

OutdoorsNZ and TIA Adventure and Outdoor Operator Workshops

In November and December 2011 OutdoorsNZ and TIA jointly ran regional workshops in 11 centres around NZ.

Workshop objectives

The objectives of the meetings were to:

- Update the sector on:
 - The regulations – what information DOL had released to date and what was to be released in the future.
 - The registration process – notification and auditing
 - The generic guidance tool and the launch of the Support Adventure website.
- Provide information about the package of recommendations that came out of the review:
 - Generic guidance (Support Adventure website)
 - Activity specific guidelines
 - Incident reporting system
 - Competence measures and levels
- To gain feedback about all of the above.
- Provide project leaders with face-to-face interaction with operators.
- Provide operators with networking opportunities

Overall perception of the meetings

- The workshops generally attracted a good turn-out, especially considering the time of the year and the pressures on operators during the busy summer months.
- Most people see the new regulations as a positive move that will strengthen safety across the adventure tourism and outdoor commercial sector, and that they won't have a major operational or financial impact on the many operators who are operating at current accepted industry practice and are already undergoing external audits.
- Some people did have concerns and questions about the regulations.
- Key areas of concern included
 - Confusion around the regulations
 - Concerns about the costs associated with audits
 - Lack of surety around audit provision and criteria
 - Concerns around enforcement of the regulations
- Outdoors NZ and TIA collated the list of concerns discussed at each meeting and produced a summary report. This report is attached below and was presented to DOL at the end of December 2011. Meetings are continuing with DOL throughout February to advocate on these matters.

Concerns and suggestions from the November workshops that have been communicated to the DOL via Outdoors NZ and TIA

Concerns around the regulations and the audit process:

- Operators are required to pay numerous agencies for similar types of assurance. The cost of compliance is becoming prohibitive and the perceived addition cost of regulated audits is of concern.
- There is considerable confusion around the definition of Adventure Activity in the regulations this leads to operators being unclear about whether they should notify or not.
- People expressed frustration with the coverage of the regulations. Of particular concern was the exclusion of schools, rental operators and indoor climbing walls. Many feel that the limited coverage is unlikely to lead to safety improvements across the sector.
- People want to be assured that the regulations will be enforced and that those who are already below standards will not continue to fall through the gaps.
- People are unclear about how the department will enforce the regulations
- People want information about the style and process of the audits (paper based v's visits, who they are done by, how they are applied). There was also discussion around the length of the audit cycle, many would like to see reward for excellence built into the process (those with better performance get a longer cycle).

Areas where more information is required

Operators have asked for clarity within the regulations around the following

- Rental equipment – many feel it is illogical to exclude hiring equipment when the goal is to improve safety.
- The definition of instruction and guiding (this links to the rental equipment question).
- The definition of deliberate
- The position of individual contractors – especially when they are offering activities that fall under the regulations for schools
- The position of operators who employ external contractors to provide training for their staff to extend skills and experience.
- How the regulations will be enforced?
- Activities that have been specifically asked about include:
 - Horse trekking
 - Luge
 - Ski rental on ski fields (they may have a lesson and then go outside the ski area boundary)
 - Other activities – like mountaineering, within the ski area boundary.
 - Snow Hosts (volunteers but they get a free seasons pass for their services) take customers on ski area tours that may include areas outside the ski area boundary.
 - Inflatable kayaks

- Rental of fixtures and equipment– e.g. climbing walls / flying foxes

Possible solutions put forward by the groups:

- Lobby for regulatory bodies and audit providers (including ACC, local authorities, DOC etc)) to streamline their process, avoid duplication and merge process to simplify the paper work and reduce the compliance fees to the operator.
- The DOL has mystery shoppers who visit organisations not registered to check they are not operating within the regulations.
- Provide more information to the public via the media and other public forums about NZ safety systems and different audit standards so that they are in the best position to make an informed choice. This may include involving tourist publications like Lonely Planet etc.

Suggestions for Audit providers:

- Have “revalidation” audits that are shorter in time and therefore cheaper – just look at changes for example.
- Have an audit cycle that rewards great performance – those who and exemplary get longer between audits. Those who only just meet requirements need to be audited more regularly.
- There was also strong support for engagement of technical sector specialists as auditors.
- Maybe different operational areas could be audited with different time frames. For example safety component and activities could be done yearly – but quality component may only need to happen every three years.
- Have paid mentors who can provide on going feedback and moderation (similar to the paid role in MNZ)
- Have people from within the sector who are willing to assist to proof draft documents to ensure they are complete before the audit - peer support review. (Assistance to ensure well prepared for the audit so can keep time involved down and also costs).
- Ensure audit providers are working together to create solutions for the sector
- Ensure audit providers have a disputes process that involves the DOL so that operators are clear on the steps they need to take, and who they need to take these with if they have a complaint.