

# pyMassEvac: A Python package for simulating multi-domain mass evacuation operations

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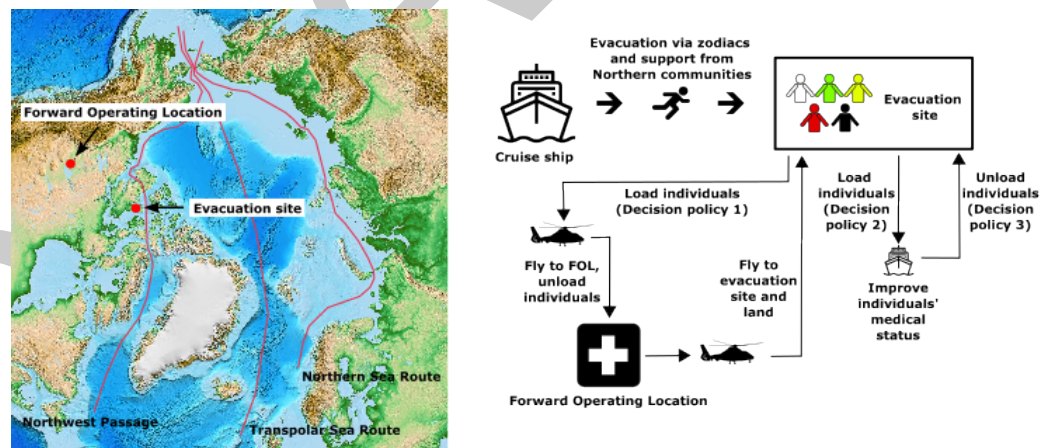
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## Summary

pyMassEvac is a Python package whose aim is to study mass evacuation scenarios. In particular, it is designed to simulate single- and multi-domain mass evacuation operations in which:

- the individuals to be evacuated are at a remote location, such as in the Arctic, where access to immediate medical care is limited or non-existent;
- each individual's medical condition may change over time, perhaps due to environmental conditions, injury, or care being provided; and
- the individuals must be transported from the evacuation site to a Forward Operating Location (FOL).

An example of a multi-domain mass evacuation operation, where the objective is to maximize the number of lives saved by transporting individuals to an FOL, is depicted in [Figure 1](#).



**Figure 1:** Evacuation plan via air with medical assistance provided at the evacuation site via ship. Colours of individuals at the evacuation site represent those in different triage categories (white, green, yellow, red, black; black represents deceased). For a full description, see Rempel (2024).

Within this context, pyMassEvac may be used to provide decision support to defence and security planners in two ways. First, through exploring the impact of policies used to make the three decisions depicted in [Figure 1](#) (see right panel):

- **Decision policy 1:** the policy that determines which individuals are loaded onto a vehicle, such as a helicopter, for transport from the evacuation site to the FOL;
- **Decision policy 2:** the policy that determines which individuals receive medical care (if available) at the evacuation site, such as onboard a nearby ship; and

- **Decision policy 3:** the policy that determines which individuals are removed from the group receiving medical care, for reasons such as limited capacity or that the individuals' medical condition has been sufficiently improved, and returned to the group ready to be transported to the FOL.

Second, assuming decision policies are selected, decision support may be provided by using pyMassEvac to explore the selected policies' robustness to changes in a scenario's parameters. For example, pyMassEvac may be used to explore how robust a set of decision policies are in terms of the number of lives saved with respect to:

- the initial arrival time of one or more transport vehicles after the individuals have arrived at the evacuation site;
- the travel time between the evacuation site and the FOL; and
- the rate at which an individual's medical condition becomes better (through receiving medical care) or worse (due to injury or exposure to environmental conditions) over time.

Changes in a scenario's parameters from baseline values may reflect a variety of real-world strategic and operational decisions beyond the tactical decisions made within scenario itself. For example:

- the reduction in the initial arrival time of transport vehicles may reflect an operational decision to pre-position vehicles during the summer season;
- the reduction in the travel time between the evacuation site and FOL may reflect a strategic decision to build a new aerodrome; and
- the decrease in the rate at which an individual's medical condition worsens may reflect an operational decision to invest in improved medical kit.

Thus, pyMassEvac is designed to be primarily used by operational researchers who study humanitarian or defence and security operations.

pyMassEvac is accessible at <https://github.com/mrempe/pyMassEvac> and is installed via a setup.py script. In addition, published evacuation scenarios that have studied using this package (or one of its earlier developmental versions) are described in Rempel et al. (2021), Rempel & Shiell (2023), and Rempel (2024).

## Statement of need

The significant decrease in Arctic sea ice in recent decades has resulted in increased activity in the Arctic across a range of sectors, such as oil and gas, mining, fishing, and tourism. For example, with the potential increase in the number of Arctic cruise ships, Arctic nations are concerned with both the potential increase in the number of Search and Rescue (SAR) incidents that may occur and the increased size of those incidents in terms of the number of individuals in need of evacuation. This is evidenced by recent exercises that have been conducted, such as the SARex series in Norway (Solberg et al., 2016, 2018), a table-top exercise including the United States, Canada, and the cruise ship industry (McNutt, 2016), and NANOOK-TATIGIT 21 by the Canadian Armed Forces (National Defence, 2021).

- "mass evacuation" "software" - review what MassEvac can do and how does it not fit this need?
- reference Camur (2021)

While software exists to support planning for and executing evacuation operations, this software either requires a paid license (Inc., 2025), focuses on search planning (Guard, 2025),

does not enable a researcher to study the impact of different decision policies, or ...

With this in mind, pyMassEvac aims to enable researchers to study the ...

## Features

### Defining an evacuation operation

Mass evacuation operations are modelled in pyMassEvac as a sequential decision problem under uncertainty using Powell's universal framework for sequential decisions (Powell, 2022). See Section 4 of Rempel (2024) for the complete description of the model. Given this framework, a scenario's parameters are specified via the initial state variable  $S_0$ , which consists of the following elements:

- $m^e$ : Vector of mean time (hours) for an individual to transition from a triage category  $t \in \mathcal{T}$  to the next triage category  $t' \in \mathcal{T}$  at the evacuation site, i.e.,  $m_w^e$  is the mean transition time from the white ( $w$ ) to green ( $g$ ) tag category. The set of triage categories is given as  $\mathcal{T} = \{w, g, y, r, b\}$ ;
- $m^s$ : Vector of mean time (hours) for an individual to transition from a triage category  $t \in \mathcal{T} \setminus \{w\}$  to the next triage category  $t' \in \mathcal{T} \setminus \{r\}$  while receiving medical care, i.e.,  $m_r^s$  is the mean transition time from the red ( $r$ ) to yellow ( $y$ ) tag category;
- $c^h$ : Total capacity for individuals onboard a transport vehicle, such as a helicopter;
- $c^s$ : Total capacity for individuals to receive medical care, such as onboard a ship;
- $\delta^h$ : Vector of capacity consumed by each triage category  $t \in \mathcal{T} \setminus \{b\}$  onboard a transport vehicle. Individual in the black ( $b$ ) tag category are not transported as they are deceased and are assumed to be recovered at the end of the rescue operation;
- $\delta^s$ : Vector of capacity consumed by each triage category  $t \in \mathcal{T} \setminus \{b\}$  when receiving medical care;
- $\eta^h$ : Total time for a transport vehicle to load individuals at the evacuation site, transport them to the FOL, unload the individuals, and return to the evacuation site;
- $\eta^{sl}$ : Total time to transfer individuals at the evacuation site to the local facility (such as a ship) in which they will receive medical care, plus the time until a decision is made as to which individuals to transfer back to the evacuation site;
- $\eta^{su}$ : Total time to transfer individuals from the local facility (such as a ship) in which they are receiving medical care to the evacuation site, plus the time until a decision is made as to which individuals to transport to the FOL;
- $\tau^h$ : Vector of initial arrival time (hours) of each transport vehicle after the individuals have arrived at the evacuation site; and
- $\tau^s$ : Vector of initial arrival time (hours) of each medical care facility (such as a ship) after the individuals have arrived at the evacuation site.

Note that the initial state in pyMassEvac differs from Rempel (2024) as this package includes both  $\tau^h$  and  $\tau^s$ . In Rempel (2024) these two parameters were specified separately in the case study presented in Section 5.

An example of an initial state, with one transport vehicle and one medical care facility, is given in the tutorial found in `tutorial\tutorial.ipynb`.

### Example decision policies

pyMassEvac provides a set of decision policies that implements those described in Rempel (2024). All policies are defined in the `mass_evacuation_policy.py` and are summarized as follows:

- `green_first_loading_policy`: This policy may be used for either **Decision policy 1** or **Decision policy 2** and puts an emphasis on loading healthier individuals prior to those with worse medical conditions.
- `yellow_first_loading_policy`: This policy is similar to the green-first loading policy, with the exception that it focuses on those individuals that require near-term care, followed by those in descending order in triage category. This policy may be used for either **Decision policy 1** or **Decision policy 2**.

- `critical_first_loading_policy`: This policy prioritizes those individuals that require immediate attention before moving onto less critical categories. This policy may be used for either **Decision policy 1** or **Decision policy 2**.
- `random_loading_policy`: This policy randomly selects individuals, regardless of their triage category. This policy may be used for either **Decision policy 1** or **Decision policy 2**.
- `random_unloading_policy`: This policy randomly selects individuals, regardless of their triage category. This policy may be used for **Decision policy 3**.
- `white_unloading_policy`: This policy only removes individuals from the medical facility whose medical condition has improved to be assigned a white ( $w$ ) tag category. This policy may be used for **Decision policy 3**.

In addition, a `do_nothing` policy to model situations in which a decision is to be delayed.

The tutorial found in `tutorial\tutorial.ipynb` demonstrates how to use these decision policies. Specifically, it uses the `green_first_loading_policy` for **Decision policy 1** and **Decision policy 2**, and the `white_unloading_policy` for **Decision policy 3**.

## Ready for reinforcement learning

`pyMassEvac` is implemented as a custom Gymnasium environment (Towers et al., 2024). An example of its use as an environment with fixed decision policies is provided in `tutorial\tutorial.ipynb`. `pyMassEvac` may also be used in combination with a reinforcement learning to seek optimal, or at least near-optimal, decision policies. Among the many considerations that must be made when selecting or designing a learning algorithm for this environment is that the set of valid actions are dependent on both the state variable  $S_k$  and the parameters defined in the initial state  $S_0$ —see Section 4.1 of Rempel (2024). Thus, when using a reinforcement learning algorithm a form of invalid action masking [(?); hou2023a] must be implemented.

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