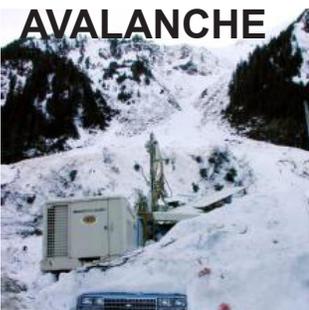


SELF SUFFICIENCY IS EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS



FEMA/Dave Saville: FEMA News Photo

JUDGING SNOW STABILITY

The best sign of avalanches are other avalanches. You can't get much more obvious than that. But it's surprising how often people miss this clue.

Collapsing snow. When you hear the snowpack collapse catastrophically with a giant "whoomph", that's the sound indicating it's extremely unstable. Stay off of steep slopes and stay out from underneath steep slopes.

Cracking snow. Recent wind loading, especially, creates cracking snow. The longer the crack, the more dangerous. Stay off of steep slopes.

Avalanche weather. Just like people, avalanches do not like RAPID changes.

- Recent rapid loading of new or windblown snow
- Recent rapid warming
- Recent rapid melting
- Rain on new snow

WHAT TO DO ...

Colorado leads the nation in deaths from avalanches, with an average of six to eight persons lost each season. Almost all avalanche fatalities occur in the "backcountry" areas outside ski area boundaries where no avalanche control is done.

Nearly all avalanches that involve people are triggered by the victims themselves or a member of their party. Here are some tips if you get caught in an avalanche:

SKIERS AND SNOWBOARDERS

If you're descending on skis or snowboard, try heading straight down hill to build up some speed, then angle off to the side off the moving slab. If you're close enough to the crown, you can try running uphill to get off the slab, or running off to the side.

SNOWMOBILERS

If you're on a snowmobile you have the advantage of power. Grab some throttle and use your power and momentum to your advantage. If you're headed uphill, continue uphill. If you're headed across the slope, continue to the side to safe snow. If you're headed downhill, your only hope is to try and outrun the avalanche. Remember that large avalanches travel 60-80 mph and they are difficult to outrun.

OTHER TIPS

- Grab a tree if you can't escape off the slab. But you have to do it fast because avalanches quickly pick up speed.
- If you can't get off the slab then you need to swim hard. A human body is about three times denser than avalanche debris and it tends to sink unless it's swimming hard.
- As the avalanche finally slows down and just before it comes to rest, try and clear an air space in front of your



mouth. This helps delay the buildup of carbon dioxide in the snow around your mouth.

- Push a hand upward. Visual clues allow your friends to find you faster. After the avalanche comes to a stop, the debris will instantly set up like concrete. So any actions you take must occur BEFORE it comes to a stop.

IF A FRIEND IS CAUGHT

WATCH THEM CLOSELY This will help reduce the search times if you have a good idea where to begin the search.

GOING FOR HELP Your friend may only have minutes to breathe under the snow, so every second counts. Spend about half an hour searching before you go for help. It should be safe to go in unless you are in a spot with multiple avalanche zones. If you think it's too dangerous, go for help immediately.

FINDING A SAFE ROUTE Usually the safest way to access avalanche debris is to come up from the bottom onto the debris.

BEACON SEARCH If the victim is wearing a beacon, turn your to receive and make SURE everyone in your party is turned to receive. Go fast and cover a lot of ground. If there is no beacon use your ski pole as a probe.

MULTIPLE BURIALS If there is more than one person buried, go for the shallow burials first. Get them breathing but don't take the time to get them completely dug out until you've uncovered as many people as you can.