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Air rescue service gears up for winter

The air rescue service Rega is preparing to face the busy winter sports season. More than a quarter of Switzerland's population are members of Rega. Rega's helicopters can reach the scene of an accident anywhere in the country in 15 minutes.



One of Rega's fleet of helicopters

The ski season traditionally starts in the first week of December. Winter is the busiest time for the air rescue service, with up to 140 interventions in one week-end. Rega's fleet of helicopters is available all year round to airlift members of the public in distress needing medical attention. The service also has three ambulance jets at its disposal to repatriate ill or injured Swiss from abroad.

Rega rescues over 8,000 people by helicopter per year. More than a quarter are mountain rescues and a further 1,000 are traffic accidents. When people are trapped in an avalanche, time is of the essence, and Rega has teams of dogs at its disposal organised by its partner the Swiss Alpine Club.

During the summer months, cattle are also among Rega's "patients". As part of the assistance programme for mountain farmers, Rega rescues injured, trapped or dead livestock from rough terrain and transports them to the nearest location that can be reached by an overland vehicle.

In the event of an accident or serious illness in Switzerland, anyone can ask Rega for assistance 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, by calling its emergency number or via emergency radio.

Based on the location and the diagnosis, the operations centre at the Rega centre at Zurich-Kloten Airport alerts the nearest helicopter base which has a helicopter in the air within five minutes.

In addition to missions to the scene of an accident, Rega helicopters transfer patients who are already receiving medical care from one hospital to another.

Winter sports are risky, according to a new snow safety campaign by the Swiss Council for Accident Protection, which reminds the public that there are on average 1,000 such accidents per day during the winter season in Switzerland. The campaign encourages people to wear helmets when on the slopes, an accessory that reduces the risk of head injuries by 75 per cent. Another part of the body that can be well protected is the wrist. Wrist protectors reduce the risk of injury by 80 per cent. Knee injuries are most common in skiing accidents, and the campaign points out that well-fitted skis and boots significantly reduce the risk of knee and leg injury.

from swissinfo

Drivers rolling stoned is a society problem

Marijuana is the most common illegal drug consumed by drivers on Swiss roads, according to the country's first nationwide drug statistics study.

But cocaine use is growing rapidly among motorists, with the percentage of drivers testing positive for the stimulant nearly double that found just a few years ago.

4,794 blood samples police had gathered from people suspected of driving under the influence of drugs were studied. Cases where police tested only for alcohol were not considered.

In nine out of ten suspected cases the drivers had one or more mind-altering substances coursing through their veins. Marijuana was by far the most common at 48 per cent, followed by alcohol (35 per cent), cocaine (25 per cent), opiates (ten per cent) and amphetamines (seven per cent). No drugs were found in 11 per cent of the samples that were processed at federal laboratories.

This first Swiss study points out that driving under the influence of drugs is a serious problem on the roads in Switzerland.

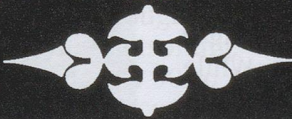
Cocaine was often used with other substances. Combining drugs is typically the most dangerous situation for risking an accident.

A study by the European Union in 2005 showed that drivers who used only marijuana were slightly less likely to have accidents than those who had blood-alcohol levels of 0.05 per cent and far less than those who both smoked and drank.

In January 2005, Switzerland reduced the legal limit for driving under the influence of alcohol from 0.08 per cent to 0.05 per cent - a level of intoxication that statistically carries about the same risks of having an accident as having consumed no drinks at all.

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