

VALLEY NEWS

By Aimee Caruso | Valley News Staff Writer | Sunday, May 3, 2015

Global Rescue to the Rescue Company With Lebanon Office Was in Position to Help After Nepal Earthquake



Global Rescue clients prepare to leave Lukla for Kathmandu Thursday on a plane chartered by the company. Global Rescue photograph

Lebanon — When Nepal was struck by a deadly earthquake last weekend, a crisis response company with local ties was among the first to respond.

With mountain climbers among its clients, Global Rescue, a Boston-based company with a satellite office in Lebanon, typically does dozens of helicopter evacuations from the Himalayas every year. When the earthquake hit, company personnel were already in Nepal gearing up to support the climbing season, which generally extends from mid-April to the end of May, said founder and CEO Dan Richards, a Tuck School graduate.

Being nearby, they were some of first responders on the scene in Lukla, where all of the casualties from the region were being sent, Richards said. During the first 24 hours, more than 200 people were triaged in the town, with some evacuated to Kathmandu for additional medical care.

The magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck near the capital, Kathmandu. More than 6,000 people are reported dead, and tens of thousands of homes have been destroyed, The Associated Press has reported. Valerie Amos, the U.N. humanitarian office's top official, met with victims and local leaders in Nepal last week.

Aid workers in the country are facing "immense logistical challenges" as they try to reach isolated, mountainside villages where helicopters can't land and roads have often been destroyed, Amos told reporters. "Of course we are worried that it is taking so long to get to people who desperately need aid. Some of those villages are virtually flattened. But it's very, very hard to see how we're going to get to them."

Global Rescue has sent additional people to the region and now have paramedics on the ground, along with a member of its security operations team, a former Green Beret, Richards said from his Boston office Thursday afternoon. They are providing rescue, evacuations, transportation and logistical support, primarily in Lukla. The town is about 38 miles from Mount Everest Base Camp and home to the airport nearest the mountain.

Some of their requests for rescue came from Camp 1 and Camp 2, areas above Base Camp that were destroyed in the earthquake. An avalanche had made the routes between the camps and Base Camp impassable, and attempts by sherpas known as "ice doctors" to re-establish them failed when aftershocks triggered falling ice and avalanches. "Unfortunately, some (of the sherpas) were killed," Richards said.

Hampered by dangerous weather conditions, and subject to clearance by the Nepalese government, the rescues, made by helicopter, took some time, Richards said. "We did some of the last missions out of the camps," taking survivors to Base Camp, where doctors and members of climbing teams who have medical training were working to help.

The last climbers stranded in camps 1 and 2 were evacuated on Tuesday.

"Incredibly, injuries have been minor for our clients and others who contacted us for assistance," Ann Shannon, the company's public relations manager, said in an email.

The 11-year-old company provides medical and security evacuations as well as intelligence to individuals, businesses, nonprofits and governments. Its clients include National Geographic, Conde Nast and NASA.

Many of their thousands of calls a year involve "mundane problems in mundane places," such as minor medical problems, Richards said. Often, they work with members to ensure a condition doesn't worsen, or connect them with a local hospital.

But Global Rescue personnel are accustomed to navigating disaster zones. They've been part of practically every major crisis around the globe in the past decade, Richards said. In both the Arab Spring uprising in Egypt and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, hundreds of their members were affected.

In such disasters, they provide services to clients, who are "always our priority," as well as people who didn't buy services but need them and are willing to pay for them, Richards said. "We try our best to help those folks."

They also do humanitarian work, for which they are not reimbursed.

In Haiti, for example, when Global Rescue medical personnel weren't busy taking care of clients, they were volunteering, Richards said. The company also donates empty seats on flights for humanitarian personnel, food, fuel, water and other necessities.

In Nepal, staff members spent the first day in Lukla providing triage services to anyone who needed it.

"We always do our best in these big crises to provide as much humanitarian support as we can," Richards said. "We view it as an essential part of our corporate responsibility."

As of Thursday afternoon, the company had responded to about 120 requests for help in Nepal and still had about 46 "active ongoing operations" there, including rescues and evacuations, he said.

Because the terrain is so rugged, flights are made only during the day.

Richards said being able to help in this way "ruins you for doing almost any other kind of work."



"We're in the business of giving people a chance they probably wouldn't otherwise have to get through something that is potentially the worst experience of their lives, be able to tip the scales and change the odds in their favor," he said. "If you're looking for meaning in your life and looking to be doing something that is meaningful, it's hard to top this."

Editor's note: Material from The Associated Press was used in this report. Valley News staff writer Aimee Caruso can be reached at acaruso@vnews.com or 603-727-3210.