

National Security Force's role in mitigation of aquatic disasters in Brazil

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The tropical climate, the immense aquatic extension, the alarming number of recorded drownings in the country and the impossibility of providing water safety at major events and disasters, reinforce the importance of federal government intervention. In 2012, drowning was the second leading cause of death in children 1-9 years old and the third in people aged 10 to 19 years, in Brazil. Nearly 6500 people die each year by drowning, averaging almost 18 deaths/day. Brazil has hosted several major events, attracting a significant number of visitors.

As relevant events we highlight the World Youth Day that, in 2013, gathered more than 2 million people at Copacabana's beach (Rio de Janeiro) to attend the Holy Mass held by the Pope. The Fire Department rescued 304 people from drowning along the 5 days of the event. During the FIFA World Cup (2014, Brazil), 15,2 million of people circulated in Brazilian airports – an increase of 132% compared to the same period in 2013. Additionally, there are the permanent events of the calendar, such as New Year's Eve, that in 2015 gathered more than 2 million people at Copacabana's beach alone; and the carnival, attracting 1 million tourists and gathering more than 5 million people in the city. Our next event will be the Olympics (2016), which has the expectation of receiving 1 million foreign tourists in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Among the constitutional duties of the state, are the protection and the defence of its citizens. One of the agents responsible for ensuring such duty is the Fire Department.

The National Security Force was created from a federal agreement between the States and the Federal Government, in order to meet the demands of the State, to support any atypical event that exceeds their individual capacity. It's composed of military from the Brazilian states, which receive specialized training to operate in disasters.

Because of the World Cup event, 111 lifeguards from 18 Fire Departments were asked to perform a centralized retraining in the capital of the country, requiring 110 hours to address the issue concerning the training of lifeguards and were sent to the Rio Grande do Norte State, during the period of the event, as requested by the state's government, in order to strengthen the lifeguards contingent.

During the period from 8Jun to 13Jul2014, there were 5.259 preventive actions and 55 rescues. The figures compiled during the period of permanence of National Force's lifeguards, show a very significant increase in the number of preventive actions, which resulted in a significant reduction of drowning cases. During the 35 days of operation, the number of preventive actions was 98.18% higher than the same period of 2013, with more rescues (+90,9%), culminating in a reduction of 71,42% drowning deaths. 81% of the cases were attended by the National Force, while the remaining were attended by the Rio Grande do Norte Fire Department. Resources involved: 13 vehicles, 5 quads, 3 IRBs, 100 pairs of flippers, 100 rescue floaters, 10 binoculars, 50 sunshades, 25 radio communicators, 7 mobile phones. The coastal extension of operation comprised 145km, divided into 19 observation posts.

Through this work we demonstrate how the National Force can take on an important role, given the difficulty of timely response from the government, towards events that overtake their capacity of human and material resources, and in particular concerning to water safety.