

# YEARBOOK 2020



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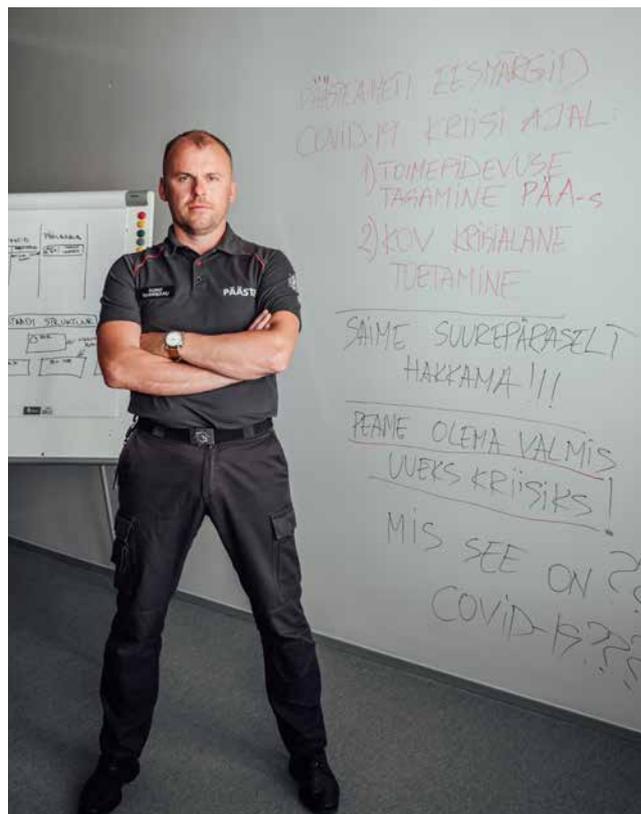


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# People are always at the core of our activities



**Kuno Tammearu**  
Director General of the Estonian Rescue Board

Dear reader, how would you summarise the year 2020? Let me guess – the coronavirus, home isolation and travel restrictions. Distance learning and home office, e-commerce, and sadly, for many people, unemployment. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the year 2020 was unprecedentedly tough all over

the world. Sadly, the crisis is not over yet, and we in Estonia and people all over the world will have to deal with the effects and consequences of it for many years to come. But there is always some good in every bad situation, and being forced to rearrange things has provided us useful lessons.



## **Crises will not frighten us or swipe us off our feet if we are prepared for them.**

The year 2020 was vastly different for the Estonian Rescue Board as well. During the emergency situation in spring we rearranged our work in a matter of hours. The whole Board switched over to a staff regime, which, on the one hand, allowed us to guarantee that the services and work of the Rescue Board continued, and, on the other hand, allowed us to help the entire country. Our logisticians helped deliver millions of face masks, several hundred thousand litres of disinfectant and other personal protection equipment items all over the country. Our people headed emergency work in their regions and in Saaremaa, helping the local authorities manage the crisis and relaying information between the local and state management levels. The emergency situation ended, but the Rescue Board's role as the main crisis partner of local authorities remained and is still ongoing. The Rescue Board has always held this role, but the large and small crises of the last few years have strengthened our position as the authority protecting the population. Local authorities are our main partners, and the main goal of our activity is for the people to manage well in crisis, as well as during 'peacetime'.

Managing crises and preparing for them are some of the main activities of the Estonian Rescue Board. Certainly, we stand for fire and water safety and promoting safety culture in the broadest sense. We respond to calls in case of fire and water

accidents, neutralise explosives and chemical pollution, save people from the highest heights and deepest pits. Nevertheless, crises and preparing for them are an unavoidable part of today's world. Among other things, a safe and secure society means that the state, local authorities, businesses and most importantly, people, are ready for crises and able to get by.

What does being ready for a crisis really mean? It means having supplies at home and knowing how to act in a certain situation, but mainly this means mental preparation. Crises will not frighten us or swipe us off our feet if we are prepared for them. Unexpected situations and uncertainty cause fear and frightened people can act in very unpredictable ways. Merely acknowledging that it is just a matter of time when the (next) crisis hits and turns our usual life arrangements more or less upside down, will help lessen fear and make peace with this idea. From then on, one must just pull themselves together and make practical preparations, and here the Estonian Rescue Board can help.

At the end of last year, we sent a publication about how to behave in a crisis to all residents of Estonia, which provided instructions on preparing for emergencies and managing them. We are at the service of every Estonian resident who has questions about how to better prepare for the unexpected situations in life.

**Kuno Tammearu**

Director General of the Estonian Rescue Board



## **Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the year 2020 was unprecedentedly tough all over the world.**



# ORGANISATION

The Estonian Rescue Board is a governmental institution under the Ministry of the Interior's area of government. As of 31 December 2020, the Estonian Rescue Board had 2,186 employees, making it the third largest public sector body in Estonia.

The Estonian Rescue Board has five key areas: prevention work, safety surveillance, rescue work, explosive ordnance disposal and emergency management. The rescue board

has a total of 65 services, including 28 main and 37 support services.

The day-to-day readiness of the Estonian Rescue Board is based on 72 national brigades, 4 explosive ordnance disposal teams and 116 volunteer rescue brigades. Our 300 professional and 250 volunteer rescuers guarantee emergency response 24/7, our forces are able to reach 92.4% of the population in 15 minutes.



## THE ESTONIAN RESCUE BOARD AS AN ORGANISATION



**2,086**  
EMPLOYEES, incl.  
**1,579**  
PROF. RESCUERS



**2,163**  
VOLUNTEER  
RESCUERS



**72**  
NATIONAL  
RESCUE BRIGADES



**116**  
VOLUNTEER  
RESCUE BRIGADES



**4**  
EXPLOSIVE  
ORDNANCE  
DISPOSAL TEAMS



**25,822**  
EMERGENCY CALLS, incl.  
**14,881**  
RESCUE EVENTS



AVERAGE TIME  
OF RESPONSE TO  
A LIFE-SAVING EVENT:  
**0:09:10,9**



**301**  
PEOPLE  
RESCUED



**19,765**  
HOME COUNSELLING  
SESSIONS



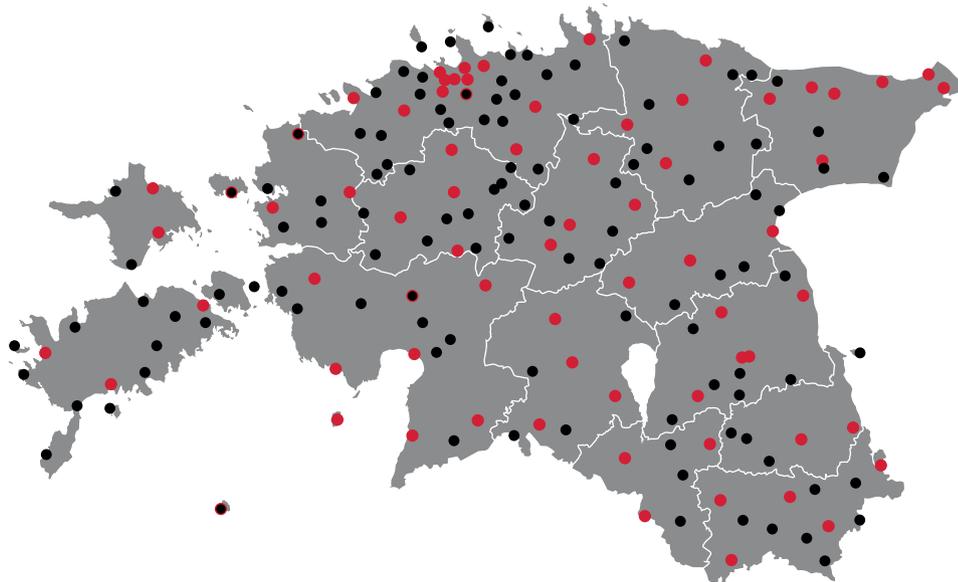
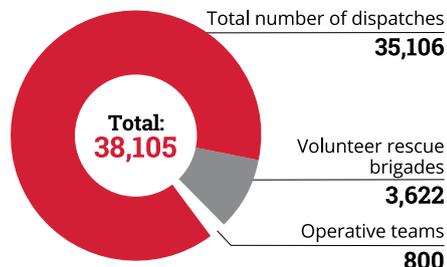
**358,252,702**  
EUROS WORTH OF PROPERTY  
DAMAGE PREVENTED

## A country-wide network

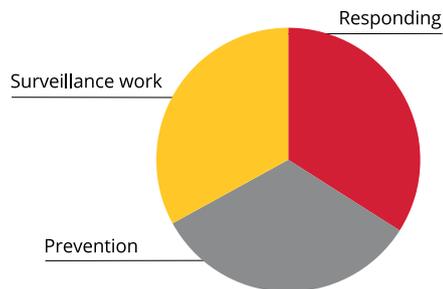
Estonia is covered by a rescue network that in 2020 consisted of 1,579 professional rescuers and more than 2,000 volunteers, i.e., over 3,500 people. Last year, volunteer rescuers went on 3,622 dispatches, which was slightly more than in the year before.

## THE ESTONIAN RESCUE BOARD AS AN ORGANISATION

### TOTAL NUMBER OF DISPATCHES



### THE ESTONIAN RESCUE BOARD'S ACTIVITIES



**In 15 minutes, we can reach 92,4% of the Estonian population**



### THE ESTONIAN RESCUE BOARD'S MAIN AREAS OF OPERATION



PREVENTION



SAFETY SURVEILLANCE



RESCUE WORK



EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL



EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



## VOLUNTEER RESCUE NETWORK 2020

The coronavirus crisis was the year's key word for the volunteers as well, as many regular activities, such as home counselling sessions, training courses and joint on-call service with professional rescuers were cancelled or disturbed. Instead, many volunteer rescue unions helped solve the COVID-19 crisis: in cooperation with local authorities they delivered food and medicine to elderly people living alone, helped with monitoring whether people followed coronavirus restrictions, helped with the logistics related to delivering disinfectant and personal protective equipment, and in Saaremaa, for example, a volunteer rescuer developed a mask wearing campaign.

In usual circumstances volunteer rescuers participate in achieving internal security sector goals and promoting safety culture in the society, responding to rescue events together with professional rescuers or independently, contributing to prevention work and taking action for the safety and security of our community.



NUMBER OF  
VOLUNTEER  
RESCUERS  
**2,163**



PARTICIPATED  
**3,092**  
IN EVENTS:



SOLVED  
**1,299**  
INDEPENDENTLY:

**Total number of all  
rescue events:**

**14,881**



Number of  
home counselling  
sessions:  
**3,812**

**19%**

# THE YEAR IN FIGURES & FACTS



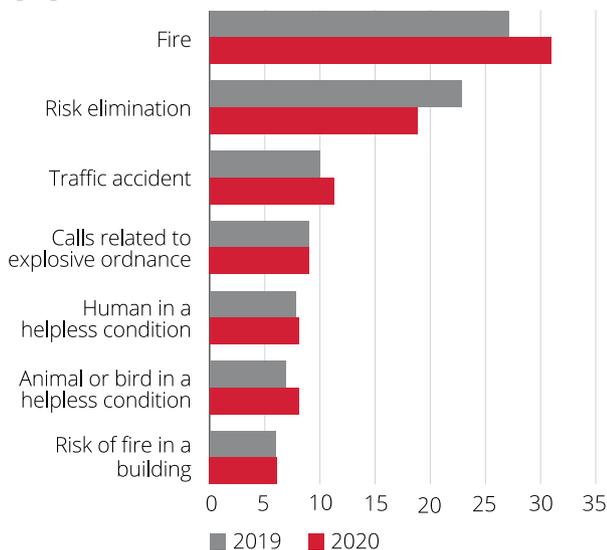
# Responding to events

In 2020, rescue workers received a total of 25,822 calls. Compared to 2019, 2020 had a higher percentage of hazard elimination events, whereas the percentage of fires was smaller.

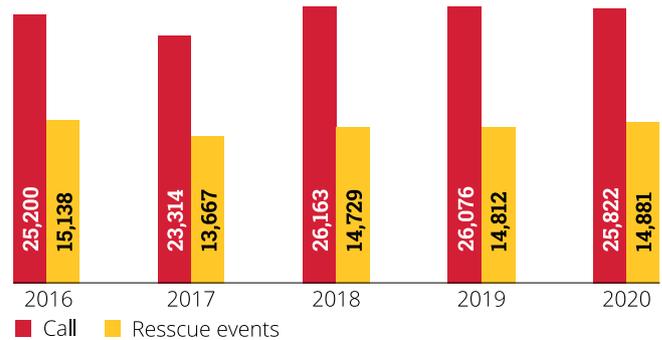
The number of rescue operations was similar to that of 2019 – 14,881. Most calls were due to fires (3,990) and storm damage (3,374) incidents. Fires and storms made up almost half of the year’s rescue events (49%). The year 2020 was stormy. In the last five years, statistically there has been 206 hazard elimination events per month on average, while the number of calls was above average in six months this year (three months in 2019). Most hazard elimination calls came in July (831). Compared to 2019, there number of hazard elimination events was higher by 581 in 2020.

The number of times administrative assistance was provided has also increased every year. For example, rescue workers are called if a person falls in their home and cannot open the door, meaning that the ambulance cannot reach them. In 2020, such incidents occurred 4,668 times.

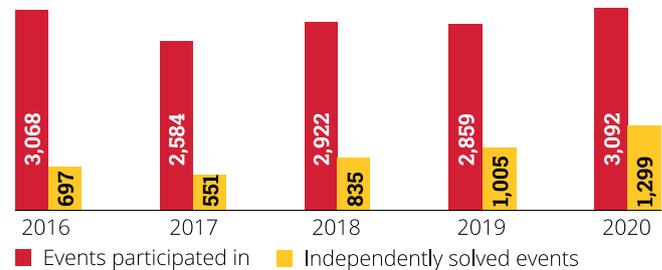
**Percentage of rescue events in 2019 in comparison with 2020 (proportion in %)**



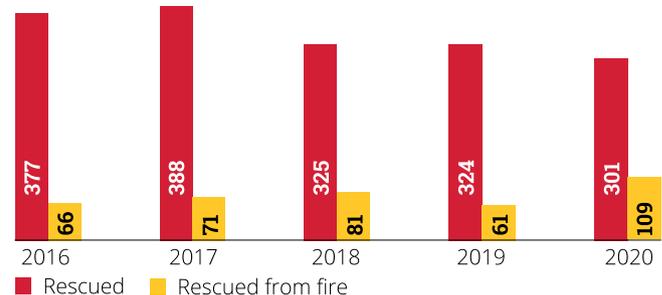
**Number of calls and rescue events in the period 2016–2020**



**Volunteer rescuers at events in the period 2016–2020**



**Number of people rescued in the period 2016–2020**

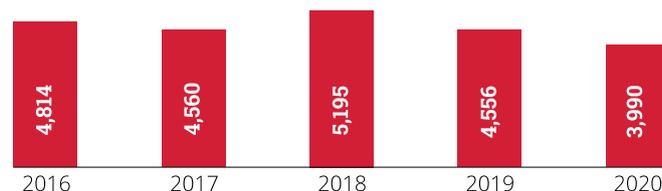


## Fires

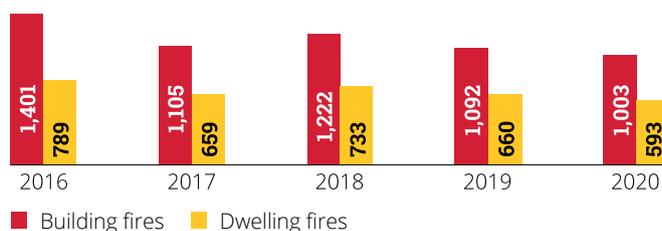
The year 2020 was record-breaking for the Estonian Rescue Board in a positive sense in many ways: the number of building, dwelling, forest, and landscape fires was the smallest since Estonia restored its independence. The number of casualties in fires was also the smallest since 1991. There was a total of 3,990 fires, 1,003 of which were building fires, 593 dwelling fires and 729 forest and landscape fires.

There were 33 fires with casualties, resulting in the death of 36 people. There were 24 fires with casualties in dwellings in use, this number was 35 in 2019. 11 people (31%) died in a private home fire, 12 (33%) in an apartment building fire.

### FIRES

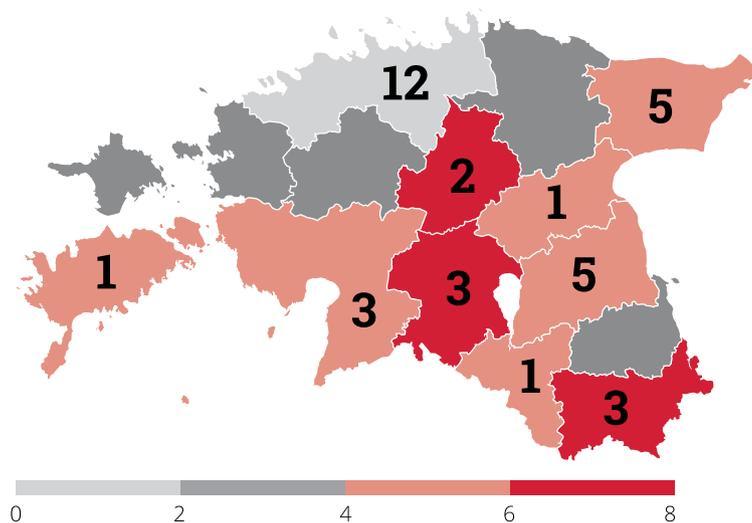


### FIRES IN BUILDINGS AND DWELLINGS



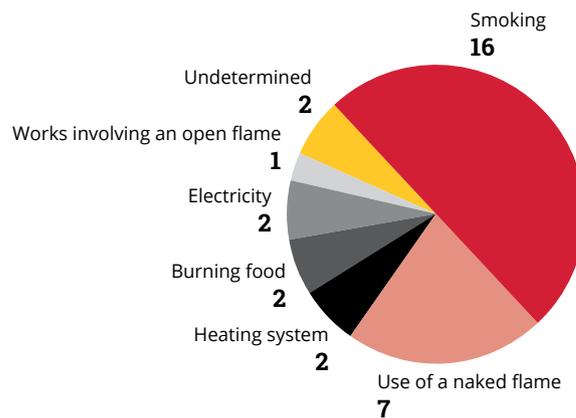
### NUMBER OF FIRE DEATHS BY COUNTY

Per 100,000 inhabitants



Careless smoking is still one of the main reasons for fires resulting in deaths.

### CAUSES OF FIRES WHICH RESULTED IN DEATH

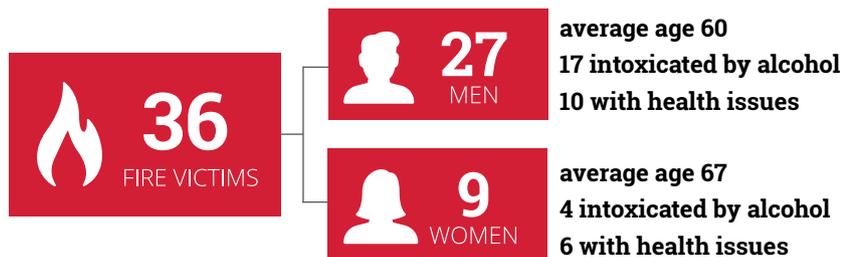


# Who does it happen to and why?

27 of the 36 fire victims were men, 9 were women. The average age of fire victims was 62. Almost half of the victims were pensioners. 58% of adult fire victims were intoxicated / suspected to be intoxicated, this was especially apparent among men – only three men who died in a fire were sober. The average intoxication of a fire victim was 2.72‰, the highest being 4.49‰.



A fire on Lapinki Street, Kasepää



**71%** of the fire victims did not have a functioning smoke detector in their home

**CAUSES: 16 careless smoking, 6 use of a naked flame**

Fatal fires were also started by burning food, electricity and heating systems

# Carbon monoxide

In 2020, at least 53 people at 46 events were harmed due to carbon monoxide. The average age of a victim was 52, but there were also 8 children among them, the youngest being under a year old. Most carbon monoxide poisonings were related to solid fuel (at least 67%), closing the wood stove damper being the most common cause.



An extensive forest fire in Klooga

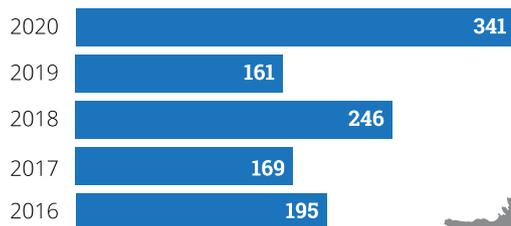
## People drowned in and rescued from water accidents

2020 had the highest number of people drowning in water accidents, 58, which is double compared to 2019. The number of water accidents increased by 103%, i.e., by 173 events, rescue workers were called to 341 water accident events, in 13 cases the drowning person could not be saved. Nevertheless, 29 people were saved from 20 water accidents.

In three consecutive years, over half of the drowned were intoxicated. In 2020, 31 of the 57 adults who drowned had consumed alcohol (average intoxication 2,58‰). All the drowned elderly were sober and all the working-age drowned were intoxicated. The number of drowning people is rising in all neighbouring countries.

The year 2020 was the warmest in Estonian climate history. The higher-than-average temperatures at the beginning of the year and the rainfall had severe consequences. 14 people drowned in the first three months of the year – bodies of water were full, shores were soft, slippery and high. In addition to the warm weather, the lockdown that had just ended could have also had an influence on the higher number of the drowned in the summer months. More than half of the water accidents were connected to ice – there were almost as many water accidents in December 2020 as there were in the whole year of 2019. Most of these events were related to children (96). There were 41 events related to fishermen.

### NUMBER OF WATER ACCIDENTS IN 2016–2020

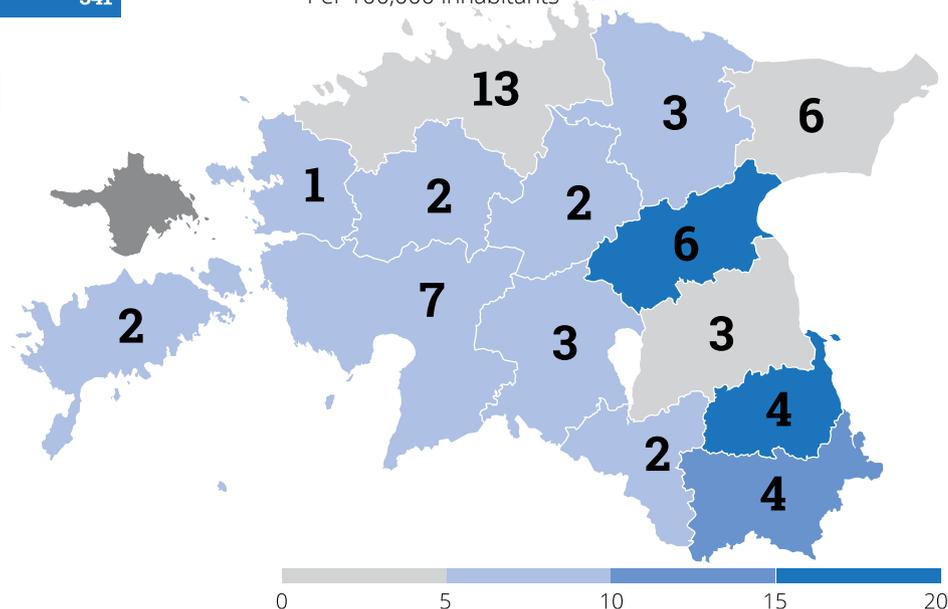


### NUMBER OF WATER ACCIDENT DEATHS



### NUMBER OF WATER ACCIDENT DEATHS BY COUNTIES

Per 100,000 inhabitants



# Who drowns and why?

Most people drowned in the summer and winter months. The majority of the drownings (76%, i.e., 44) occurred in inland bodies of water, 10 people drowned in their home environment. 79% of the drowned were men and 21% women, one child drowned as well. This year, the proportion of the elderly who drowned was three times greater than in 2019. So many elderly have not drowned before in the last 10 years. The average age of a drowning casualty has risen substantially, it was 61 in 2020, 53 the year before. More than half of drownings happened upon falling into the water – 52% (mostly trenches and ponds), the number of such drownings was the highest of the last five years. Most people drowned in ponds (12), lakes (12), rivers (11) and the sea (9).



average age 60  
 30 intoxicated by alcohol  
 1 suspected suicide  
 17 with health issues

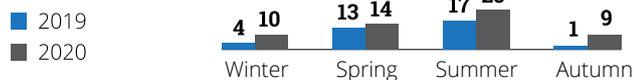
average age 66  
 2 intoxicated by alcohol  
 5 suspected suicides  
 7 with health issues

**CAUSES: 30 fell into water, 11 were swimming, 8 were fishing, 9 other**

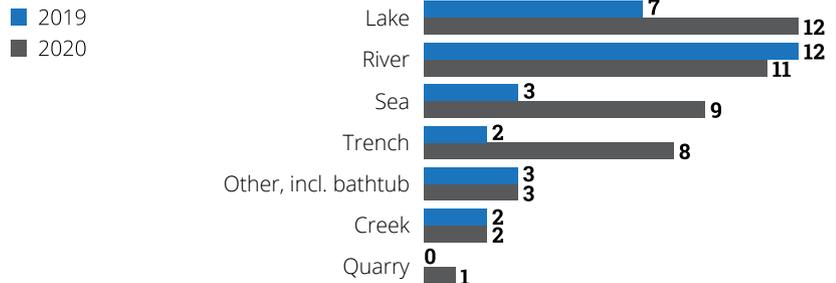
Based on the activities which preceded the drowning, they can be divided into two main categories: drownings which occurred while using a body of water, i.e., swimming, boating, fishing, or driving on an ice road, and those where a person fell or slipped into the water (e.g., into a pond or a trench). More than half of the casualties drowned due to falling and slipping.

In 2020, 11 people, i.e., every fifth of the casualties, drowned while swimming. All of the elderly who drowned while swimming were sober and all the working-age people were intoxicated. 8 people drowned while fishing, 5 of them while fishing on a boat. Only 2 of the people who drowned while fishing on a boat wore a life jacket, they were the only sober ones as well. 3 people drowned in a watercraft accident. Only one person involved in the watercraft accident was intoxicated, but none of the three wore a life jacket. In 2020, 30 people drowned due to slipping and falling, 20 of those in a public place and 10 at home. In this case, the activity that preceded drowning was not determined in all events. Most of the people who drown near their home were elderly and had an alcohol problem or health issues. Suicide was suspected in 6 drowning cases.

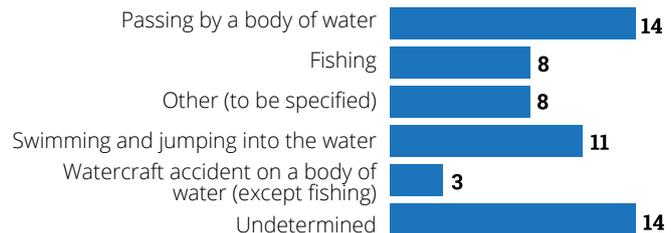
## TIME OF DROWNING



## BODIES OF WATER WHERE DROWNINGS OCCURRED



## ACTIVITIES THAT PRECEDED DROWNING





## EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSAL

# 9,041 explosives defused

In 2020, the explosive ordnance disposal centre received 1,651 calls, more than two thirds of these for ammunition findings. A total of 9,041 explosive devices were rendered harmless. 1 person died and 2 were injured in ammunition explosions in 2020.

There were several reasons for discovering this record-breaking number of explosives. The winter and spring of 2020 were warm and more people spent time in the nature. Planned works in East Estonia ("Ida kõmin") and helpful residents who notified the Rescue Board of ammunition also contributed to increasing the number of findings.

On 21 to 24 September the Rescue Board's explosive specialists were in Ida-Viru county with large forces, organising a

planned explosives defusing event called "Ida kõmin." In cooperation with the explosive specialists from the Defence Forces, 1,191 explosives were found and destroyed after searching and following information received from residents. This included 566 shells, 451 mortar mines, 1 aerial bomb and 164 grenades. The Estonian Rescue Board's Explosive Ordnance Disposal Center (all teams: From East, South, West and North Estonia), explosive specialists and equipment from the 1st Infantry Brigade of the Defence Forces, the Estonian Road Administration, the Environmental Board, the Emergency Response Centre, the Police and Border Guard Board and the Eastern Estonian Rescue Center participated in the "Ida kõmin" event.

The goal of the event was to clean the Toila municipality, area around Valaste waterfall, and the territory between Sirgala and Auvere of ammunition dating back to World War II and make the area safer. Most of the findings were in the area between Sirgala and Auvere. One of the largest findings was detected owing to a notification from a person gathering mushrooms, the specialists examined the referenced area and found 181 explosives.

In 2020, three puppies joined the Estonian Rescue Board's Explosive Ordnance Disposal Center: two German shepherds, Estrellest Ingo Indigo and Estrellest Lexus, and a Labrador girl, Allihuppan Rise and Shine from Finland. Explosive detection dogs keep an eye on the visits of foreign dignitaries, examine suspicious bags and items, ensure safety at large events and help the police in searches.

## Main events

**On 4 February 2020**, the West Estonian explosive ordnance disposal team responded to an ammunition incident in Saaremaa rural municipality, Saare county, where 345 time fuses and 1 shell were found during cleaning a nature reserve.

**On 5 May 2020**, the East Estonian explosive ordnance disposal team responded to an ammunition incident in the town of Narva-Jõesuu, Ida-Viru county, where 113 mortar mines of different calibre, 143 shells of different calibre, 12 hand grenades of different purpose and 2 fuses were found in the forest.

**On 25 May 2020**, the North Estonian explosive ordnance disposal team responded to an ammunition incident in the city of Tallinn, Harju county, where different explosives were found while screening soil. The team visited the site 16 times. 337 explosives were found: 207 shells of different calibre, 29 mortar mines, 5 hand grenades, 61 fuses of different purpose, 5 propelling charges, 2 boosters, 15 bottom tracers of shells and 13 cases.

**On 8 June 2020**, the West Estonian explosive ordnance disposal team responded to an ammunition incident in Saaremaa rural municipality, Saare county, where 122 shells and 39 cases were found during excavation works.



**On 9 June 2020**, the East Estonian explosive ordnance disposal team responded to an ammunition incident in Toila rural municipality, Ida-Viru county, where prior survey gave reason to believe that ammunition could be found there. In checking the area, explosive specialists found 92 shells of different calibre and 3 fuses.

**On 9 June 2020**, the East Estonian explosive ordnance disposal team responded to an ammunition incident in the town of Narva-Jõesuu, Ida-Viru county, where 52 shells and 27 mortar mines were found in the Auvere forest.

**On 7 July 2020**, the East Estonian explosive ordnance disposal team responded to an ammunition incident in the town of Narva-Jõesuu, Ida-Viru county, where 22 shells and 93 mortar mines were found in the forest.

**On 1 October 2020**, the East Estonian explosive ordnance disposal team responded to an ammunition incident in the town of Narva-Jõesuu, Ida-Viru county, where 79 shells of different calibre, 37 mortar mines, 14 hand grenades, 1 anti-tank mine, 2 rifle grenades and 2 fuses were found in the forest.

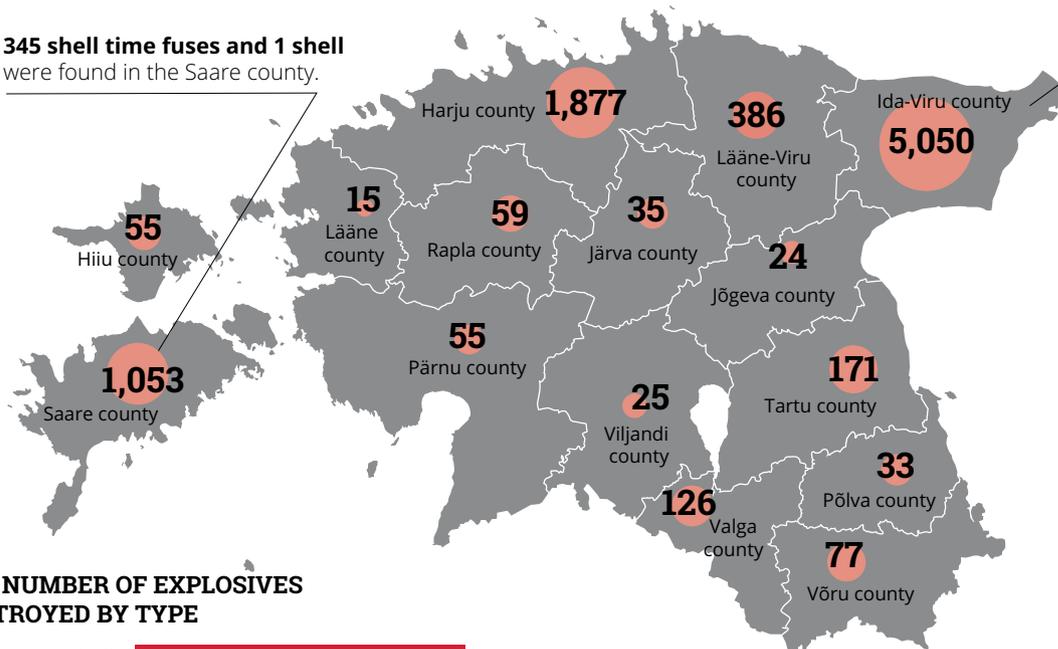
## IN 2020, 9,041 EXPLOSIVE DEVICES WERE DEFUSED

### NUMBER OF EXPLOSIVES DEFUSED BY COUNTY AND THE LARGEST FINDINGS

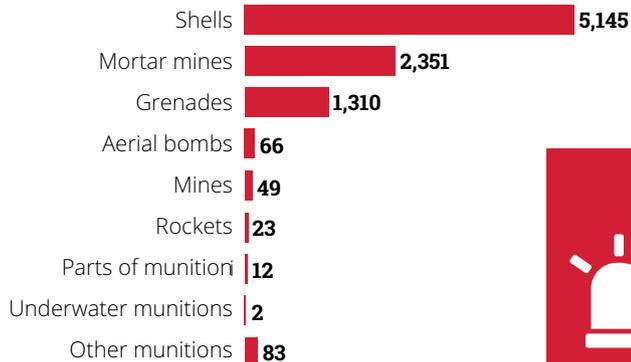
207 shells of different calibre, 29 mortar mines, 5 hand grenades, 61 fuses of different purpose, 5 propelling charges, 2 boosters, 15 bottom tracers of shells and 13 cases were found in the city of Tallinn.

On several separate calls, 270 mortar mines of different calibre, 296 shells of different calibre, 26 hand grenades of different purpose, 1 antitank mine, 2 rifle grenades and 4 fuses were found in the town of Narva-Jõesuu.

345 shell time fuses and 1 shell were found in the Saare county.



### THE NUMBER OF EXPLOSIVES DESTROYED BY TYPE





## SAFETY SUPERVISION

# The digitalisation of safety supervision

Fire safety and chemical safety supervision inspectors inspect the performance of safety rules in approximately 7,000 buildings each year. The number of inspections is tied to the number of inspectors, which will not increase remarkably in the near future. However, it is possible to use technology for the Board's advantage and decrease the workload of the safety supervision department by introducing automatic operations.

The issue was taken in hand in 2018 and the first large development has been completed by today. A new administrative procedure module has been implemented and the inspectors conduct proceedings only in an electronic environment. In terms of work organisation, it is a rather considerable change since the entire procedure is now digital.

In parallel with the administrative procedure module, the

Estonian Rescue Board's safety portal was also launched – this is intended for providing information on proceedings to clients and facilitating communication between clients and inspectors. Clients can view the data and documents related to their proceedings, write to inspectors, upload necessary documents and authorise other people in the safety portal. The administrative procedure module is the first step towards creating a safety portal where other developments currently in progress will become available in the future. The purpose of the developments is to simplify proceedings for both inspectors and clients.

Reducing the workload of inspectors and facilitating the communication between clients and inspectors helps us move towards a safety culture where fire and chemical safety rules are known and performed, making our society safer.

# FIGURES AND FACTS



**CONTROL PATROLS WERE MADE IN 2020**

**3**



**515**

SHORTCOMINGS WERE REVEALED



**109** administrative proceedings and **64** misdemeanour proceedings were initiated to remedy the shortcomings

**A TOTAL OF ...**

**WERE INSPECTED**



**163**

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

**53%** of them had shortcomings



**308**

COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

**46%** of them had shortcomings



**259**

SOCIAL WELFARE INSTITUTIONS

Web surveys and telephone conversations. **35%** of them had shortcomings



**6,566**

BUILDINGS WERE INSPECTED IN 2020

including **106** enterprises liable to be affected by a major accident and dangerous enterprises.

**4,259** precepts were issued to building owners and possessors of buildings, and **380** misdemeanour procedures were initiated to remedy detected non-compliances.



THE CAUSES OF

**1,003**

BUILDING FIRES WERE INVESTIGATED

and the cause was determined in **95%** of the cases.



**23,666**

BUILDING MONITORING APPLICATIONS WERE PROCESSED:



- **442** plans
- **15,387** projects
- **7,837** permits for use





# MAIN EVENTS

# Residents of Estonia received instructions on how to behave in an emergency situation

At the end of 2020, the Estonian Rescue Board sent all Estonian residents a printed manual titled "Ole valmis!" ("Be prepared!"), providing instructions on how to cope in a potential crisis.

A crisis always hits the society unexpectedly. The biggest issue in a crisis is that various vital and convenience services may be interrupted – we may have no power or Internet connection, we may have a flood, or the roads may become impassable for some reason. This, in its turn, brings along a shortage of food and water supply, and information.

The survey the Estonian Rescue Board organised in late 2019 revealed that only 15% of Estonian residents have sufficiently analysed their preparedness for a crisis and only 35% of the residents consider it possible that an emergency situation may arise in their neighbourhood. This means that the majority of the population is not sufficiently prepared for large-scale emergency situations.

In the case of a crisis, it should be considered that many people are in need at the same time and help will therefore arrive later than usual. This is why it is important for all households to be able to cope independently in unusual situations. Accordingly, people should be knowledgeable and consider the possibility of a crisis in their daily activities.

The instructions on how to behave in the case of crises were posted to 560,000 households. The instructions were published in three languages: Estonian, Russian and English. In addition to the brochure, necessary information is also available via the mobile application "Ole valmis!" ("Be prepared!") and on the web page [olevalmis.ee](http://olevalmis.ee).



# Midsummer Night's bonfires were looked after by **724 guards**, a record number



Before Midsummer's Eve, the Estonian Rescue Board provided instructions on building a safe bonfire

Before Midsummer's Eve, the Estonian Rescue Board once again invited people to become bonfire guards and register their safe bonfire online. A record number of bonfire guards responded to the call: 724 people, which is 287 more than the year before.

The summer of 2020 was exceptional in terms of Midsummer's Eve bonfires as well. The spread of the coronavirus set its restrictions and large communal bonfire nights were cancelled. More people built a fire in their yard owing to that. The Estonian Rescue Board was glad that so many people took fire safety seriously and prioritised their personal safety as well as that of their family.

Bonfire patrols were also out and about during the festivities to make sure that the bonfires were safe. Rescue workers and volunteers checked the safety of 845 bonfires, 112 of which were declared non-compliant. In most cases, the fire was in the wrong location, e.g., in the forest or too close to buildings or vehicles. In several cases, there was no primary extinguishing equipment near the bonfire and in some cases, prohibited waste was used as fuel. Dangerous bonfires were extinguished, and people received instruction on fire safety.

The Estonian Rescue Board received approximately 400 calls during the Midsummer's Eve festivities, a quarter of which were related to people's concerns about their neighbours' bonfires. Fortunately, fire safety had been guaranteed in most cases, and there was no threat to the surroundings or the people nearby.



**The spread of the coronavirus set its restrictions and large communal bonfire nights were cancelled.**



**Sandra Repp, expert of the Estonian Rescue Board's prevention department, working as a volunteer at the Emergency Response Centre**

## Helping the call centre

The workload of the Emergency Response Centre's and Health Board's call centre increased drastically due to the corona crisis. The unusual situation prompted more questions from people than the employees were able to answer at first. The Estonian Rescue Board employees offered their help to service the flood of calls.

Tens of the Estonian Rescue Board employees helped the Emergency Response Centre to answer the questions people asked upon contacting the state helpline 1247 both during the first and second wave of the coronavirus. The Health Board also received support in that the Rescue Board employees helped to call the close contacts of individuals who had contracted the coronavirus.

Working as a volunteer at the call centre requires excellent communication skills, patience, empathy and high stress tolerance – the person that maps the close contacts of people who have been infected is, unfortunately, the harbinger of bad

news. Each call means a health scare, having to acknowledge a new situation or reorganise familiar living arrangements for a family or extended family. People are different and their reactions vary. The caller must take this into account and cope with it. On average, a volunteer needs to make about twenty calls a day, provide support and information to people and comfort them, if necessary.

The volunteer of a call centre needs to have great listening skills, a warm personality and good heart. It is important to leave the calls behind at the office so one would not take the concerns back home. The person receiving the call needs to get the help they need but the person calling also needs to stay healthy. The Estonian Rescue Board employees have the necessary skillset. Thus, dozens of volunteers are helping the Health Board and Emergency Response Centre, take or make tens or hundreds of calls each day and make their contribution into guaranteeing that all of us would be safe in our changing circumstances.



## COVID patrols with a drone

In the spring of 2020 during the emergency situation in Estonia, the Estonian Rescue Board helped the Police and Border Guard Board (PBGB) with its forces and equipment to prevent mass gatherings and the spread of the virus.

During this time period, all offices cooperated more closely than in usual circumstances and when the need arose, drone operators from the Rescue Board were involved in addition to patrols, mostly in the city of Rakvere. The option of transmitting a live video feed, owing to which staff members and the PBGB's operational manager could monitor and direct the flight in real time was a great advantage. Direct communication between the PBGB's operational manager and the drone

operator allowed to provide grounded units rapid information on large gatherings, while the units could then go and inform the gathering people. Severe breaches were, fortunately, not discovered, but as the schools had switched to remote learning, it was usually young people who met in groups. In the initial days, PBGB patrols had to drive to some locations, but later only a drone fly-by was sufficient for the young people to understand that they should peacefully disperse.

The drone of the Eastern Rescue Centre is equipped with an excellent zoom feature and thermal imaging camera, which allows operating it in the night-time as well. Thus, the Estonian Rescue Board has more to offer its partners in the future.

## Fireproof homes

When the “500 kodu tuleohutuks” (“500 fireproof homes”) project was launched two years ago, the target number seemed quite ambitious. As we came close to reaching the target, the maximum limit was done away with in 2020 and the project got a new name: “Kodud tuleohutuks” (“Fireproof homes”). The purpose of the project remains the same – helping residents who cannot help themselves, primarily families with many children, elderly people living alone and disabled people, make their homes safer.

Since 2020, the project allows supporting people whose fire-hazardous home belongs to a family member. Additional activities available included repairing and replacing gas equipment, and necessary preparatory works, such as providing expert assessments to heating systems or performing an electrical installation audit.

Notwithstanding that all activities ceased for months during the emergency situation and measures for preventing the

virus were taken for the rest of the year as well, all that had been planned was achieved by the end of the year. A total of 425 households received help in 2020. Construction work was performed in 256 homes, while in 169 households the Estonian Rescue Board helped to purchase a carbon monoxide detector, extinguishing equipment and/or maintain the heating system. In terms of construction works, the largest proportion of the work volume was made up by repairing heating systems (61%), electrical systems (24%) and in some cases both of the above (13%). In a few cases, people applied for support for gas equipment and heat pumps (2.8%).

76 local authorities made use of the support all over Estonia. The project’s budget was a total of 913,000 euros, 600,000 euros of which was contributed by the state. In three years, 1,088 households received support from the Estonian Rescue Board’s, Ministry of the Interior’s and local authorities’ joint project.



**Notwithstanding that all activities ceased for months during the emergency situation all that had been planned was achieved by the end of the year.**

**A before and after photograph of a chimney repaired thanks to the project**



## Logistics support in everyday work and during the emergency situation

During the first wave of the coronavirus, the Estonian Rescue Board's Kose logistics centre had an important part in alleviating the situation, supplying personal protective equipment and disinfectants to the entire country.

Nearly 3.5 million surgical masks, 150,000 litres of disinfectant and countless other personal protective equipment items passed through the logistics centre at the time. All the pieces of equipment needed to be counted, assembled based on the distribution plan and safely delivered – the logistics experts of the Rescue Board worked for weeks on end practically without rest. This activity is not a function of the Rescue Board per se, but the country needed support during the emergency situation.

Specific equipment that grants certain capabilities upon the occurrence of various events is maintained in the 1,000-square metre warehouse at Kose that was opened on 14 June 2011. Be it a flood that requires evacuating people, a forest fire, chemical spill or other large-scale event. The facility also helps to guarantee the Estonian Rescue Board's continuous operation by stocking employees' clothing and other necessary equipment. The Kose logistics centre may be called the heart of the Estonian Rescue Board and volunteer rescue brigades, owing to which all the units of the Board are equipped at all times so as to perform their activities without hindrance.



**The Kose logistics centre may be called the heart of the Estonian Rescue Board and volunteer rescue brigades.**



Disinfection of goods at the logistics centre



A moment in time at the staff of the Western Rescue Centre

## How the Estonian Rescue Board guaranteed its continuous operation during the emergency situation and also **took care of its partners**

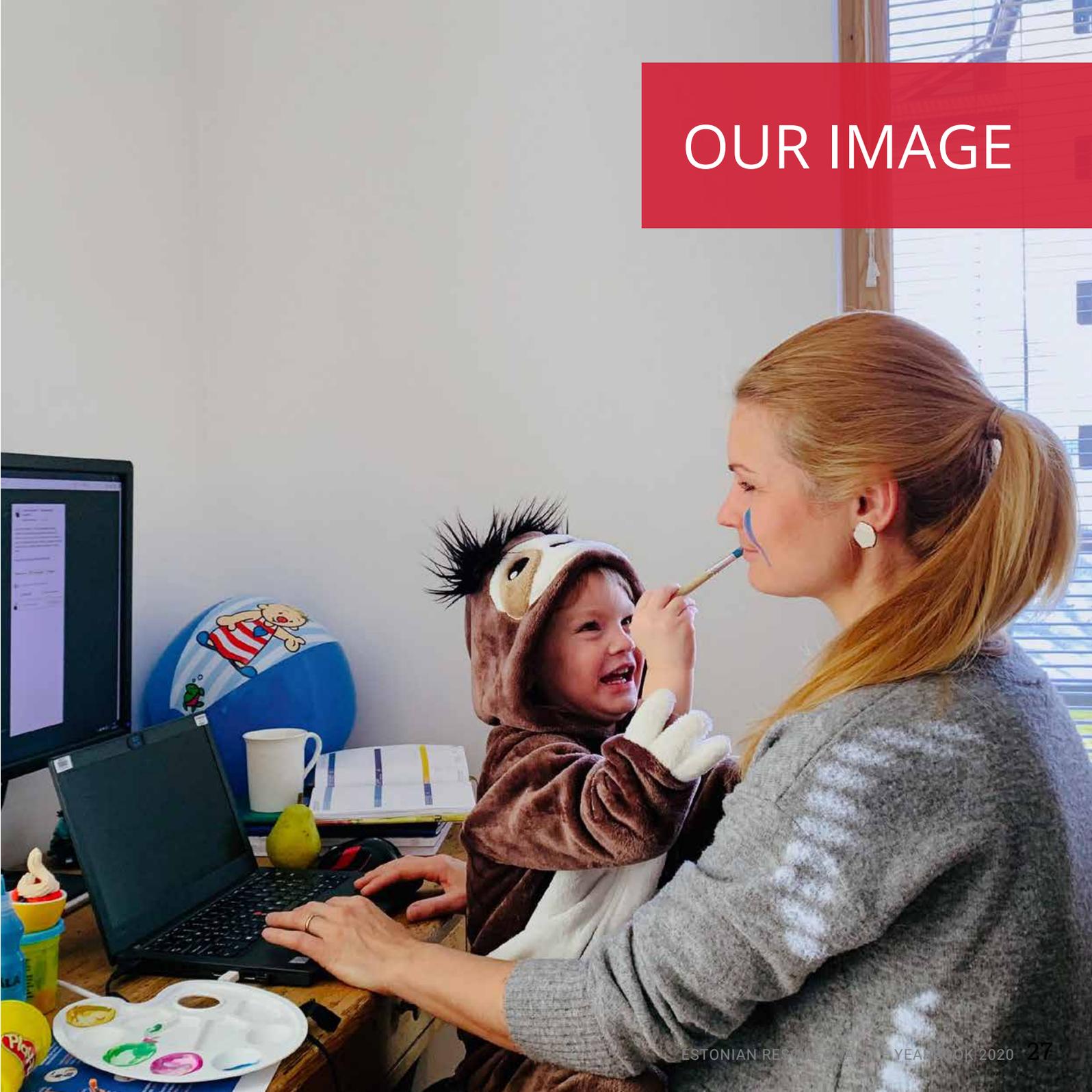
During the emergency situation in the spring of 2020, the Estonian Rescue Board launched a national staff and five regional staffs, including in the crisis area on the Island of Saaremaa. Considering the character of the corona crisis, the situation was somewhat new and challenging for the Estonian Rescue Board as well, providing an opportunity to test the current work organisation of the Board's staff and the suitability thereof. A staff is a temporary management structure, the purpose of which is to direct the resolution of an event or situation, coordinate the activity of offices and guarantee cooperation with partners.

Last spring, the main tasks of the staffs were to guarantee the work organisation and continuous operation of the Estonian Rescue Board and the common rescue network during the emergency situation, support local authorities and the work of regional crisis committees. As the Rescue Board officials led emergency work in the regions and on Saaremaa, their

task was to guarantee the performance of emergency work and support. In simple terms, the purpose of the Rescue Board's staffs was to facilitate and coordinate activities so as to stop the spread of the virus in the country, support its partners, including local authorities, keep the rescue network functioning and guarantee that residents have access to life-saving aid.

In practical terms, the staffs were used in guaranteeing the continuous operation of the rescue network and the availability of aid, supporting local authorities and other partners in their activity, maintaining information management within the Board and in communication with partners and preparing various safety instructions for public servants during the crisis. The availability of personal protective equipment was guaranteed and the state's various logistics assignments were coordinated and performed.

# OUR IMAGE



# The Estonian Rescue Board is a family-friendly employer

In 2020, the Estonian Rescue Board was awarded the gold level of the Family-Friendly Employer Label. This means that the Estonian Rescue Board has created opportunities to lead a balanced work and family life. Combining work life and family is often spoken of in relation to employees with children, but this topic is much wider and important for all civil servants.

A balanced life relies on good mental and physical health, this was one of the focus topics of the Estonian Rescue Board in 2020. Working in rescue service is mentally challenging, and the corona crisis left an additional mark in 2020. To support the mental health of our people, the Estonian Rescue Board increased the number of free psychological counselling sessions it offers to employees from 3 to 5, and paid even more attention to collective health, offering group counselling to units.

Physical wellness is the precondition for good mental health, and expanding the opportunities for supporting physical health was a central topic in 2020. For example, all our employees had a budget of 100 euros per quarter to use via the Stebby environment (former SportID) that facilitates leading a healthy lifestyle. Training sessions, massages, and many other opportunities to take care of one's health are available via Stebby. Gyms in many of the rescue brigades were renovated, new equipment was purchased and rescue workers had the opportunity to use the services of personal trainers and nutritional consultants. The costs of tick-borne encephalitis and flu vaccine shots are compensated for our people as well.

The employees' expectations for work and their employer have changed a lot compared to earlier times. Employees expect their employers to take their interests and specificities into account increasingly more. In joining the family friendly employer programme, one of the Estonian Rescue Board's goals was to get the big picture of the organisation so as to understand, which current activities help shape a friendly work environment, facilitate balancing it with family life, as well as determine the areas to contribute even more into in developing and maintaining a diverse organisational culture.

**Employees can be there for their kin only if they are physically and mentally healthy, and the employer has the power to support this in every possible way.**



People need to take time for their loved ones, therefore the Estonian Rescue Board has offered the opportunity of remote work for years. Flexible working time and work arrangements are based on mutually agreed rules and trust, both of which are present at the Estonian Rescue Board. Civil servants who work on-call shifts have a say in planning work schedules and can change their shifts, if needed.

Employees can be there for their kin only if they are physically and mentally healthy, and the employer has the power to support this in every possible way.

The Rescue Board's working family includes people from different generations with their varying wishes and understandings. Everybody cannot like everything, there is no need for it, and we are not able to offer the same benefits for everyone in the same way either, but the Estonian Rescue Board's goal as an employer is to have something available for everyone. The aim is for everyone to feel as comfortable as possible at work.

In the Estonian Rescue Board, every employee's contributions have value. Every day, the Estonian Rescue Board makes an effort so that every employee would feel valued, and strives towards strengthening the sense of unity within the institution.

**Every day, the Estonian Rescue Board makes an effort so that every employee would feel valued, and strives towards strengthening the sense of unity within the institution.**





# INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

## International cooperation continued in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2020, COVID-19 changed the work of the Estonian Rescue Board a lot. Cooperation with partners from different countries also suffered due to the pandemic. Some trips and meetings were postponed, but some had to be cancelled. Luckily,

some employees could still participate in international cooperation events to develop partnerships, learn something new and help people in need.

# Humanitarian mission in Sudan

At the end of the year, Sudan suffered from a refugee crisis, when thousands of war refugees arrived from Ethiopia daily due to a military conflict. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) asked the International Humanitarian Partnership (IHP) network for support in creating housing and working conditions for the people involved in solving the crisis. From Estonia, Indrek Agar, expert of the rescue work department of the Estonian Rescue Board, went to Sudan and took on the responsibilities of base camp technician from 19 December 2020 to 23 January 2021. Below, Indrek Agar provides an insight into the mission from his perspective.

“The team consisted of experts from Estonia, Denmark, Sweden and Luxembourg. The aim of the mission was to build accommodation facilities for the UNHCR employees in refugee camps. Altogether we needed to build four camps for daily accommodation and work. Tents, generators and other

supplies for building the camps came from Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg and Estonia. Estonia contributed with two accommodation tents with the necessary equipment for their installation and maintenance.

As construction wood is hard to find and expensive in Sudan, we had to seek out alternatives. Everyone was tasked with certain topics. My task was to plan shelters and tent foundations, and prepare all camp drawings, taking into account the specificities of the location. Tent foundations were necessary because there is a rainy season in Sudan in the summer, and there are many floods. Lavatories, washing facilities, a secure fence, the security guard's house and many other facilities needed to be built for the camps. Medics wanted hospitals equipped to treat COVID-19, which would also have antidotes for snake bites and scorpion stings, and would be fit for other severe cases.

**Sunrise at the camp.** Henrik Olofsson



## COOPERATION

Finding construction materials in Khartoum, the capital, was not easy either. Khartoum is approximately 80 kilometres in diameter, and we didn't find the information we needed on the internet. It took about 4 to 5 days until we found a district with many stores selling building supplies. The order in which to build the camps changed as well, as there were armed conflicts near the border with Ethiopia. We started with the camp closest to the capital of Khartoum, about 330 km away, not 700 km away as initially planned. This simplified the logistics as well, because at first, we brought all necessary supplies from the capital. Before moving on to camps, we had to wait for special permissions or visas to drive to the border.

On 11 January we drove to the first camp site in Tenedba. The drive was around 6 hours, as the roads were in bad condition and part of the way ran along open fields, we found our way based on landmarks. We could not remain on the road in the night-time either. At night we could only drive in special circumstances and with armed guards.

We lived in a tiny village next to a camp housing over 5,000 refugees. The conditions were quite tough, the temperature was +35 degrees Celsius during the day, and physical work was exhausting. At night, the average temperature was +20 degrees, and +10–15 in the morning. We saw poisonous snakes and scorpions already during the first days, as they came out in the dark. Scorpions were the most annoying, they crept into the tents and our rest area and were not afraid of people.

We had the UNHCR's consent to hire refugees to build the camp. Every day, around 30 refugees worked alongside us. My team had two women and four men, one of whom worked on a shovel loader. One man had a walking disability, but he was an excellent welder. Our task was to build foundations and lavatories.

During the mission I took on the tasks of an IT technician, logistician, camp technician and even team leader for the hired employees based on the problem that needed to be solved."



**Building fencing**  
Henrik Olofsson



**Indrek Agar and Leif Englund repairing a generator**  
Henrik Olofsson



**This is what the team's camp was like**

Guy Wagener

*The IHP is a collaboration network that unites the rescue boards of eight countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, United Kingdom, Luxembourg, and Estonia) and aims to jointly contribute into international humanitarian operations. The IHP helps to create temporary working and living environments to*

*humanitarian organisations in crisis hotspots and disaster areas, as well as logistics for field management and IT support in international humanitarian operations, if necessary. The IHP humanitarian mission in Sudan will continue in 2021.*

# The Estonian Rescue Board Explosive Ordnance Disposal Center's cooperation with the United States

The Estonian Rescue Board Explosive Ordnance Disposal Center's continuous cooperation with different agencies of the US dates back to 1998. In recent years, the Estonian Rescue Board Explosive Ordnance Disposal Center has cooperated closely with the Office of Defence Cooperation of the United States in the field of humanitarian explosive ordnance disposal. In the framework of the last project that started already in 2018, explosive specialists received many kinds of new equipment as well as training for underwater explosive ordnance disposal work. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic some deliveries arrived later than planned, and the assembly of two boats received from the programme took longer than expected. Nevertheless, the boats were ready for work in 2020 and the first exercises to test the equipment were carried out the same year. Now, the equipment for underwater explosive ordnance disposal work has substantially improved and the new boats can also be used for rescue works.





# HISTORY

## History of a crisis: dealing with the aftermath of the worst nuclear disaster in history today

On 26 April 1986, a disaster occurred in the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in North Ukraine, quite close to the Belarusian border, about 150 km from Kyiv. Upon testing the reactor of the fourth energy unit, an enormous explosion occurred, and the reactor core burst out of the building. A huge fire followed, and the fire fighters who arrived at the scene first received a lethal dose of radiation. Radiation emitted from the open

reactor for days before the fire could be put out with thousands of tons of sand thrown from military helicopters on the open reactor. A danger zone with a radius of 30 kilometres was set up around Chernobyl but the radiation spread all over Europe. Chernobyl became the worst nuclear disaster in history, affecting the life of hundreds of thousands of people still today.

## HISTORY

Tens of thousands of soldiers and reservists were sent to eliminate the aftermath of the disaster, over half a million people altogether. According to the Estonian Chernobyl Society (*Eesti Tšernobõli Ühing*), 4,833 men were sent to eliminate the consequences of the breakdown, most of them under the guise of reservist training. Men were called to reservist training in the first weeks of May, and those who gave their signature to the official behind their door about receiving their registered letter had to go. Those who could avoid that and went into hiding for some time were spared. Even though the Soviet Union attempted to cover up the accident and its severity in every possible way and understate the possible consequences, information spread around Estonia. Finnish television had a role in this.

Men gathered to rendezvous points, equipment was handed out and trains took them to the south to clean the contaminated area. In the first months after the disaster, the surrounding villages were watered to fix the radioactive dust on the ground. Then soil was turned over with tanks that had a bulldozer blade welded in front of them. Scientists assessed that to be safe, every log in every woodpile should have been washed, but there was an easier option. The approved method was to take a bulldozer, dig a huge hole in front of a house, push the house in and cover it with soil. Whole villages were buried like that. Domestic animals had to be euthanized and burnt.

### **The nuclear power plant's cooling structure during construction**



Many Estonians were also sent to the roof of the power plant, where extremely radioactive rubble had to be cleared away. To do this, men were covered in tin plates, a siren was sounded, and the men had 40 seconds to run, take a shovelful of rubble, throw it over the edge of the roof, and run back. Initially robots were meant to do this job, but due to extremely high radiation, they would not turn on.

By the way, Kalev Timberg, former Director General of the Estonian Rescue Board, worked at the disaster elimination staff, and has shared his experiences with the public as well.

### **Sarcophagus containment structure over reactor No. 4 of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant (Shelter Structure)**



### **A memorial to firefighters, heroes of the Chernobyl disaster**





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