

How Ornge's Emergency Services Work

By Andrew Hurlbut, Chair,
GBA Boating and Safety Committee



Rupert Kindersley, Bob Duncanson and Andrew Hurlbut of GBA met with ORNGE's Robert Giguere, COO and Deputy CEO; Daryl Ewan, Operations Control Centre Director; and James Dennison, Manager Flight Operations on March 5th at their offices in Mississauga as part of our ongoing investigation of emergency response on Georgian Bay.



ORNGE is a non-profit organization that provides air ambulance and associated ground medical transportation services for the Province of Ontario under the direction of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC). The organization is accountable to the MOHLTC

through a performance agreement, and is nearly 100% funded by government.

ORNGE is not an acronym but rather is based on the colour of its aircraft. The "a" was dropped so people would take a second look, and also so that the name could be trademarked. The original program was established in 1977 at Buttonville Airport in Toronto, and by 1981 had expanded to several communities – Timmins, Sioux Lookout, Thunder Bay and Sudbury – to serve remote areas, primarily in Northern Ontario.



Now fast forward to today. ORNGE provides more than 20,000 patient-related transports per year covering a population of almost 14 million in a service area of about 1 million square kilometres. Their mission is "providing Ontario's patients with safe and timely care, transport and access to healthcare services."

93% of ORNGE transfers are inter-facility transfers moving patients from one hospital to another and to provide service to remote communities. 7% of ORNGE transports are on-scene

response where emergencies occur. This is the service that we, as cottagers, would potentially utilize in emergency situations. In 2017, ORNGE had approximately 3,850 rotor-wing transfers; of these around 28% were scene or modified scene (which involves a rendezvous with local EMS at an approved landing site, such as a hospital helipad). It uses 7 helicopter bases in Ontario: Toronto, Ottawa, London, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Kenora and Moosonee.



Each base is equipped with a Leonardo AW139 helicopter; Toronto has two. While Sudbury and Toronto are the most likely responding bases for us on Georgian Bay, help could come from London or Ottawa as well. The helicopters have a mid-range of about 250 kilometres. Their fleet actually is comprised of 11 AW139 aircraft, but due to the high degree of maintenance required by helicopters, two are normally unavailable due to planned maintenance activities, and one is a backup in the system.

When ORNGE Responds to Emergencies

ORNGE is not part of the 911 system and cannot be called directly by the public. After a 911 call comes in, hospitals, EMS, and primarily, Central Ambulance Communications Centres directly request ORNGE service. **ORNGE is a secondary responder.** Requests for service must meet certain provincial guidelines (Air Ambulance Utilization Guidelines set forth by the MOHLTC) which can include time to patient, time to hospital, level of care required or other extraordinary circumstances and clinical factors based on field trauma triage or specific medical criteria. Whether or not ORNGE responds is also determined by availability of helicopters (they may already be servicing a call or may be unavailable



All photos courtesy of ORNGE

for mechanical or staffing reasons) and, of course, weather conditions.

Once a request for service comes in, the ORNGE Operations Control Centre (OCC) springs into action. There is a physician on duty 24/7. The physician remotely assesses the patient's situation and the OCC dispatches the most appropriate asset and coordinates logistics with EMS. He/she triages the patient and gives medical orders to the helicopter crew and provides advice to hospitals.

How ORNGE Responds

Each helicopter is staffed with 2 pilots and 2 paramedics. The paramedics' level of care designation ranges from primary care to advanced care to critical care. The majority of paramedics are designated as critical care. During the day ORNGE can perform on-scene response, and in some circumstances, can even perform "hover exits" where the paramedics exit the helicopter and reach the patient in areas where the helicopter can't safely set down. At night the pilots who are night vision goggle-trained will only land at identified and approved helipads or airports.

So having an ORNGE-approved and, ideally, Transport Canada-certified or registered, helipad in your area increases the likelihood of ORNGE response in your community. At night it is an absolute requirement. ORNGE is happy to assist groups interested in helipads by providing information. They can provide all the specifications that must be met to create an approved helipad. Contact either Jeff DeMille or James Dennison for more information at jdemille@ornge.ca or jdennison@ornge.ca or call 1-800-251-6543.

ORNGE does not build helipads nor fund them. Funding would need to be explored with your local municipality or service board. ORNGE also does not service helipads.

There is a lot more to ORNGE. Check out their website to learn more at www.ornge.ca. ■

Hospitals - Closest Landing Site

West Parry Sound Health Centre - Hospital Helipad CRS2
Killarney Health Centre - Killarney Airport – CPT2
Mactier Health Centre - Mactier Helipad R111
Manitoulin Health Centre - Hospital Helipad CNT4

Nursing Stations - Closest Landing Site

Britt Area Nursing Station - Britt Helipad R029
Pointe au Baril Nursing Station - Parry Sound Helipad CRS2

A photograph of a rustic living room interior. It features a large stone fireplace, a wooden ceiling with exposed beams, and large windows. The room is furnished with a wicker coffee table, a wicker sofa, and a wicker chair. The text "NORMERICA TIMBER HOMES & COTTAGES" is overlaid on the image, along with "SERVING GEORGIAN BAY SINCE 1979". At the bottom of the image, the contact information "info@normerica.com • 1-800-361-7449 • normerica.com" is displayed.

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