

Inreach VS Smartphone

Here are some of the main differences between the current capabilities of smartphones and Inreach. Note that to keep terminology simple, we use Inreach, but this could also refer to similar devices like Zoleo.

1. GPS coordinates are not always precise on smartphones because they rely on fewer satellites compared to Inreaches. As reported during a recent Search and Rescue mission in the Gila along one of the riverways, a person needing assistance sent an SOS message using the new satellite feature on cell phones. Since there are fewer satellites with this capability to determine location, the person's actual location was a canyon away from where the satellite indicated. This can cause serious problems if SAR teams cannot accurately locate the person in need.
2. The reliability and durability of both the physical device and the person or organization that answers the call are crucial. Inreach directly contacts the responsible agency, while the phone alert can bounce around trying to determine who should respond. This causes a significant time lag, which can be critical to the outcome or, worse, result in no response at all.
3. The ability of family and friends to track the user in real time on a computer map linked to the Inreach is easy for anyone to read and interpret. For example, they can notice that the user hasn't moved for hours when they are supposed to be active. If the user knows to send a text to someone at the start of the hike, that person can always directly contact the user via text if any concerns arise. Often, this early self-help resolves many issues before SAR needs to be called.
4. The longer battery life of the Inreach compared to a phone is beneficial. In many SAR missions, users (person needing assistance drains their batteries through texting and other activities before deciding they need emergency help. Once the battery dies, communication with satellites, responders, or family is no longer possible.

With many companies heavily investing in satellite communications, the Inreach might soon become outdated. In the meantime, the Inreach's capabilities are superior to a smartphone for SAR-related situations. Despite thorough preparation, anyone could still require SAR assistance.

Want to read more about the difference? Check out: [iPhone Satellite vs Garmin inReach: Which Is Better for Hikers in 2025? - HikingGuy](#)