

Hamilton Police Service

The Hamilton Police Service have the overall responsibility for all in water and ice water rescue responses in all bodies of water in the City. The Hamilton Police Service Marine Unit's history dates back to the origins of the Hamilton Harbour Commission's Harbour Police in 1921. For more than 60 years, the Harbour Police were responsible for policing Hamilton Harbour and its surrounding shores. In 1986, the Harbour Police were absorbed into the Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Police Service. Many of the existing members of the Harbour Police transferred over as constables with Hamilton Police. Since that date, patrols and policing of Hamilton Harbour have been the responsibility and mandate of the Hamilton Police Service Marine Unit. The Hamilton Police Marine Unit also works closely with a number of partner agencies, including the RCMP, Toronto and Peel Police, Canadian Coast Guard, Canadian Air Force, Hamilton Beach Rescue Unit, Ministry of Natural Resources, Transport Canada, Canadian Safe Boating Council, and the Hamilton Port Authority.

Depending on the season, the Marine Unit is actively on the water from March/April through to November, but is operational year-round. The Marine Unit responds to ice rescue and swift water or urban flooding incidents. At present, the Marine Unit is comprised of four full-time members who operate in two teams of two Officers and work 7am – 7pm, Monday to Saturday and 8am – 6pm on Sundays, meaning that during these time frames, there are only two Marine Officers on duty. If an incident occurs, the two Marine Officers respond. No additional trained personnel are paged or called in. If an incident occurs outside of the hours in which Marine Officers are working, these Officers are not on call or on standby. The Hamilton Police Marine Unit are equipped with the necessary tools and equipment to conduct ice water rescues including but not limited to:

Argo amphibious vehicle – an amphibious vehicle utilized for search and rescue which can be deployed on land, ice or water



Fortuna rapid deployment sled – an inflatable water craft that can be deployed on the ice and allows for a patient to be extricated from the water and pulled on board. The rapid deployment sled has extremely upturned ends. They allow the rescuer to "drive"

the sleds open end over the victim while the victim's head remains above water at all times. It also allows a rescuer to reach forward into a pour-over while still safely centered in the sled. The floor is open at each end, allowing 2 entry points. The freeboard height is only inches, enabling a rescuer to easily pull a victim into the sled.



MARSARS rescue sled – a sled that can propelled across the ice to a victim. As the sled nears a victim the empty sled becomes a self-rescue reaching device for victims that can assist in own rescue. The sled provides for a quicker extraction by minimizing risk of injury to both victim and rescuer.



Mustang Suits – a floatation suit that provides in-water insulation to delay the onset of hypothermia in the event of water immersion.



During the winter months, the on-duty Marine Unit staff may be utilized for other responsibilities (i.e.: RIDE Program) and if required for an ice water rescue call they would respond from that location. In some circumstances, they may be required to pick

up equipment from the station located at Hamilton Harbour before responding to a scene.

Initial training of Hamilton Police Marine Unit personnel is a one week ice rescue training course conducted in Toronto by the Toronto Police Service. Following that initial training, any additional training completed is initiated and completed by the Marine Unit Officer's as deemed necessary. There is no adequacy standard for Police in relation to ice rescue. It should be noted that as previously identified by the Hamilton Police Service in a report dated May 2013, the Toronto Police Service recommend that a minimum of three (3) trained personnel be available and in optimal circumstances, five (5) trained personnel be available to safely complete an ice rescue.

Given the front line service pressures that the Hamilton Police Service are faced with, a May 2013 Hamilton Police Service report identified some key concerns including a concern that there is limited staff resources available to provide ice water rescue services in a consistent, timely and safe manner throughout the City. Two Marine Unit Officers is already below the Toronto Police recommendation of three to five trained personnel. Sickness, annual leave, training requirements and court time can have an impact on availability of trained personnel. In this same report, the Hamilton Police Service reported on estimated response times to various Conservation Areas across the City. Those estimated response times were as follows:

| LOCATION | RESPONSE TIME (estimated) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Hamilton Harbour | Minutes (if in station) |
| Valens Conservation Area | 60 minutes |
| Christie Conservation Area | 40 minutes |
| Binbrook Conservation Area | 40 minutes |
| Fifty Point Conservation Area | 25 minutes |
| Mountsberg Conservation Area | 60 minutes |

These anticipated response times are critical when dealing with victims that may be suffering from hypothermia. Information from the Hamilton Police Marine Unit identified that the Hamilton Police Service responded to and conducted two ice water rescues in 2017. There is a potential for increased ice water incidents on many of the bodies of water in and around the City of Hamilton due to the increased level of popularity of outdoor/back to nature activities and with the current and future increase in popularity/use of the bay front areas. Ice water rescue responses are a low frequency call however the consequences/risks associated with these calls is extremely high.