Nunavik Search and Rescue Roundtable

Beyond the Official Record: Documenting Search and Rescue Incidents in Nunavik

Report Prepared for Kativik Civil Security

Peter Kikkert and Ian Belton

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Executive Summary

This report examines the longstanding underreporting of search and rescue (SAR) incidents in Nunavik and its consequences for communities, responders, and the broader SAR system. Developed through a partnership between Kativik Civil Security, community responders, and academic members of the Nunavik SAR Roundtable, the project sought to better understand why many SAR incidents are never formally reported and to document as many historic SAR cases as possible across the region.

Drawing upon fieldwork conducted in all fourteen Nunavik communities, local SAR records, Northern Village documentation, Inuit Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Support Program files, reporting by federal agencies, and discussions at meetings of the Nunavik SAR Roundtable, the project documented 945 SAR incidents between 2000 and 2024, with the majority spanning 2019-2024. These figures reveal a dramatic discrepancy between actual SAR activity in Nunavik and the number of incidents reflected in official government reporting systems. The Nunavik Police Service (NPS) is the agency of jurisdiction for ground SAR and responsible for supporting air and marine responses. According to official procedures, all SAR cases should be reported to the police – but only a fraction are. In 2024, for instance, the NPS recorded nine SAR cases, yet communities responded to more than 142 incidents. In the three previous years, the NPS recorded fewer than 5% of all cases.

This report explains that underreporting stems from several interconnected factors, including limited collaboration between communities and external SAR partners, confusion over reporting procedures and responsibilities, inconsistent understandings of what constitutes a SAR incident, the absence of standardized reporting systems, limited SAR coordination capacity, and a longstanding culture of communities "going it alone" in emergency response.

The findings also demonstrate that SAR in Nunavik is a continuous and demanding public safety function, the burden of which is carried primarily by local responders operating in one of the harshest and most rapidly changing environments in Canada. Ground and marine incidents involving hunters, travellers, and community members dominate the regional SAR landscape, while climate change, changing travel patterns, infrastructure limitations, food insecurity, and increasing outside activity continue to elevate operational demands and risk.

Finally, the report highlights several recent developments working to improve SAR reporting and documentation in Nunavik, including stronger collaboration between several key SAR partners, expansion of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary, the creation of a Regional SAR Coordinator position, and the piloting of a regional SAR reporting platform. Together, these initiatives represent important steps toward building a more collaborative, better documented, and more effective SAR system in Nunavik.

1. Invisible Emergencies: The Underreporting of Search and Rescue Incidents in Nunavik and its Consequences

In 2022, the Nunavik Search and Rescue (SAR) Roundtable – a partnership between community responders, government practitioners, and researchers – met for the first time. The roundtable was created in response to repeated calls from Nunavimmiut for review and discussion of the region's SAR system. Community responders also requested a platform through which they could discuss issues with their search and rescue partners and strengthen the relationships required to conduct effective SAR operations in the region.[1]

Discussions at the first roundtable confirmed what Kativik Civil Security had long recognized: the high number of SAR cases that community responders face is not reflected in the official record. SAR cases in Nunavik were often not reported to the responsible government agency – they were handled at the community level. As one participant at the 2022 roundtable explained, "The SAR we do locally without disturbing other authorities is done a lot. [Our SAR team] goes out half the time and I don't even hear about it. We emphasize getting things done." Another responder pointed out, "Probably over half the cases we never report to anyone. We just handle these cases on our own."

Within Canada's search and rescue system, the Canadian Armed Forces is responsible for the effective operation of the federal coordinated maritime and aeronautical SAR system, while the Canadian Coast Guard leads the maritime SAR program for incidents involving vessels or persons in distress on federal waterways, including Ungava Bay, Hudson Bay, and James Bay. Humanitarian search and rescue (ground SAR or GSAR) incidents – such as searches for missing hunters on the land or ice, or for boaters on inland waters – fall under provincial jurisdiction and have been delegated to the Nunavik Police Service (NPS), although the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) may assume control during prolonged or particularly complex operations.

Accordingly, marine and aeronautical incidents are intended to be reported to the Joint Rescue Coordination Centres in Halifax or Trenton, while ground incidents are to be reported to the NPS. Formal reporting requirements in Nunavik are further outlined in two protocols developed and adopted by Kativik Regional Government, the

[1] The roundtable was never envisioned as a one-and-done event. It is an ongoing initiative that provides the time and space to discuss and improve the search and rescue system, offers training opportunities, helps to organize other SAR activities, and strengthens the relationships required for effective SAR operations.

NPS, and the SQ: *Procedure for Land Search and Rescue in the Kativik Region* and *Search and Rescue Procedure for Maritime and Aeronautical Incidents in the Kativik Region*. These protocols specify that ground, maritime, and aeronautical incidents should all be communicated to the NPS. Although the police service is not the lead agency for maritime or aeronautical SAR, it is intended to serve as the "regional liaison and coordinator" for these incidents. In principle, therefore, all SAR incidents occurring in Nunavik – regardless of type or jurisdiction – are supposed to come to the attention of the NPS.

Official NPS records indicate only 18 SAR incidents of all types in 2019, 29 in 2020, 5 in each year from 2021 through 2023, and 9 in 2024.[2] When reviewing these numbers at the 2024 roundtable, one community responder retorted: "Five cases in 2022? Really? We had at least three times that many in my community alone."

The consequences of underreporting SAR incidents in Nunavik are significant and far-reaching. Most immediately, when incidents are not reported to the appropriate authorities, community responders do not receive access to the operational support available through Canada's SAR system, including police resources, Canadian Coast Guard vessels and icebreakers, Royal Canadian Air Force aircraft, and other provincial and federal assets. As a result, local authorities and volunteer responders are often left to manage complex and potentially dangerous operations largely on their own, despite not being formally mandated, funded, or adequately supported to carry out this role.

When incidents are not reported to the agency of jurisdiction, the financial burden of the response also falls almost entirely on regional and local organizations. In Nunavik, much of this cost has been absorbed by the Inuit Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Support Program, established under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. While search and rescue is not the program's intended purpose, it has nevertheless provided more than $8 million to support SAR operations since 2002.[3] In practice, millions of dollars originally intended to support harvesting activities, food security, and Inuit land use have instead been redirected toward emergency response.

Underreporting also has broader systemic consequences. Accurate and well-documented SAR incident data is essential for operational planning, understanding lost person behaviour, identifying trends and recurring hazards, assessing regional risk patterns, informing prevention efforts, and determining training, equipment, and staffing requirements across the SAR system. Critically, SAR data is used justify the allocation of resources at the regional, provincial, and federal levels. When incident reporting is incomplete or inconsistent, it creates a distorted understanding of operational realities in Nunavik. This, in turn, undermines evidence-based decision-making, obscures the true scale and frequency of SAR activity in the region, and makes it more difficult for Nunavik communities and organizations to advocate for the

[2] Data shared with Nunavik SAR Roundtable by the Nunavik Police Service.
[3] Information taken from the annual reports of the Inuit Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Support Program (available at https://www.krg.ca/en-CA/publications/annual-reports) and from presentations at meetings of the Nunavik SAR Roundtable.

personnel, equipment, infrastructure, and long-term investments needed to support an effective and sustainable SAR system.[4]

2. The Project: Understanding Underreporting in Nunavik and Documenting Incidents

In response to Nunavik's search and rescue data gap, Kativik Civil Security and the roundtable's academic partners launched a project to:

a) better understand the causes of underreporting;
b) systematically document historic regional SAR incidents, particularly those from 2019-2024, to bring official records more in line with operational reality;
c) explore what past cases reveal about the causes of SAR incidents in Nunavik.[5]

To accomplish the project's objectives, the research team – Peter Kikkert, Ian Belton, Rory Jakubec, Liam Smith, and Archie Rudman – gathered information at multiple meetings of the Nunavik SAR Roundtable between 2022 and 2025. While the team collected some search and rescue case data during these meetings, discussions focused primarily on the causes, extent, and operational consequences of underreporting across the region. These conversations provided critical context for understanding how SAR incidents are managed, documented, and remembered within Nunavik communities, as well as the limitations of existing official reporting systems.

The research team also carried out fieldwork in all fourteen Nunavik communities, supported by Kativik Civil Security staff members Kris Tukkiapik, Steven Walker, and Jordan Jones. Between June and July 2024, visits were conducted in ten communities (Aupaluk, Kangiqsualujjuaq, Kangiqsujuaq, Kangirsuk, Kuujjuaq, Quaqtaq, Tasiujaq, Akulivik, Puvirnituq, and Salluit). The remaining four communities (Ivujivik, Inukjuak, Kuujjuarapik, and Umiujaq) were visited in March 2025. In each community, the team met with SAR coordinators and responders based on their availability, as well as representatives from Northern Village administrations and local leadership.

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[4] Information taken from the annual reports of the Inuit Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Support Program (available at https://www.krg.ca/en-CA/publications/annual-reports) and from presentations at meetings of the Nunavik SAR Roundtable.

[5] Financial support for this project was drawn from two sources: the Canada-Inuit Nunangat-United Kingdom (CINUK) Research Program's Nunavut-Nunavik SAR Project and two Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund projects. The Nunavut-Nunavik SAR Project is a partnership between several academic institutions (St. Francis Xavier University, the University of Strathclyde, Dalhousie University, Trent University, and the Marine Institute at Memorial University) and community responders focused on strengthening the Arctic SAR system. The Search and Rescue New Initiatives Fund (SARNIF) is a Public Safety Canada program that supports projects that will improve Canada's SAR system. Managed by Kativik Civil Security, Project 22322 - SAR Data Management in Northern Québec (Nunavik) is focused on addressing the gaps and the lack of standardization in SAR information gathering, reporting, and data management within Nunavik. Led by Peter Kikkert, SARNIF Project 24040 - Closing the Gaps: Addressing Critical Challenges in Arctic Ground Search and Rescue is a partnership between academics from St. Francis Xavier University, Dalhousie University, Trent University, and the Marine Institute at Memorial University, Nunavut Emergency Management, Kativik Civil Security, and the Inuit community responders that sit on the Nunavut and Nunavik SAR Roundtables. The project is focused on co-developing solutions to governance, training, and capability gaps, and investigating new and emerging alerting, communications, and geolocation technologies. With support from community SAR groups across Nunavik, research ethics approval for this project has been secured from St. Francis Xavier University Research Ethics Board (File 25969).

During these visits, the team reviewed all locally available materials relating to search and rescue incidents, including:

- Digital and hand-written SAR reports from coordinators and SAR team members
- Northern Village administration records
- Inuit Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Support Program records
- Fast Rescue Craft logbooks
- Volunteer Fire Department records

While our focus was on the five-year period from 2019-2024, we cast a wide net and included all available reports in our assessment.

To supplement this community-based research, the team also accessed SAR case data from several regional and national sources, including:

- Search and Rescue Program Information Management System data
    - Developed by the Canadian Coast Guard, SISAR integrates all marine SAR incidents into a national database
- Case reports sent by communities to Kativik Civil Security
- Inuit Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Support Program
- Case reports from 2nd Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (incidents involving Ranger activation)
- Records from the Nunavik Police Service

When reviewing the statistics presented in this report, several critical points must be kept in mind. First, reporting practices vary considerably between communities, often shaped by differing local understandings of what constitutes a SAR incident. As a result, there is little regional consistency regarding which events should or should not be formally documented as search and rescue cases. Second, the majority of records maintained by Northern Village administrations and the Inuit Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Support Program contain only limited operational detail, often recording little more than the date of a response and the number of hours responders were active. Third, almost every community reported that some SAR incidents are never formally recorded at the local level, while many also noted that older records have been misplaced, damaged, or destroyed over time. Accordingly, the further back in time the research extends, the more limited, inconsistent, and incomplete the available data becomes. Finally, when confronted with fragmentary, inconsistent, or unclear reporting and in the absence of sufficient evidence to confirm that an incident occurred, the research team chose to err on the side of caution and exclude those possible cases from the dataset. For all these reasons, the incidents documented in this report should not be interpreted as representing the full number of SAR cases that have occurred in Nunavik. Rather, they should be understood as a conservative minimum based on the records and evidence available.

3. Why Have Search and Rescue Cases Been Underreported in Nunavik?

Discussions at meetings of the Nunavik SAR Roundtable, as well as the interviews and focus groups conducted during in-community field work, highlighted that the underreporting of SAR incidents in Nunavik stems from several interconnected issues:

A. Limited Collaboration: Historically, the most significant barrier to reporting has been the limited collaboration between community responders and external SAR partners, including the Nunavik Police Service, the Sûreté du Québec (SQ), Canadian Coast Guard, and the Canadian Armed Forces. A wide range of issues have limited collaboration: distrust of police and southern agencies, shaped by past experiences, inconsistent engagement, and limited regional presence, weak relationships, inconsistent communication, language barriers, and limited understanding of partner roles and capabilities. Further, community responders have highlighted the fundamental mismatch between mandates and capabilities. The NPS holds responsibility for humanitarian SAR in Nunavik but lacks the ability to make substantive contributions to operations. Federal partners possess significant capabilities but remain geographically distant and have not always been well integrated into community response systems. Many responders saw little practical benefit in notifying agencies that lacked permanent operational resources in the region. As one roundtable participant explained, "Why would I report a case if I don't think the authorities would help us or even be able to help us?"

Importantly, where collaboration between SAR partners has been strengthened, reporting has improved. Roundtable participants highlighted meaningful progress in collaboration between community responders, the Canadian Coast Guard, and the Joint Rescue Coordination Centres. The collaboration has supported the expansion of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary in Nunavik. These units receive training on how to report incidents and require formal taskings to respond, all of which has improved reporting through the federal SAR system by creating clearer operational and administrative pathways for documenting incidents.

B. Confusion Over SAR Notification and Reporting Procedures: Participants at the Nunavik SAR Roundtables repeatedly emphasized confusion over how SAR incidents should be reported and to whom. Many community responders remain uncertain about which organizations are responsible for different types of incidents, when incidents should be escalated beyond the community level, and how to contact the appropriate authorities. These responders consistently expressed a desire for more education and practical training on how the SAR system functions, how to activate it, what information to share, and how local responders can access outside operational support.

Several roundtable participants also noted that reporting procedures can appear overly complex, particularly during stressful or rapidly evolving incidents. In some cases, responders are unsure whether they should contact the NPS, Kativik Civil Security, the JRCCs, the Coast Guard, or other organizations first. This uncertainty can delay notifications or discourage communities from formally activating the broader SAR system altogether.

At the same time, participants highlighted that meaningful progress has been made in recent years through the work of the Nunavik SAR Roundtables and the efforts of Kativik Civil Security, the Canadian Coast Guard, and the JRCCs. More community responders now understand how to activate the SAR system, who to contact during incidents, and what kinds of support external partners can provide. Nevertheless,

participants stressed that continued outreach, training, relationship-building, and practical exercises will be necessary to sustain and expand this progress**.**

C. Confusion Over What Constitutes a SAR Incident: Many participants also identified uncertainty over what should formally be considered a search and rescue incident. Without clear or universally understood definitions establishing the threshold for a SAR case in the region, much is left to the interpretation of local authorities and responders. In some communities, incidents are only formally reported when a larger scale search is required, while rescues involving known locations, mechanical breakdowns, stranded travellers, equipment recoveries, or welfare checks may not be documented at all. Some coordinators explained that they rarely report shoulder-season incidents involving stuck ATVs because these situations are often viewed as routine travel problems rather than emergencies.

Participants emphasized that decisions about whether an incident constitutes a SAR case often involve complex risk assessments that consider the subject, the environment, weather conditions, available equipment, travel experience, and the potential consequences of inaction. As a result, what one community considers a reportable SAR incident may not be documented at all in another community facing similar circumstances. This lack of consistency contributes significantly to uneven reporting practices across the region.

D. Lack of Trained SAR Coordinators: Several participants emphasized that communities without experienced or well-trained SAR coordinators are less likely to formally document incidents or activate the broader SAR system. In these situations, SAR operations are often managed informally by local volunteers, family members, or community leaders without notification to external agencies or the creation of official records. The absence of standardized training in SAR coordination contributes to inconsistent operational practices across the region.

Communities with stronger coordination capacity generally demonstrated more systematic reporting practices, better record retention, clearer operational procedures, and more frequent engagement with outside agencies during incidents. Participants consistently highlighted the importance of sustained coordinator training and support from partners to improve both operational effectiveness and reporting consistency across Nunavik.

E. Absence of a Standardized Regional SAR Reporting System: Participants consistently highlighted the absence of a simple, regionally standardized SAR reporting system as a major contributor to underreporting. Existing reporting practices are fragmented and vary considerably between organizations and communities. Responsibility for collecting and maintaining records is often unclear and may shift between SAR coordinators, elected officials, Northern Village administrators, volunteer fire departments, police, and other local organizations. As a result, documentation practices are inconsistent and records are often incomplete, difficult to access, or lost over time. Some communities maintain detailed case files and operational logs, while others rely primarily on informal notes, reimbursement records, or personal recollections. In many cases, information remains entirely local and is never incorporated into regional or national SAR databases.

Roundtable participants stressed the need for a regional reporting system that is systematic, simple, consistent, and user-friendly. Participants emphasized that any new reporting system must be adapted to the operational realities of Nunavik communities and should not impose excessive administrative burdens on volunteer responders and local coordinators. They also highlighted that a new system should include an educational component explaining why accurate reporting and data collection matters for operational effectiveness, future planning, prevention initiatives, training, funding allocation, and advocacy for additional SAR resources and infrastructure.

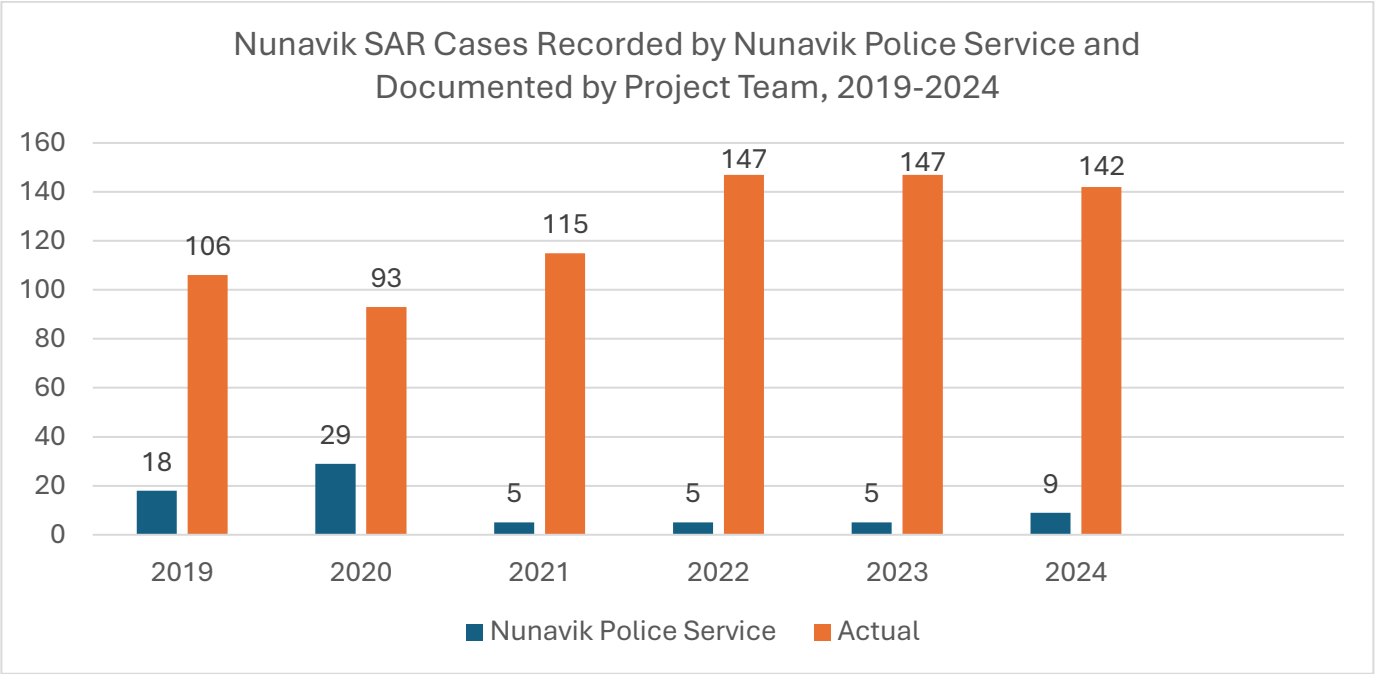
F. A Longstanding Culture of "Going It Alone": Given these barriers, many communities have historically chosen to conduct marine and ground SAR operations primarily at the local level without formally activating the broader SAR system or reporting incidents through official channels. Over time, this evolved into a deeply ingrained operational culture of "going it alone," shaped by necessity, experience, and limited confidence in the responsiveness of outside agencies. In many communities, marine and ground searches became so routinely managed at the community level that local authorities and responders often viewed reporting incidents to outside authorities as unnecessary unless additional assets were specifically required.

4. The Data: Historic Search and Rescue Cases in Nunavik, 2000-2024

Overall, this project documented 945 search and rescue incidents in Nunavik between 2000 and 2024. The most significant finding emerging from this work is the confirmation of the enormous gap between the number of SAR incidents occurring in the region and those formally reported through official channels. Under existing SAR governance frameworks and procedures, all SAR incidents occurring in Nunavik, regardless of type or jurisdiction, are supposed to come to the attention of the Nunavik Police Service (NPS). In practice, however, the vast majority of incidents were never formally reported to the police or incorporated into official SAR databases. As the following figure demonstrates, the difference between actual documented incidents and those recorded by the NPS is striking. Between 2019 and 2024 alone, this project identified between 93 and 147 SAR incidents annually, while NPS records for the same period ranged from only 5 to 29 incidents per year.

The scale of this discrepancy demonstrates that official SAR statistics have dramatically underestimated operational activity in Nunavik for many years. In some years, the NPS recorded less than five percent of the incidents documented through this project. The result is that the true scale, frequency, and complexity of SAR operations in Nunavik has remained largely invisible within provincial and federal reporting systems.

These findings reinforce what community responders, Kativik Civil Security, and participants at the Nunavik SAR Roundtables have long pointed out: search and rescue in Nunavik is a demanding public safety service delivered primarily by local responders that has historically existed outside formal reporting and governance systems.



As noted previously, these figures should not be considered a complete record of all SAR incidents that occurred in Nunavik during this period. Many incidents were never formally documented at the community level, while existing records often contain only limited operational detail. In addition, older records have frequently been misplaced, damaged, or destroyed over time. Accordingly, the statistics presented here should be understood as a conservative minimum reflecting the incidents that could be verified through available records, interviews, and community consultations.

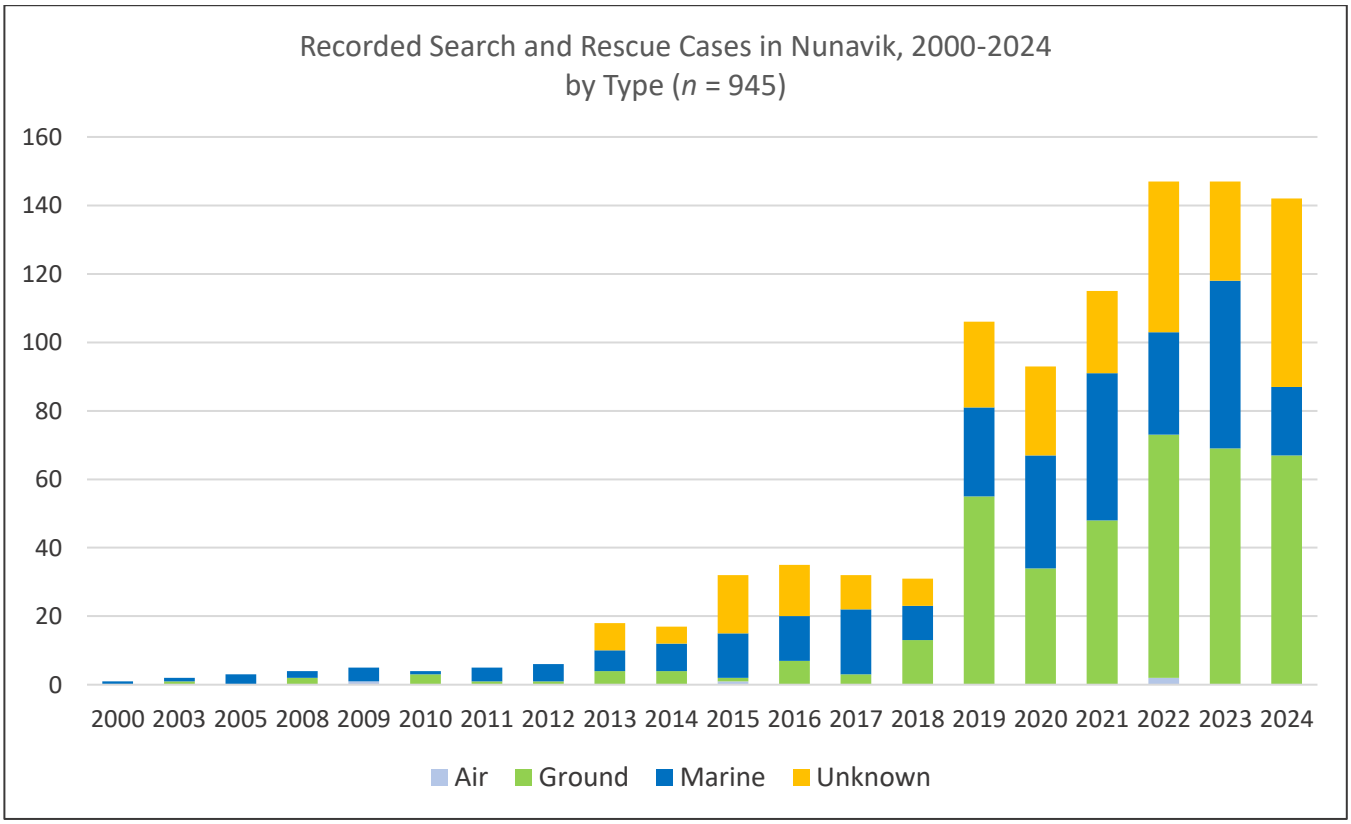
A. Recorded Search and Rescue Cases in Nunavik, 2000-2024

The following charts present overall documented search and rescue (SAR) statistics for Nunavik between 2000 and 2024, broken down by incident type: air, ground, marine, and unknown. The data generally covers the period up to the first six months of 2024, except for the four communities visited during fieldwork in March 2025, for which all cases recorded in 2024 were included.

Between 2000 and 2024, the project team documented 945 SAR incidents across the region. Of these, 384 were classified as ground incidents, 291 as marine incidents, 266 as incidents of unknown type, and 4 as air incidents.

Recorded Search and Rescue Cases in Nunavik, 2000-2024					
Year	**Air**	**Ground**	**Marine**	**Unknown**	**Grand Total**
2000			1		1
2003		1	1		2

2005			3		3
2008		2	2		4
2009	1		4		5
2010		3	1		4
2011		1	4		5
2012		1	5		6
2013		4	6	8	18
2014		4	8	5	17
2015	1	1	13	17	32
2016		7	13	15	35
2017		3	19	10	32
2018		13	10	8	31
2019		55	26	25	106
2020		34	33	26	93
2021		48	43	24	115
2022	2	71	30	44	147
2023		69	49	29	147
2024		67	20	55	142
Grand Total	**4**	**384**	**291**	**266**	**945**



B. Recorded Search and Rescue Cases in Nunavik by Community, 2000-2024

The following charts present documented SAR incidents in Nunavik between 2000 and 2024 by community and by incident type: air, ground, marine, and unknown. The statistics show significant variation between communities in both the total number of recorded incidents and the types of SAR activity documented. Ivujivik recorded the highest overall number of SAR incidents with 155 documented cases, followed by Tasiujaq (99), Salluit (96), Kuujjuaq (84), Kangirsuk (81), Puvirnituq (77), and Kangiqsualujjuaq (72). At the other end of the spectrum, Umiujaq recorded the fewest documented incidents with 13 cases, followed by Akulivik (20) and Kuujjuarapik (21). At this point, the project team has been unable to ascertain why Ivujivik had such a high number of recorded cases compared to other communities. While likely the result of different recording practices, this requires further research.

Ground SAR incidents represented the largest category overall (41% of the total) and were recorded in every community. The highest numbers of ground incidents were documented in Tasiujaq (59), Kangiqsujuaq (51), Kuujjuaq (50), and Kangirsuk (47). These figures reinforce that land- and ice-based searches involving hunters, travellers, and community members remain a core component of SAR activity throughout Nunavik.

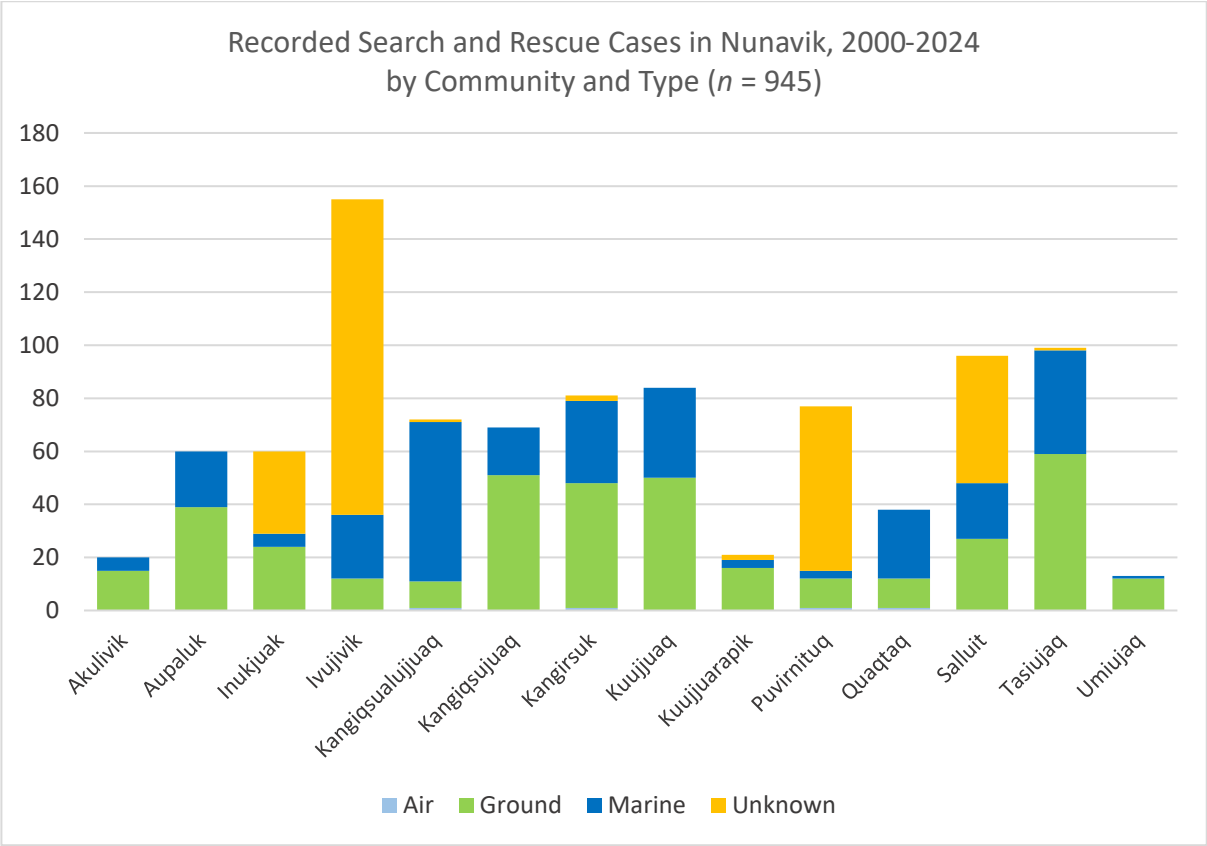
Marine SAR incidents were also common in several communities (31% of the total). Kangiqsualujjuaq recorded the highest number of marine incidents with 60 cases, followed by Tasiujaq (39), Kuujjuaq (34), Kangirsuk (31), and Quaqtaq (26).

A large number of incidents were categorized as “unknown” (28% of the total), particularly in Ivujivik (119 incidents), Puvirnituq (62), and Salluit (48). In many cases, historical records contained insufficient operational detail to determine whether the incident involved land, marine, or another form of SAR activity. The size of this category highlights the fragmented and inconsistent nature of historical SAR reporting and documentation practices across the region.

Overall, the charts demonstrate that SAR activity is widespread across Nunavik and affects every community in the region, although the scale and character of incidents vary considerably from place to place.

Recorded Search and Rescue Cases in Nunavik by Community, 2000-2024					
Community	**Air**	**Ground**	**Marine**	**Unknown**	**Grand Total**
Akulivik		15	5		20
Aupaluk		39	21		60
Inukjuak		24	5	31	60
Ivujivik		12	24	119	155
Kangiqsualujjuaq	1	10	60	1	72
Kangiqsujuaq		51	18		69

Kangirsuk	1	47	31	2	81
Kuujjuaq		50	34		84
Kuujjuarapik		16	3	2	21
Puvirnituq	1	11	3	62	77
Quaqtaq	1	11	26		38
Salluit		27	21	48	96
Tasiujaq		59	39	1	99
Umiujaq		12	1		13
Grand Total	**4**	**384**	**291**	**266**	**945**



C. Recorded Search and Rescue Cases in Nunavik by Month, 2000-2024

The charts in this section reveal clear seasonal patterns in SAR activity across the region. Ground SAR incidents were most common during the winter and spring months, particularly in March (68 incidents), February (48), January (46), and May (45). These numbers declined significantly during the summer and early fall, reaching their lowest levels in October (7 incidents) and August and September (10 incidents each).

Marine incidents followed the opposite seasonal pattern, increasing sharply during the summer open-water period. Marine SAR activity was highest in July (87 incidents) and August (76 incidents), before

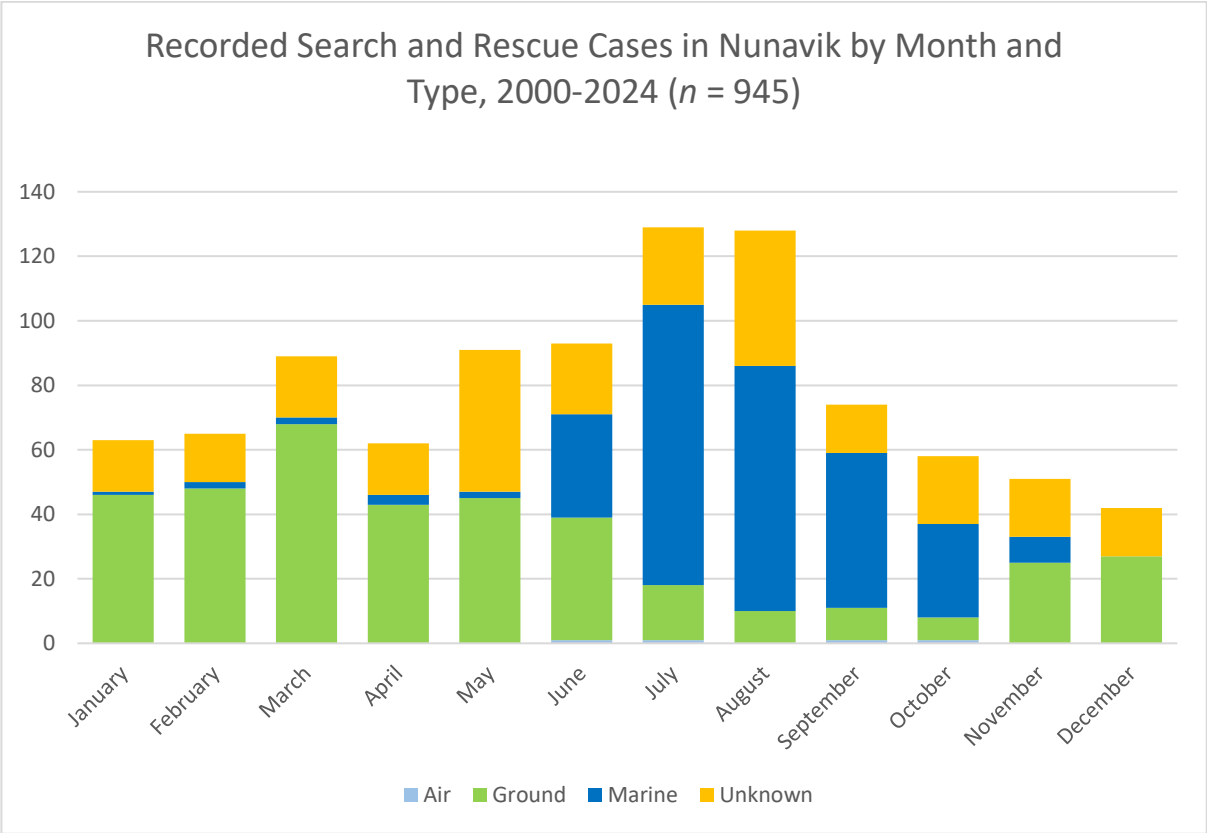
declining through the fall. Comparatively few marine incidents were documented during the winter months, with only one incident recorded in January and none in December.

Overall SAR activity peaked during the summer months, with 129 incidents documented in July and 128 in August. Elevated totals were also recorded in June (93 incidents), May (91), and March (89). December recorded the lowest overall number of documented incidents with 42 cases.

A substantial number of incidents were categorized as "unknown" throughout the year, particularly during August (42 incidents), July (24), June (22), and October (21). These cases reflect incidents where available records did not clearly identify the type of SAR response involved.

Overall, the charts demonstrate that SAR activity in Nunavik occurs year-round but follows strong seasonal patterns associated with changing environmental conditions and travel practices, which supports the information shared by community responders participating in meetings of the Nunavik SAR Roundtable. Ground incidents are concentrated during the winter and spring land travel season, while marine incidents increase significantly during the summer open-water period. The statistics highlight the continuous operational demands placed on Nunavik communities and responders across all seasons, while also illustrating how the nature of SAR activity changes throughout the year. Moving forward, the project team will conduct further analyses to better understand the seasonal patterns of SAR operations in Nunavik.

Recorded Search and Rescue Cases in Nunavik by Month, 2000-2024					
Month	**Air**	**Ground**	**Marine**	**Unknown**	**Grand Total**
January		46	1	16	63
February		48	2	15	65
March		68	2	19	89
April		43	3	16	62
May		45	2	44	91
June	1	38	32	22	93
July	1	17	87	24	129
August		10	76	42	128
September	1	10	48	15	74
October	1	7	29	21	58
November		25	8	18	51
December		27		15	42
Grand Total	**4**	**384**	**290**	**267**	**945**



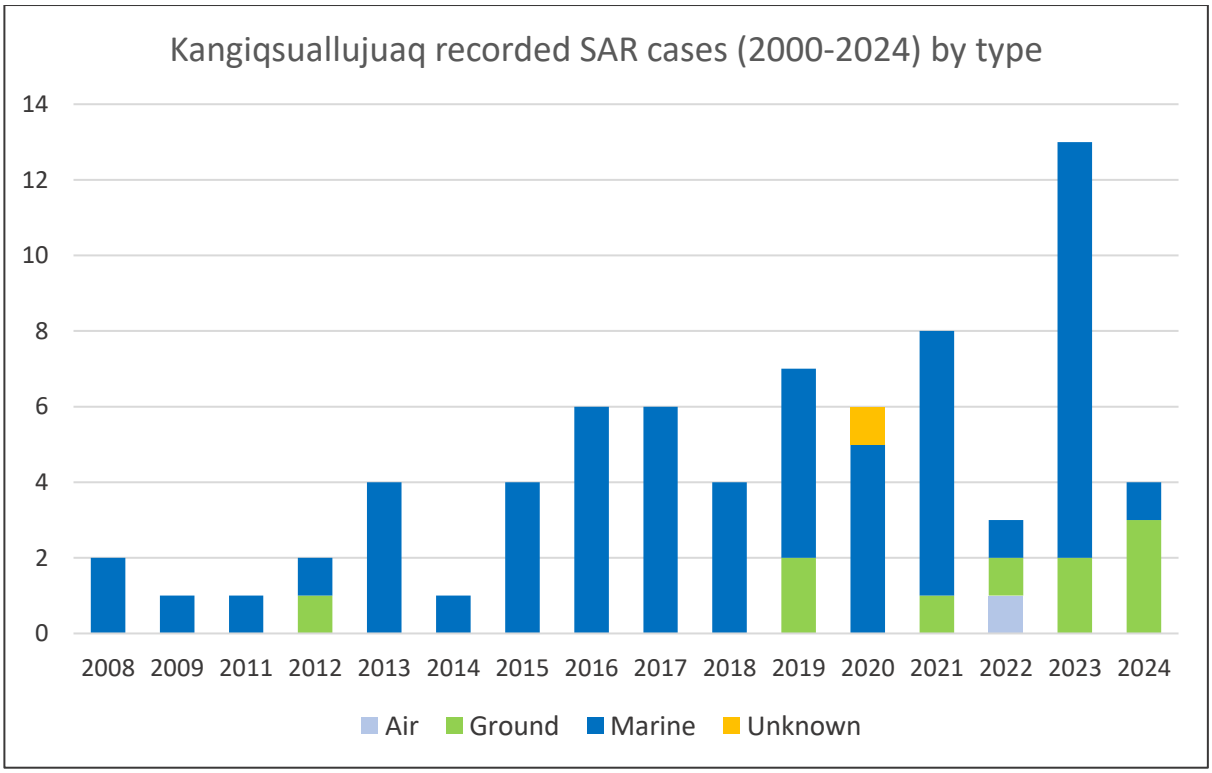
D. Community Search and Rescue Data, 2000-2024

The following section reproduces the SAR data collected from each Nunavik community during this project. These community summaries draw upon local SAR records, Northern Village files, Inuit Hunting, Fishing and Trapping Support Program documentation, interviews with responders and local leadership, and other available operational records. The quantity and quality of information available varied considerably between communities depending on local reporting practices, record retention, and the availability of historical documentation.

These summaries are intended to provide a clearer picture of the scale and character of SAR activity occurring across Nunavik, while also highlighting the important role played by local responders in managing emergencies on the land, ice, and water. They should not be interpreted as complete historical records of all incidents that occurred in each community, but rather as the most comprehensive reconstruction possible based on the information available to the project team.

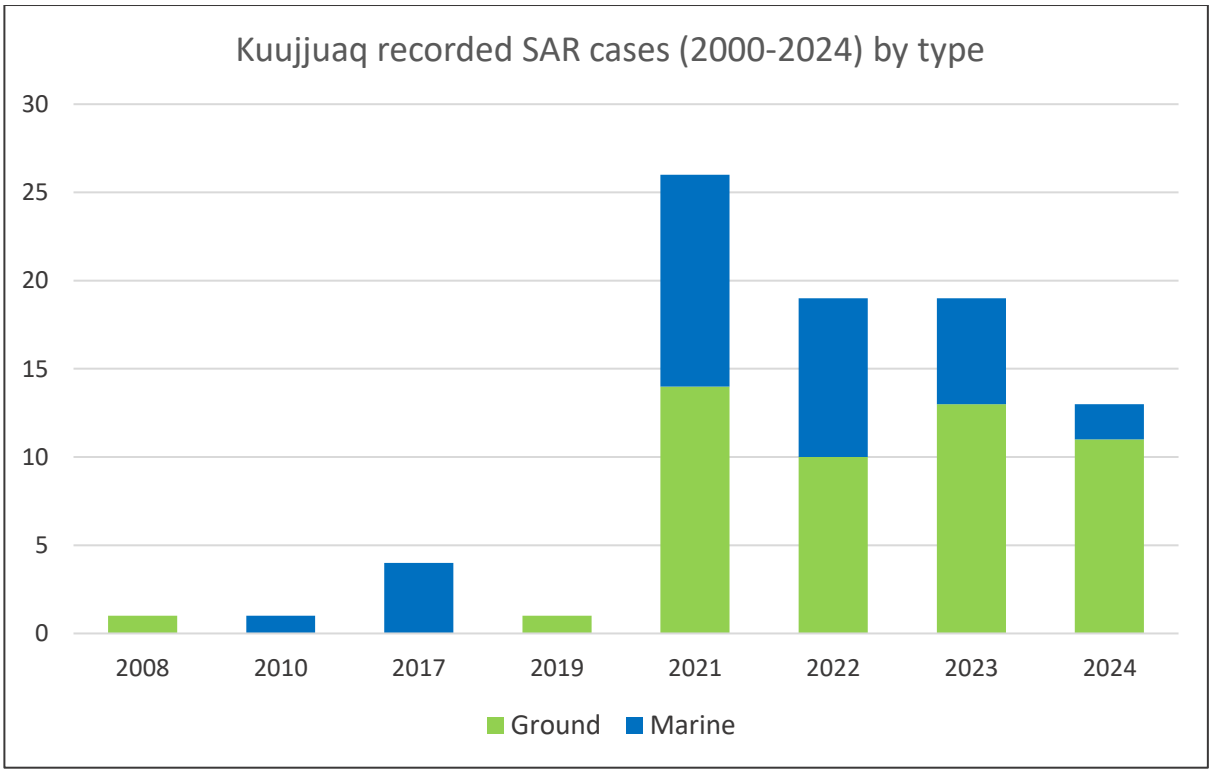
Kangiqsualujjuaq

Year	Air	Ground	Marine	Unknown	Grand Total
2008			2		2
2009			1		1
2011			1		1
2012		1	1		2
2013			4		4
2014			1		1
2015			4		4
2016			6		6
2017			6		6
2018			4		4
2019		2	5		7
2020			5	1	6
2021		1	7		8
2022	1	1	1		3
2023		2	11		13
2024		3	1		4
Grand Total	**1**	**10**	**60**	**1**	**72**



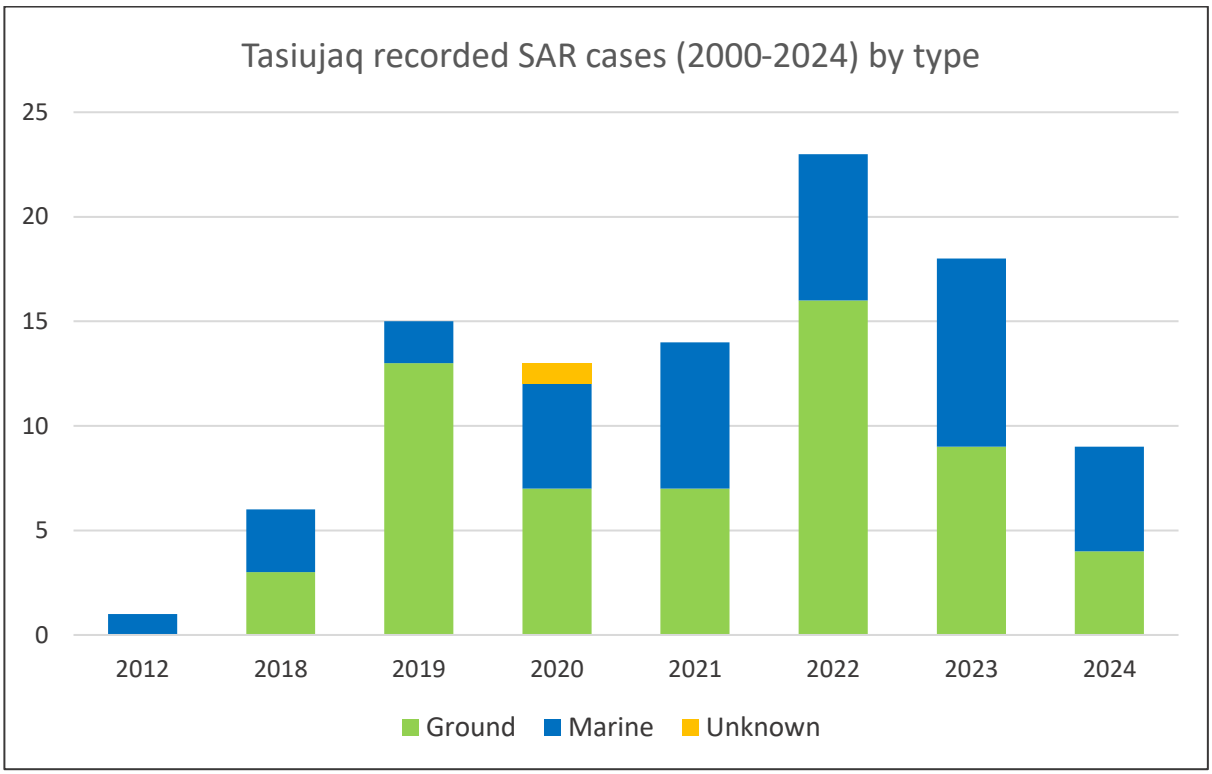
Kuujjuaq

Year	Ground	Marine	Grand Total
2008	1		1
2010		1	1
2017		4	4
2019	1		1
2021	14	12	26
2022	10	9	19
2023	13	6	19
2024	11	2	13
Grand Total	**50**	**34**	**84**



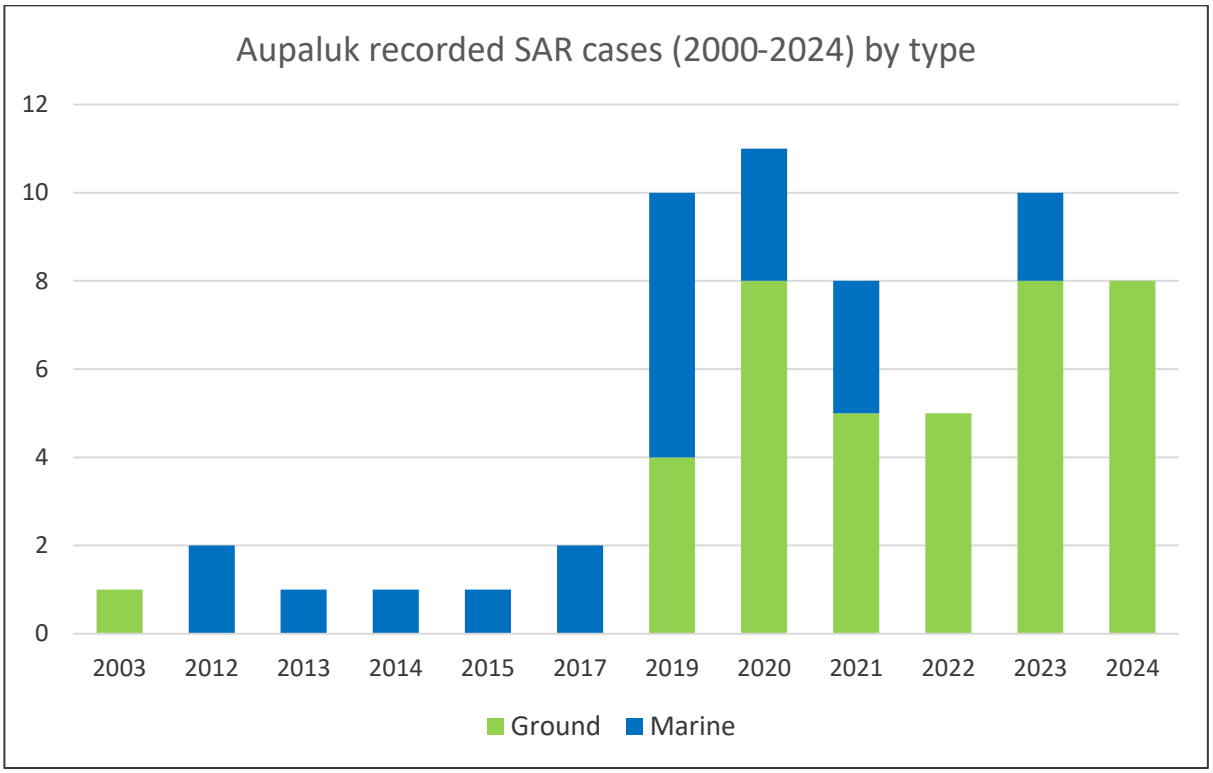
Tasiujaq

Year	Ground	Marine	Unknown	Grand Total
2012		1		1
2018	3	3		6
2019	13	2		15
2020	7	5	1	13
2021	7	7		14
2022	16	7		23
2023	9	9		18
2024	4	5		9
Grand Total	**59**	**39**	**1**	**99**



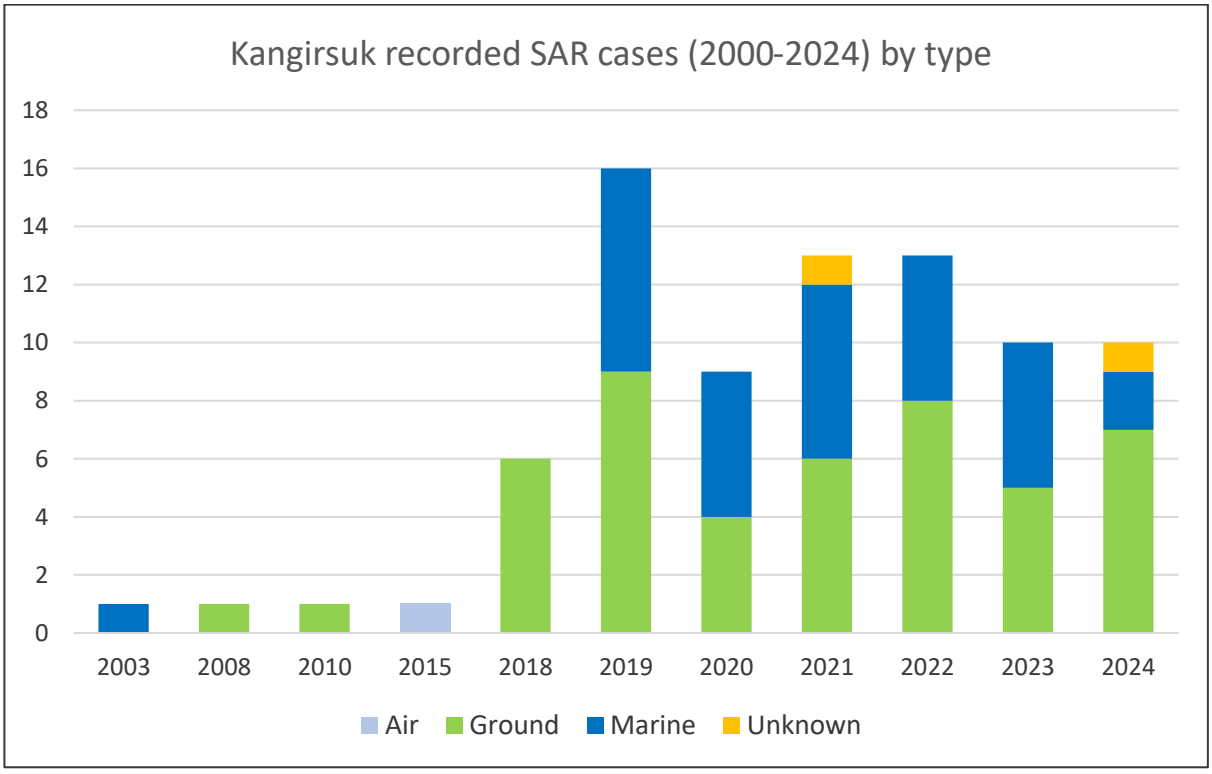
Aupaluk

Year	Ground	Marine	Grand Total
2003	1		1
2012		2	2
2013		1	1
2014		1	1
2015		1	1
2017		2	2
2019	4	6	10
2020	8	3	11
2021	5	3	8
2022	5		5
2023	8	2	10
2024	8		8
Grand Total	**39**	**21**	**60**



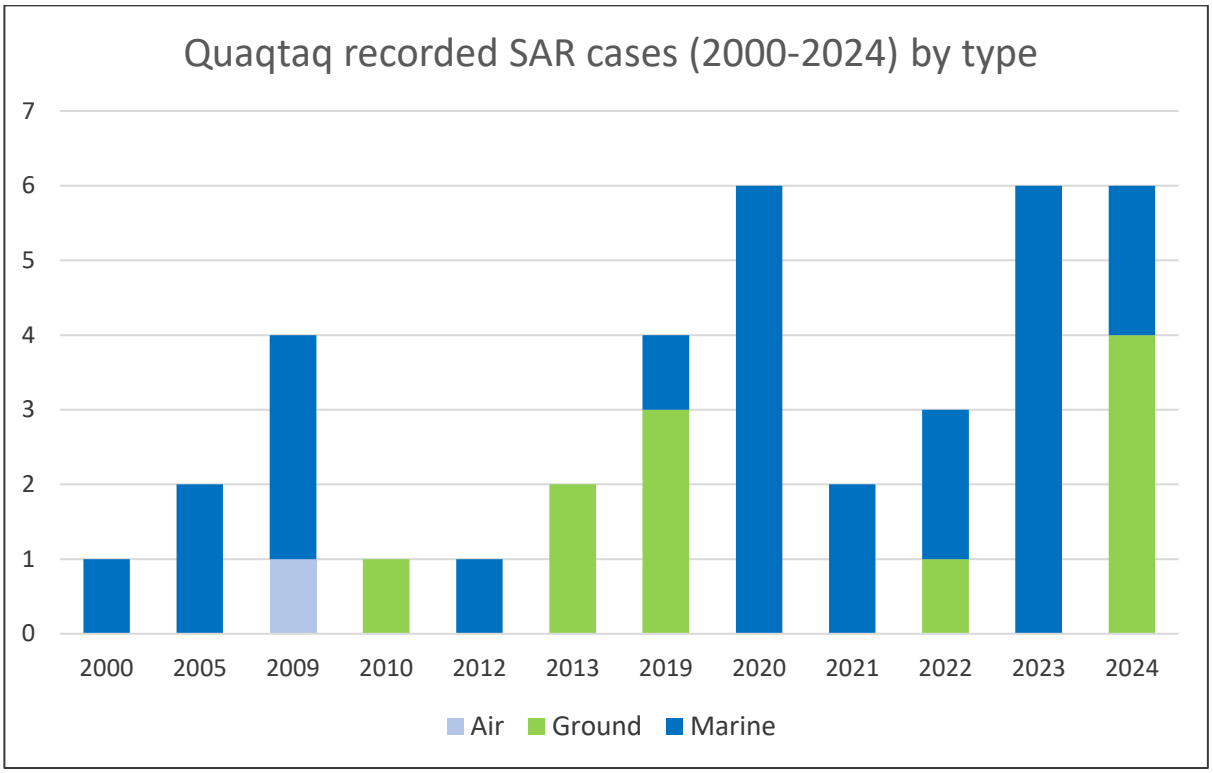
Kangirsuk

Year	Air	Ground	Marine	Unknown	Grand Total
2003			1		1
2008		1			1
2010		1			1
2015	1				1
2018		6			6
2019		9	7		16
2020		4	5		9
2021		6	6	1	13
2022		8	5		13
2023		5	5		10
2024		7	2	1	10
Grand Total	**1**	**47**	**31**	**2**	**81**



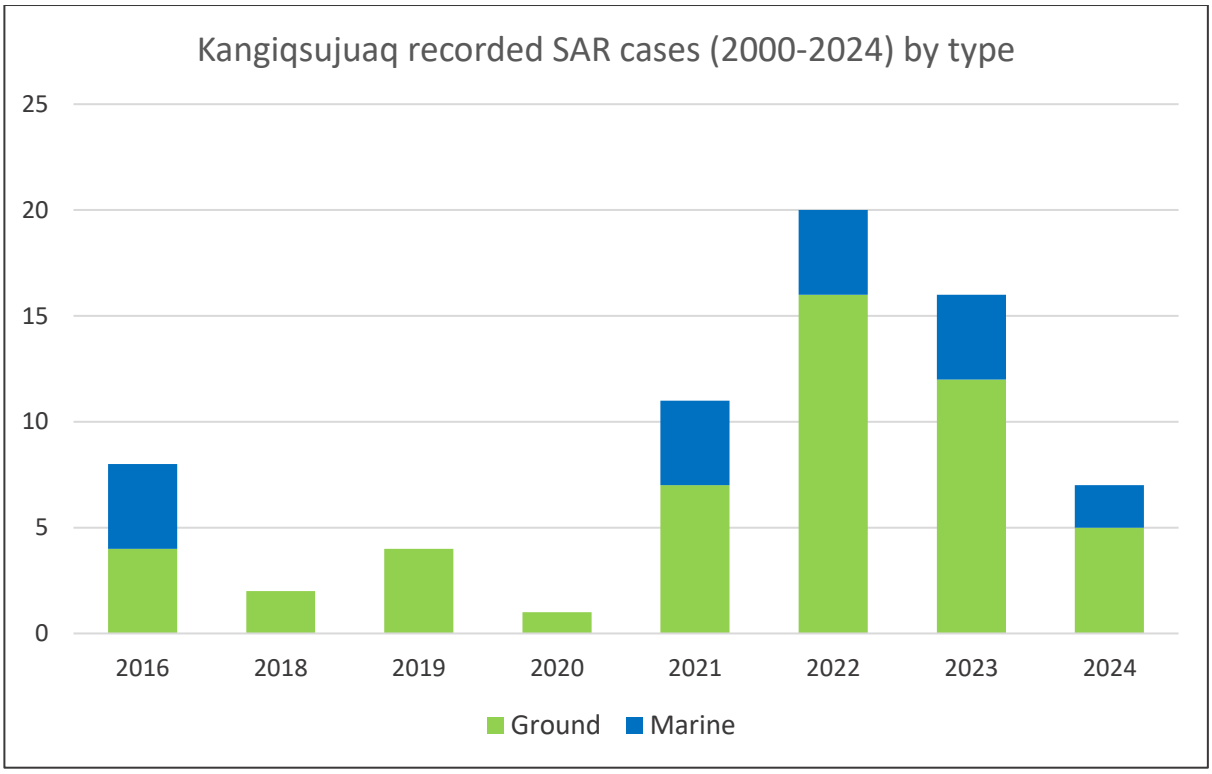
Quaqtaq

Year	Air	Ground	Marine	Grand Total
2000			1	1
2005			2	2
2009	1		3	4
2010		1		1
2012			1	1
2013		2		2
2019		3	1	4
2020			6	6
2021			2	2
2022		1	2	3
2023			6	6
2024		4	2	6
Grand Total	**1**	**11**	**26**	**38**



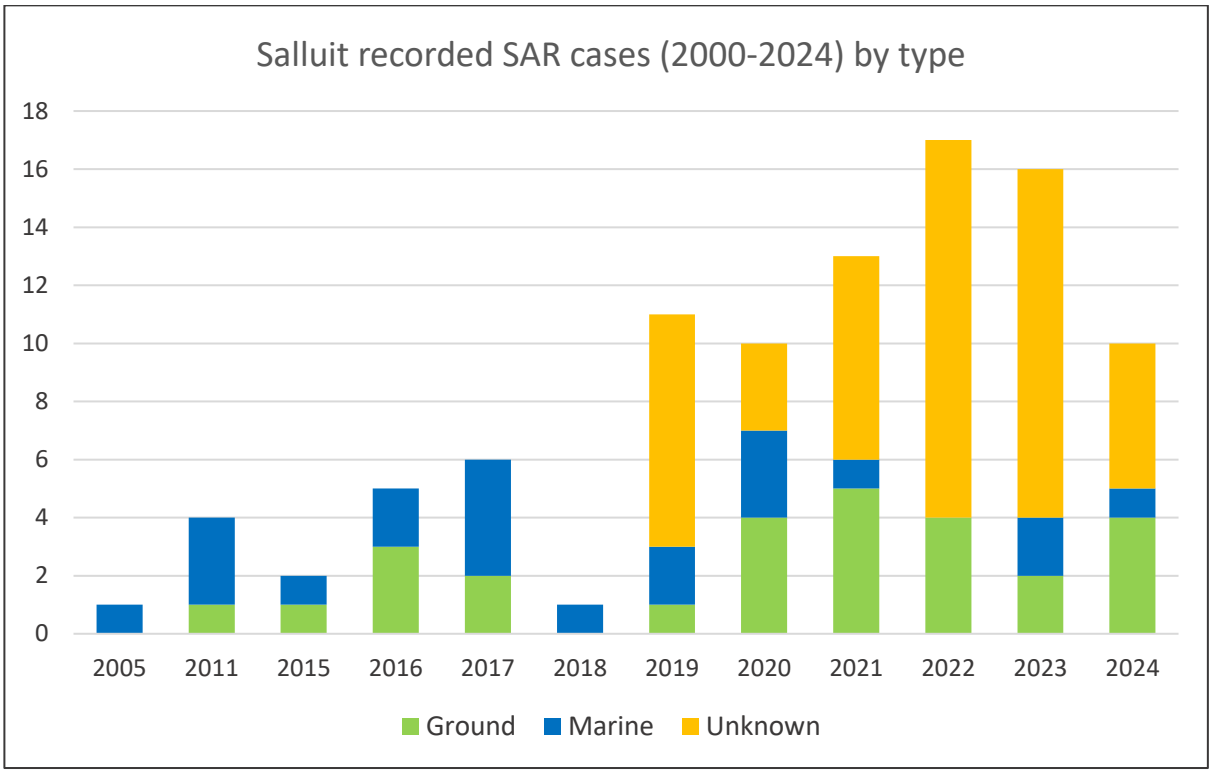
Kangiqsujuaq

Year	Ground	Marine	Grand Total
2016	4	4	8
2018	2		2
2019	4		4
2020	1		1
2021	7	4	11
2022	16	4	20
2023	12	4	16
2024	5	2	7
Grand Total	**51**	**18**	**69**



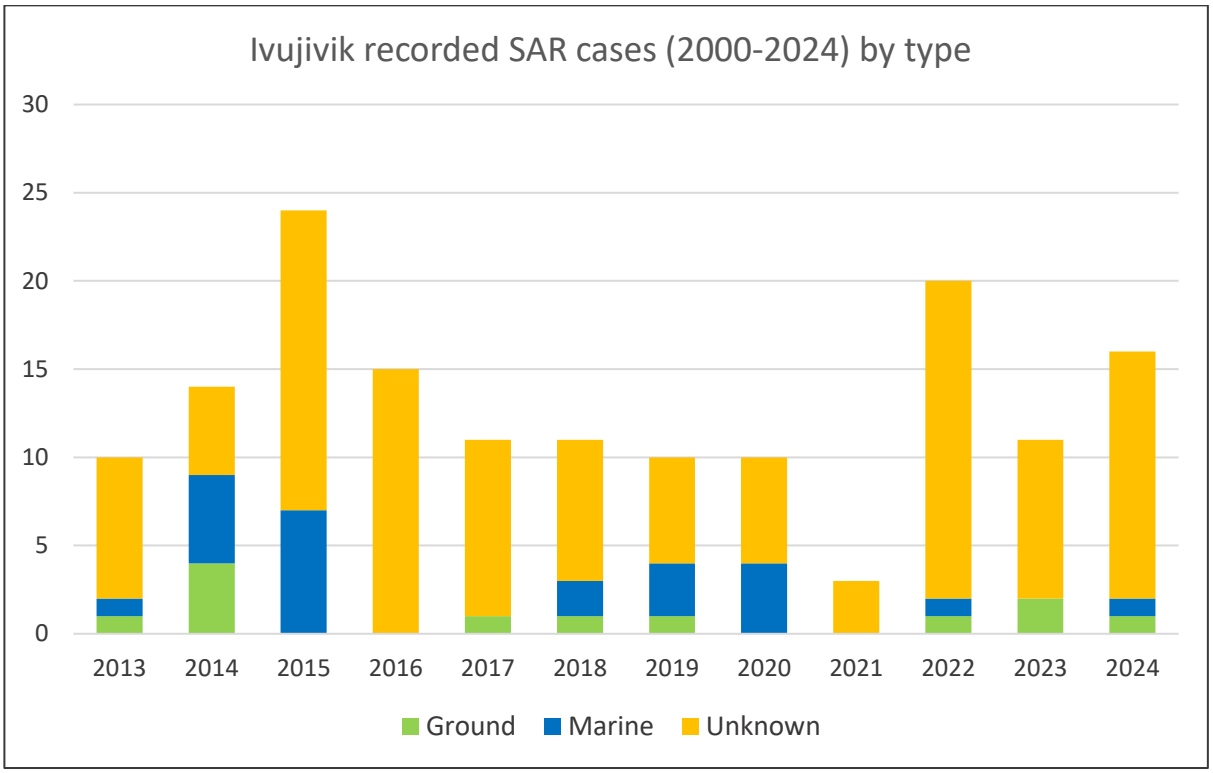
Salluit

Year	Ground	Marine	Unknown	Grand Total
2005		1		1
2011	1	3		4
2015	1	1		2
2016	3	2		5
2017	2	4		6
2018		1		1
2019	1	2	8	11
2020	4	3	3	10
2021	5	1	7	13
2022	4		13	17
2023	2	2	12	16
2024	4	1	5	10
Grand Total	**27**	**21**	**48**	**96**



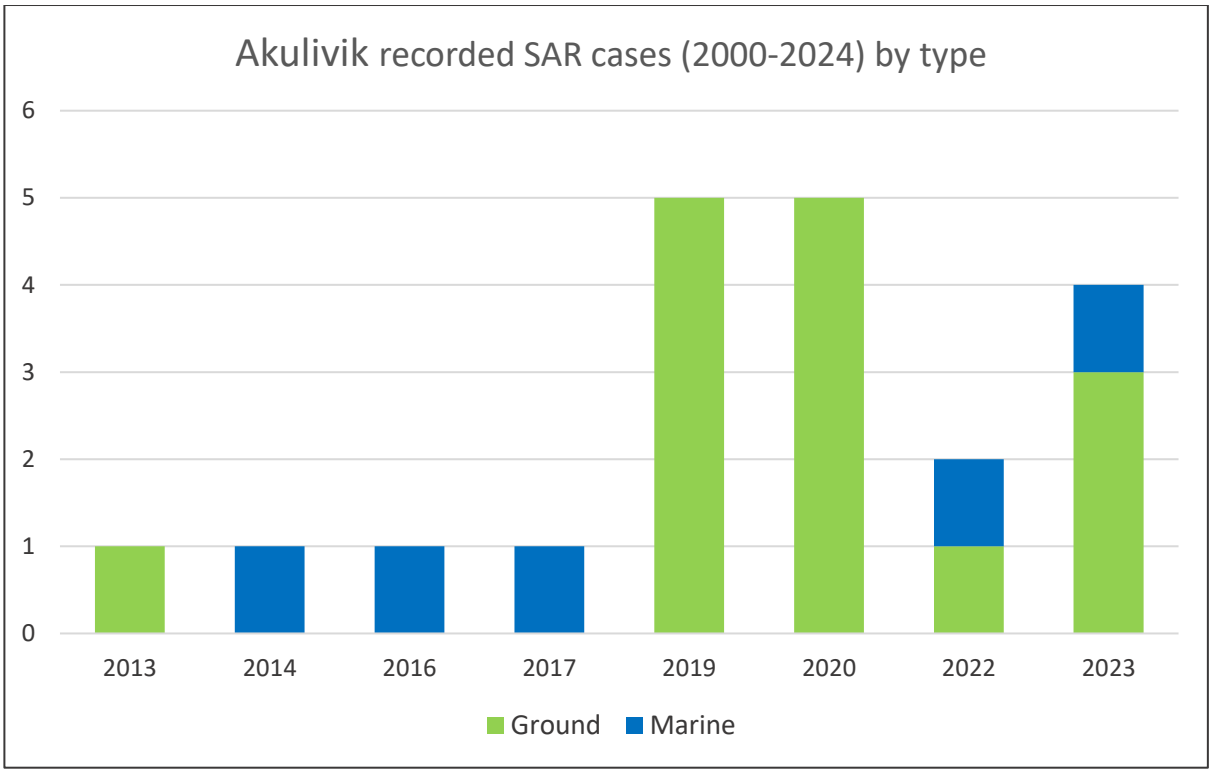
Ivujivik

Year	Ground	Marine	Unknown	Grand Total
2013	1	1	8	10
2014	4	5	5	14
2015		7	17	24
2016			15	15
2017	1		10	11
2018	1	2	8	11
2019	1	3	6	10
2020		4	6	10
2021			3	3
2022	1	1	18	20
2023	2		9	11
2024	1	1	14	16
Grand Total	**12**	**24**	**119**	**155**



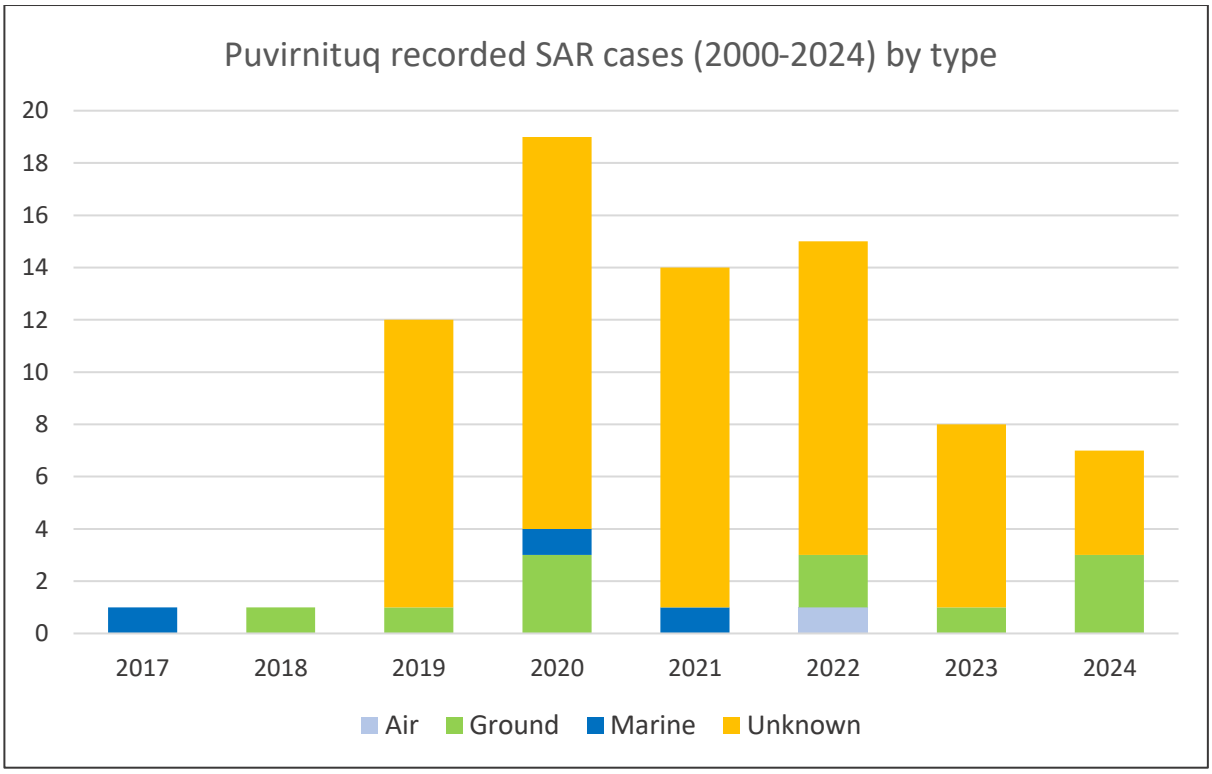
Akulivik

Year	Ground	Marine	Grand Total
2013	1		1
2014		1	1
2016		1	1
2017		1	1
2019	5		5
2020	5		5
2022	1	1	2
2023	3	1	4
Grand Total	**15**	**5**	**20**



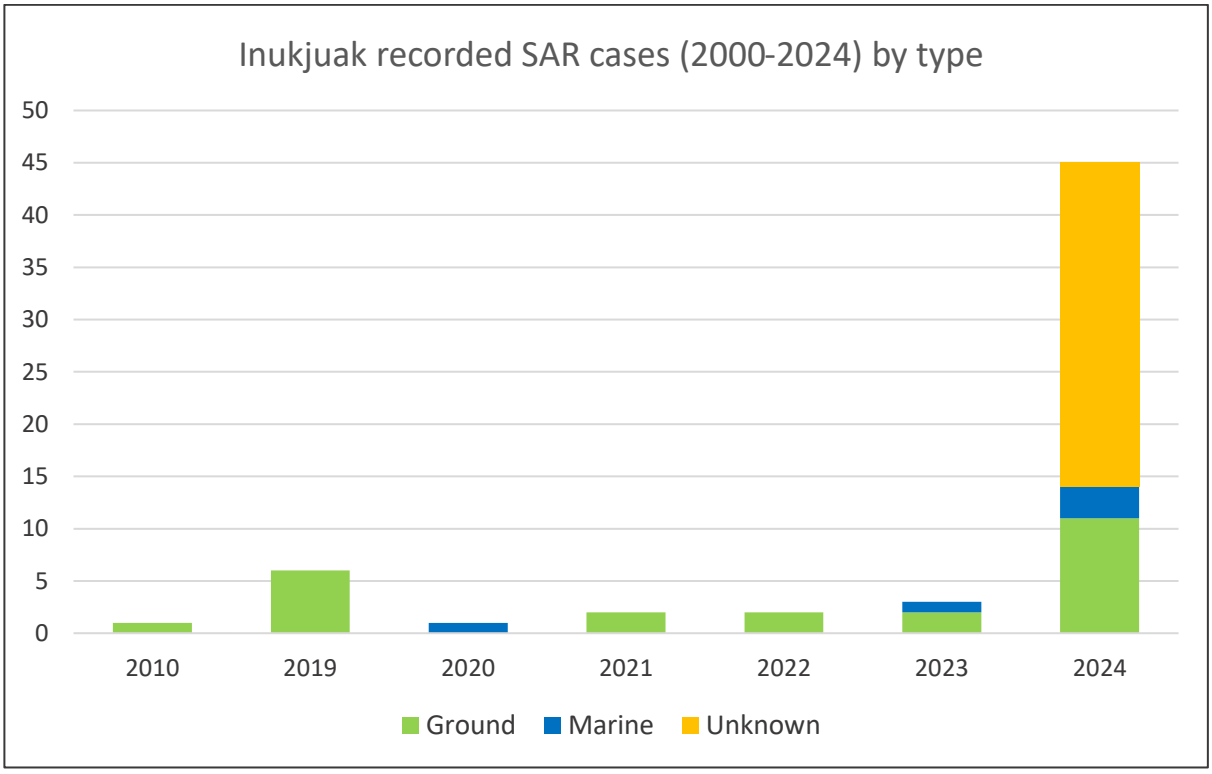
Puvirnituq

Year	Air	Ground	Marine	Unknown	Grand Total
2017			1		1
2018		1			1
2019		1		11	12
2020		3	1	15	19
2021			1	13	14
2022	1	2		12	15
2023		1		7	8
2024		3		4	7
Grand Total	**1**	**11**	**3**	**62**	**77**



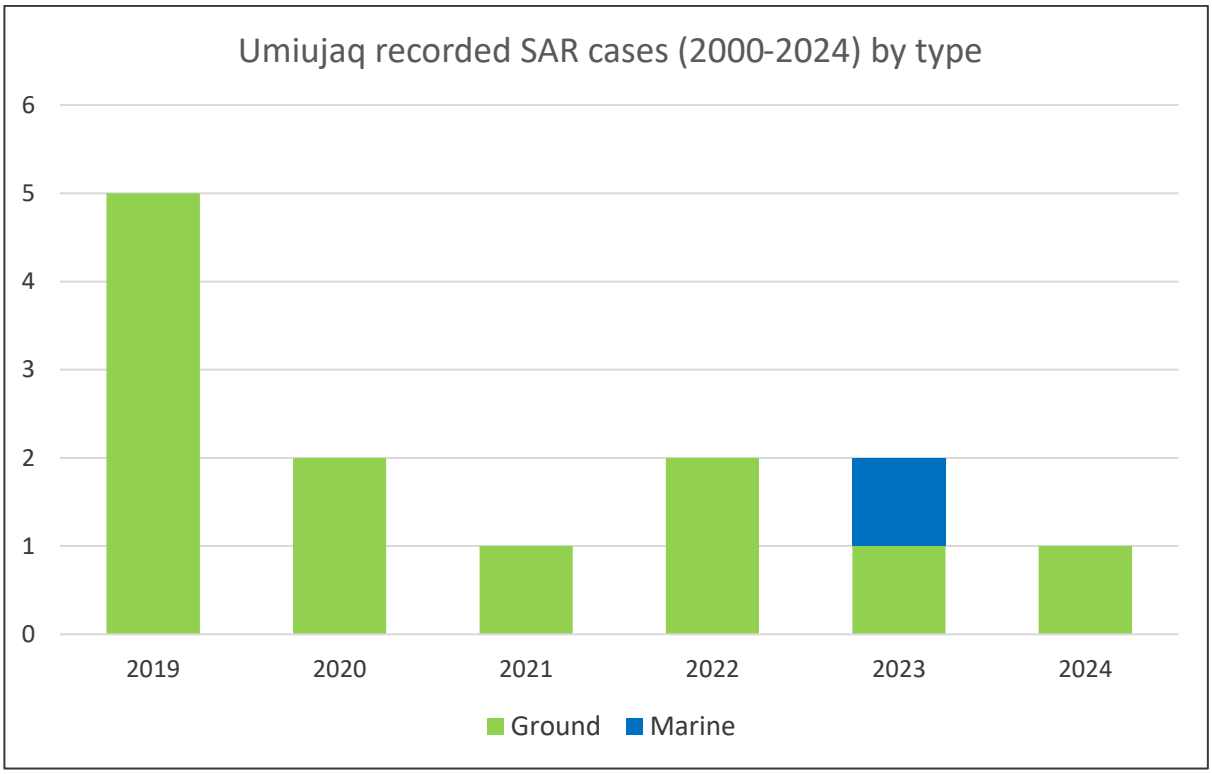
Inukjuak

Year	Ground	Marine	Unknown	Grand Total
2010	1			1
2019	6			6
2020		1		1
2021	2			2
2022	2			2
2023	2	1		3
2024	11	3	31	45
Grand Total	**24**	**5**	**31**	**60**



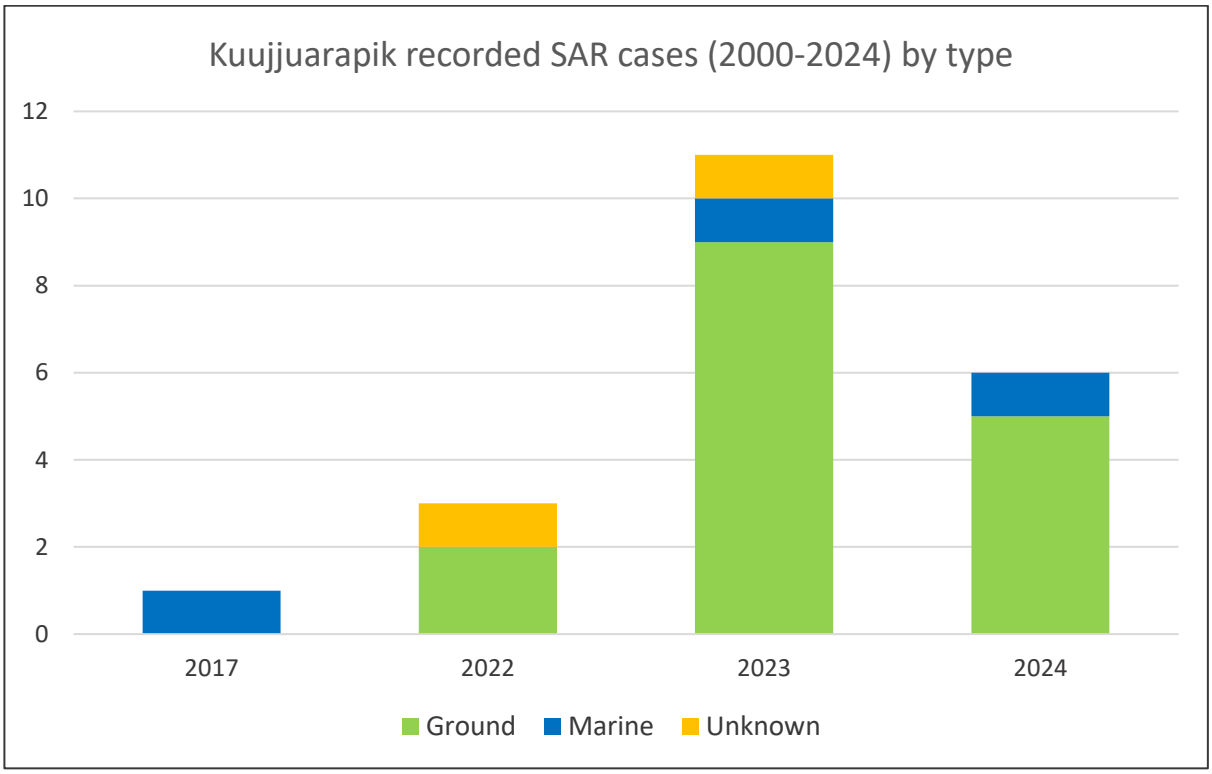
Umiujaq

Year	Ground	Marine	Grand Total
2019	5		5
2020	2		2
2021	1		1
2022	2		2
2023	1	1	2
2024	1		1
Grand Total	**12**	**1**	**13**



Kuujjuarapik

Year	Ground	Marine	Unknown	Grand Total
2017		1		1
2022	2		1	3
2023	9	1	1	11
2024	5	1		6
Grand Total	**16**	**3**	**2**	**21**

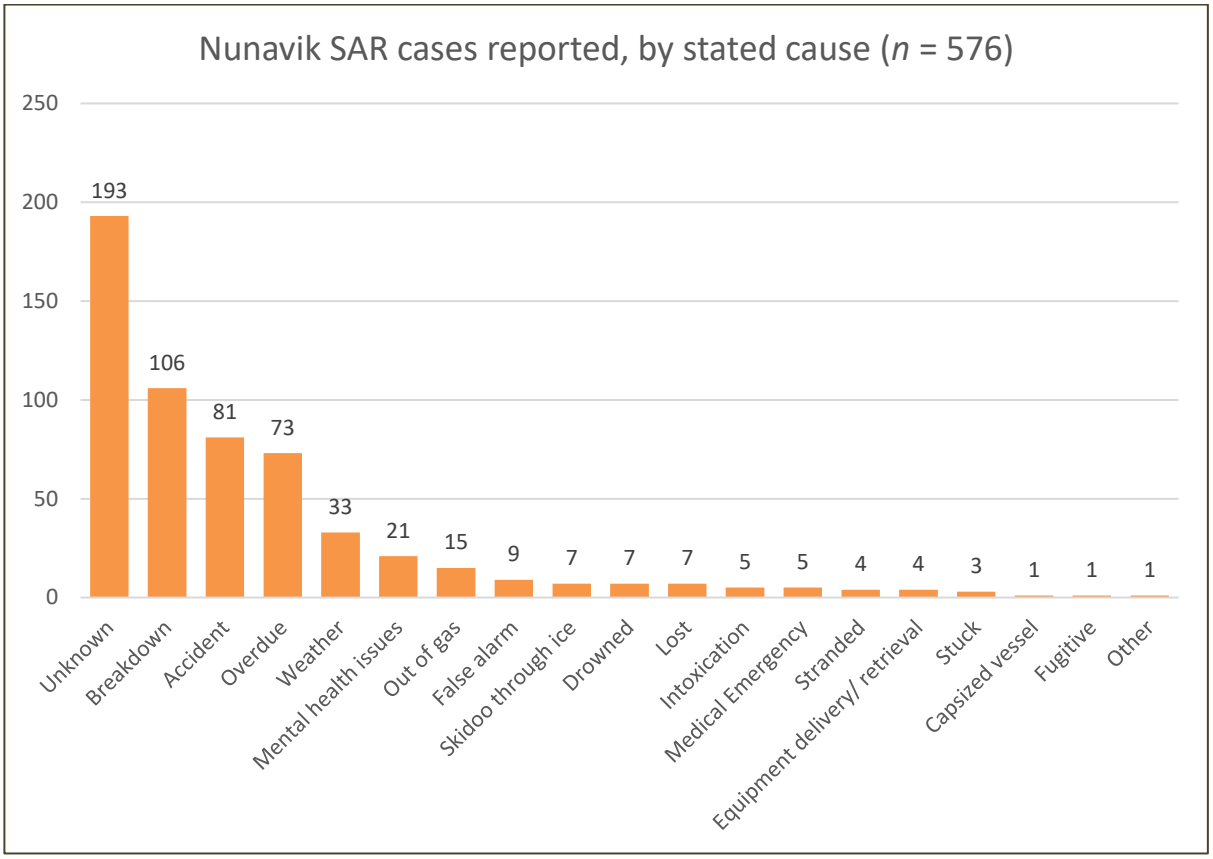


5. What is Causing Search and Rescue Incidents in Nunavik?

The large number of people who regularly go out on the land in Nunavik, combined with the region's austere environmental conditions, means that on-the-land accidents and lost people are frequent occurrences. The charts in this section present documented SAR incidents in Nunavik between 2000 and 2024 by primary cause, where a cause could be identified. A total of 576 incidents included sufficient information to assign a primary cause, while many other cases lacked enough operational detail to determine why the incident occurred.

Among incidents where a cause was identified, mechanical breakdowns were the most common, accounting for 106 cases. Accidents were the second-largest category with 81 incidents, followed closely by overdue travellers with 73 cases. Weather-related incidents accounted for 33 cases, while mental health-related incidents represented 21 documented responses. Several other recurring causes appeared at lower frequencies, including incidents involving travellers running out of fuel (15 cases), false alarms (9), snowmobiles breaking through the ice (7), lost persons (7), drownings (7), intoxication (5), and medical emergencies (5). Smaller numbers of incidents involved stranded travellers, stuck vehicles, equipment retrieval operations, fugitives, and capsized vessels.

The Causes of Search and Rescue Incidents in Nunavik	
Row Labels	**Cause**
Unknown	193
Breakdown	106
Accident	81
Overdue	73
Weather	33
Mental health issues	21
Out of gas	15
False alarm	9
Skidoo through ice	7
Lost	7
Drowned	7
Intoxication	5
Medical Emergency	5
Stranded	4
Equipment delivery/ retrieval	4
Stuck	3
Fugitive	1
Capsized vessel	1
Other	1
Grand Total	**576**



The largest category was incidents with an unknown cause, accounting for 193 cases. This reflects the limited and often fragmentary nature of many historical SAR records, where operational details were either never documented or have since been lost.

Overall, the statistics demonstrate that most SAR incidents in Nunavik are linked to the realities of travel, harvesting, and daily life on the land and water. Mechanical failures, accidents, overdue travellers, and weather-related emergencies emerge as recurring operational challenges across the region. These findings reflect what SAR responders have shared at meetings of the Nunavik SAR Roundtable and during the in-community research conducted by the project team.

Past research has shown that deaths caused by accidents in Nunavik – many of which occur on the land – are more than three times the provincial average: there are 11.5 deaths per 10,000 residents in Nunavik compared with 3.0 per 10,000 throughout Quebec.[6] As one community responder noted at the 2022 SAR roundtable, "Even the best people on the land can run into trouble. They can have all the skills, all the gear, all the knowledge, but things can still go wrong. We have a hard environment." When experienced and well-prepared Salluit hunters Frankie Ikey, Stas Ikey, and Adamie Alaku disappeared in June 2011, it was sunny and mild, with good ice conditions. They departed the community with hunting gear, a satellite phone, and a High Frequency Band (HFB) radio. They did everything right, and things still went wrong.

[6] Christopher Curtis, "This Is Salluit: Search-and-rescue team faces down death in a harsh climate," *Montreal Gazette*, 12 April 2018, https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/this-is-salluit-search-and-rescue-team-faces-down-death-in-a-harsh-climate.

Climate change is increasing the hazards faced by travelers on Nunavik's land, ice, and waters. Nunavimmiut responders have consistently highlighted the link between changing environmental conditions and greater SAR requirements in the region. Across Nunavik, climate change has caused warming temperatures, unstable ice conditions, thawing permafrost, and increasing instances of severe weather. Travelers on the land are exposed to more frequent, dramatic, and sudden temperature changes, and the early melt and late freeze up of lakes, rivers, and sea ice in the shoulder seasons (spring and fall) make travel routes more difficult and dangerous. Changes to these travel routes have led to increased fuel use, running out of gas, breaking through unexpected areas of thin ice, and having to travel over rough ice and/or land, resulting in snowmobiles and other equipment being lost and damaged. Thawing permafrost is also making travel by all-terrain vehicles (ATV) more challenging in the summer months. On the marine side, sea ice reduction has led to longer boating seasons, with boaters travelling earlier in the spring and later in the fall, when weather and travel conditions are their most uncertain, increasing the hazards to which they are exposed.[7] In short, at the community level, the changing environment has elevated the dangers of personal travel, affecting safe access to harvesting grounds, disrupting travel between communities, and causing high SAR incident rates, injury, and death.

Community responders throughout Nunavik have highlighted that changing environmental conditions have intersected with the failure of some people to take sufficient fuel and equipment on the land, the loss of traditional skills and knowledge (IQ), and the overreliance on technology to increase the SAR case load of their teams. People will often leave a community to travel or go hunting without shelter, rations, emergency kits, or additional fuel. Some are forced to go on the land without the necessary equipment and supplies because of the extreme expense involved in purchasing those materials. As one community responder at the 2022 roundtable explained, "Not many families can afford to get sat phones, and we don't have towers for VHF radios, so there is no way of communicating, and some people can't afford a communication tool, so they leave unprepared and with no ability to communicate if they get into trouble." At times, however, even the SPOT devices or other satellite communication tools that are provided free of charge to those going on the land are not used. Some people have a mindset that they are only going 60 kilometres from home, and thus they do not need to take anything with them. Responders also explained that some community members see search and rescue as a "fuel service." These individuals carelessly or even purposely go on the land with insufficient fuel, knowing that a search will be declared and that someone will bring them gas for their machine. Many searches could have been avoided if people had been better prepared.

Nunavimmiut responders identified several other factors leading to riskier behaviour on the land. They confirmed how the pressures of food insecurity often force harvesters to travel further afield and in poor conditions, increasing their risk. All highlighted the power and endurance of new skidoos, which allow travellers to go vast distances at speeds that often make it difficult for them to follow trails and make

[7] See, for instance, Mathilde L. St-Pierre, Peter G. May, Barrie Ford, Kyle H. Elliott, and Murray M. Humphries, "Nunavimmiut Knowledge of climate change and its impact on environment, wildlife, and harvest activities in Hudson Strait," *Arctic Science* 11 (2025): 1-15, https://doi.org/10.1139/as-2025-0024; and Makivvik, *Nunavik Climate Change Adaptation Strategy* (2024), https://www.makivvik.ca/nunavik-climate-change-adaption-strategy/#2.

accidents more likely. This extends to the marine side, with more powerful boats and sea ice reduction allowing boaters to travel further afield, which increases the possibility of running out of fuel or experiencing mechanical failure. Financial pressures and the high costs often involved in marine repairs and maintenance also make it difficult for Nunavimmiut to maintain their boats to the standard they would prefer and that safe travel often requires. These factors, combined with limited safe boating culture in many communities, is leading to more incidents on the water.

Many of the issues outlined above are exacerbated by a lack of environmental data, particularly on ice and weather conditions. Robert Way, an assistant professor of geography at Queen's University, has recently drawn attention to the fact that "there are fewer stations across Canada collecting information about all four key weather variables: precipitation, snow depth, air temperature and wind speed…. Since there can be hundreds of kilometres between weather stations in northern Canada, many small communities lack accurate information about the weather, which can be dangerous for people travelling on the land."[8] The lack of reliable information on ice and weather conditions can create risks for Nunavimmiut travelling on the land, ice, and waters of Nunavik – and lead to additional SAR cases.

Community responders and coordinators suggested that a significant portion of the incidents with an "unknown cause" might be related to despondency, mental health crises, and substance abuse. Responders noted a growing number of incidents involving individuals experiencing emotional distress, suicidal ideation, or mental health crises, many of which require urgent searches and/or rescues under difficult and emotionally taxing circumstances. Another major issue identified by responders was the role that alcohol and drugs play in many ground and marine incidents. As drug and alcohol abuse increases in communities, so too do search and rescue cases. There is limited support for people struggling with addiction in Nunavik. When a community responder was shown the statistics presented above, his first comment was that the "intoxication number was way too small. A lot of searches and rescues are for people under the influence. It's the drugs and alcohol. It's the drugs, alcohol, and how these go with all the mental health stuff. These are all connected. But that's also not something a lot of people feel comfortable putting on an official record."

Responders also suggested that dementia is emerging as an increasingly important factor contributing to SAR incidents in Nunavik, reflecting broader search and rescue trends observed across Canada. Incidents involving dementia often involve Elders who wander from communities, become disoriented while travelling on the land, or fail to return from routine activities. Responders noted that these searches can be particularly urgent and complex, as vulnerable individuals may be exposed to extreme weather, difficult terrain, and hazardous environmental conditions while lacking the ability to recognize danger, navigate safely, or respond predictably to search efforts.

Finally, while the official record does not yet show a marked increase in this type of case, there is growing concern amongst responders that outside activity – eco-tourists, adventurers, researchers, bulk carriers, pleasure craft, and cruise ships – will continue to increase in the region leading to more search

[8] Rachel Sanders, "Weather stations are sparse in Labrador. The gaps can be a matter of 'life or death,'" *CBC Radio*, 19 February 2023, https://www.cbc.ca/radio/whatonearth/weather-data-gaps-life-or-death-1.6751883.

and rescue incidents. Often, these groups or individuals venture into difficult to reach and potentially unsafe areas, increasing the risk of SAR incidents and the complexity of rescue operations.

6. Recent Developments

Several recent developments have either improved or have the *potential* to improve the reporting of search and rescue incidents in Nunavik. Together, these initiatives reflect a broader shift toward stronger regional coordination, improved collaboration between community responders and external partners, and a growing recognition of the importance of accurate SAR data collection.

Improved SAR Collaboration: At Nunavik SAR Roundtable 2025, participants highlighted the improved collaboration between the Joint Rescue Coordination Centres, the Royal Canadian Air Force, the Canadian Coast Guard, Kativik Civil Security, and community responders. A more collaborative environment has evolved around marine SAR, allowing partners to start working better together and begin to operate at the speed of trust. This has resulted in more consistent reporting, better communication, and collaboration between partners during marine SAR incidents. Participants noted that a significant driver of this progress has been the regular meetings between key partners facilitated by the activities of the Nunavik SAR Roundtable.

Expansion of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary: The expansion of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary in Nunavik has been one of the most important developments contributing to improved SAR reporting in the region. Auxiliary units receive formal training on SAR procedures, including incident notification and reporting requirements, and require official taskings in order to respond. As a result, their presence has helped create clearer operational and administrative pathways for documenting incidents through the federal SAR system. Official maritime SAR cases have increased noticeably in recent years. While this rise partly reflects growing operational demands, expanding marine traffic, and the increased presence of trained Auxiliary units capable of responding to incidents, responders emphasized that it also signals a meaningful cultural and operational shift. Community responders are increasingly willing to notify and work with the JRCCs and Coast Guard rather than managing incidents entirely at the local level.

Creation of a Regional SAR Coordinator Position at Kativik Civil Security: Working in partnership with the Nunavik Police Service (NPS), Kativik Civil Security is working to establish a Regional SAR Coordinator position. Although funded through the NPS, the position will operate within Kativik Civil Security in order to strengthen regional coordination, operational effectiveness, and collaboration between communities and external SAR partners. The Regional SAR Coordinator will be responsible for supporting and coordinating SAR operations across Nunavik, including liaising with partner agencies, assisting with operational planning, conducting risk assessments, and helping ensure the safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of SAR teams during operations. Importantly, the coordinator will also play a critical role in strengthening regional reporting and documentation practices. Community responders that do not feel comfortable reporting incidents to the NPS or federal partners may now communicate them to the Regional SAR Coordinator instead.

Roundtable participants have consistently highlighted that community responders often lack the training and administrative capacity required to effectively report and document SAR incidents. By providing regional coordination and administrative support, the new position is expected to improve the consistency of SAR reporting, assist communities with data collection, and help ensure that incidents are documented more systematically moving forward.

Reporting and Documentation Pilot Project: Based on feedback collected through this project and at successive Nunavik SAR Roundtables, members of the research team have been working with Kativik Civil Security to develop a new online reporting platform tailored to the operational realities of SAR in Nunavik. The goal of the platform is to create a reporting system that is simple, accessible, standardized, and practical for community responders while also improving the quality and consistency of regional SAR data. A beta version of the reporting platform was tested with Nunavimmiut responders during the Nunavik SAR Roundtable 2025 and Arctic SAR Exchange 2025, and through community visits in November 2025. Participants were asked to provide feedback on the system's usability, functionality, and relevance to local operational needs. This feedback was then incorporated into subsequent revisions of the platform.

A pilot version of the reporting system was launched in the fall of 2025 and continues to be tested and refined by community responders. If successful, the platform has the potential to significantly improve regional SAR reporting, preserve operational knowledge, strengthen planning and prevention efforts, and provide decision-makers with a far more accurate understanding of SAR activity and resource requirements across Nunavik.

7. Conclusion

This project has confirmed what Nunavimmiut responders and Kativik Civil Security have long understood: the scale of search and rescue activity in Nunavik has never been accurately reflected in official records. For decades, communities across the region have carried out a large proportion of SAR operations independently, often without formally activating the broader SAR system or reporting incidents through official channels. As a result, the true operational demands placed upon Nunavik's communities and responders have remained largely invisible within provincial and federal SAR planning and governance systems.

At the same time, this report demonstrates the remarkable resilience, expertise, and commitment of Nunavik's community responders. In an extremely challenging operating environment, Nunavimmiut responders continue to protect their communities with limited resources and support. The statistics and community accounts presented throughout this report reinforce that SAR in Nunavik is not an occasional emergency service, but a continuous public safety function deeply connected to everyday travel, work, harvesting, food security, and life on the region's land, ice, and water.

Importantly, as collaboration between Nunavimmiut responders and several of their SAR partners has improved in years, so too has the reporting and documentation of incidents. The expansion of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary, the creation of a Regional SAR Coordinator position, and the development of a pilot regional reporting platform all represent important steps towards ensuring the long-term improvement of reporting practices.

Improving the reporting of search and rescue incidents will not, on its own, solve Nunavik's broader SAR challenges. However, without accurate and consistent data, the true scale of operational demands, risks, and resource requirements in the region will continue to be underestimated, making it difficult to direct investment, training, infrastructure, and support where they are needed most. Ultimately, strengthening SAR reporting is about far more than statistics or administrative processes. It is about ensuring that Nunavik's community responders – who carry the overwhelming burden of search and rescue operations across the region – receive the recognition, partnerships, resources, and long-term support they require.

About the Authors

Dr. Peter Kikkert is an Associate Professor of Public Policy and Governance at St. Francis Xavier University. He is the academic lead for the Nunavut-Nunavik SAR Project and co-creator of the Nunavik and Nunavut SAR Roundtables and the Arctic SAR Exchange. He is a Team Leader and Training Officer with the Strait Area Ground Search and Rescue (SAGSAR) Association in Nova Scotia.

Dr. Ian Belton is a Lecturer at the University of Strathclyde. His research expertise centres on supporting and enhancing human judgment and decision making at both individual and group levels. He has conducted decision-making research in a range of applied contexts including strategic management, risk and reliability evaluations, the criminal justice system, and the defence and security sectors.

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