

February 2011

Emergency Preparedness Pointers

Snow Can Make A Downhill Run

The scenic mountains of Idaho attract a range of recreationists during the winter. Snowmobilers, skiers and snowboarders take to the slopes to enjoy the snow. The slopes are indeed a part of the experience, but they are also the part that can hold hidden dangers. This year, much of Idaho is experiencing above average snow packs and is also experiencing periods of warmer weather and at times, rainfall. This combination can be deadly. Over the past 45 years in the United States, 440 people have died in avalanches. Maximize your safety when recreating outdoors this winter; raise your avalanche awareness.

Avalanche Resources

The information in this Pointer was taken from the following sources. Please take the time to visit these websites and take advantage of online tutorials, links to forecast centers and other avalanche related information.

[American Avalanche Association](#)

[Forest Service National Avalanche Center](#)

[National Snow and Ice Data Center](#)



(Photograph courtesy of Richard Armstrong, National Snow and Ice Data Center.)

Identifying Avalanche Country

SLOPE ANGLE : Avalanches are possible on any slope that is steeper than 30 degrees. They occur most often on slopes ranging from 35 to 50 degrees. Many expert ski runs have sections steeper than 35 degrees. If you are recreating on a slope less than 30 degrees, look uphill to make sure there is not a much steeper slope directly above you.

SLOPE ORIENTATION: Avalanches can run on slopes facing any direction, however, most avalanches occur on slopes facing north, east and northeast. These happen to be the orientations that most ski runs are located on. Colder deeper snow packs develop on these slopes. If the slope is in shadow most of the day, the snowpack remains cooler. This reduces the melting and bonding that make the snow layers stronger.

TERRAIN: Winter recreation requires paying special attention to bowls and gullies in the mountain. Snow accumulates deeply and quickly in these areas which increases the risk of avalanche. If it is apparent that an avalanche has already run from one of these areas do not assume that it is now safe. Avalanches can fail a piece at a time. One section may fall leaving the rest of the slope weakened. In this case, it may only take the slightest provocation to cause subsequent avalanches along the same slope.

Avalanche Red Flags

These are events and conditions that can increase avalanche risk:

- * **Recent Avalanches:** Check with local experts before you go to an area for any known recent activity.
- * **Warning Signs:** **Look** for cracking or collapsing snowpack. **Listen** for a “whumpfing” or hollow sound.
- * **Rain and Snow:** Significant snowfall or rain during the past 24 hours can make snowpack unstable.
- * **Windblown Snow:** Windblown snow can load the leeward side of a mountain when its not snowing.
- * **Rising Temperatures:** Warm temperatures and gravity can cause the snow to creep downhill and become less stable.

Improve Your Chances and Minimize Your Risks

Always recreate with a partner or in a group. Never expose more than one person in your group at a time to a potential risk. Watch each other from a known safe location. Stay alert to changing weather conditions.



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