goes along way to drastically reducing risk factors, improving evacuation and notification times and providing a cohesive and effective event management team. Current urban living people expect instant comms and 100% comms coverage but this is an unrealistic expectation when events are conducted in remote and difficult terrain and this fact often needs to be strongly communicated to competitors, volunteers and other members.i.e. don't expect an ambulance to arrive in less than 7 minutes if you need one and your stuck in the middle of the desert or the rainforest. This may also extend to such things as air evacuations. For eg. Most people expect they can be airlifted out of any predicament within 10mins. This is NOT the case. Eg. A MTB race we conduct in/around Alice Springs we have had to try and evacuate riders who have been seriously injured and come under criticism for the fact they were not airlifted. The fact is there are no helicopters capable of moving a stretchered patient within 1,200kms of Alice Springs. People's expectations need to be modified to what they are used to in an urban environment.

Having said that it still should be the event organizers responsibility to provide adequate medical support and evacuation methods that are consistent with the limitations imposed on them by suitably available resources within the event area and what is the "norm" for that geographical area.

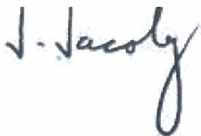
An event management team also needs an appropriate chain of command to enable them to act promptly and responsibly in times of stress.

WA Tourism should not be responsible for the RMP of an event they provide financial support to. Yes, WA Tourism should be satisfied they are dealing with a reputable event organization but I do not believe their responsibility extends beyond this.

As mentioned above some WA Govt Dept agencies such as DEC, FESA etc. have a responsibility to provide input and information to event organizers about local conditions and possible risks the event organizer maybe unaware of but again it should not be those agencies responsibility as to the actual conduct of the event.

All sports/events carry risks and there is a perception that "extreme sports" are risky, foolhardy and dangerous but the statistics do not generally support this widely held belief. The belief is there as a result of the general public and media ignorance surrounding the relevant extreme sport. "Extreme" sportspeople are usually very well prepared and aware of the risks applicable to their support and mitigate against them as much as possible. This also applies to reputable event organizers.

Regards,



John Jacoby – Director, Rapid Ascent Pty Ltd
www.rapidascent.com.au