

Special Avalanche Warning for BC's Northern Interior

North Columbia Mountains and North Rocky Mountains Targeted for Warning

Friday January 30, 2009, Revelstoke, BC: The Canadian Avalanche Centre (CAC) is issuing a special public avalanche warning for the mountainous regions of BC's northern interior. The region of concern stretches from Revelstoke to Kamloops north to Chetwynd, and from Mackenzie east to Tumbler Ridge and Valemount. This warning is in effect from Friday, January 30 through to Monday, February 2, 2009.

The Arctic air of mid-January created a weak type of crystal on the snow surface. The snow that has fallen since then is now resting on those delicate crystals, producing an unstable layer within the snowpack. As snow slowly accumulates on that layer, prime avalanche conditions are created.

"We're especially concerned with areas at treeline and below treeline," explains CAC Operations Manager John Kelly. "I would urge backcountry users to be very cautious in cut-blocks and other large openings in the trees."

Sixteen people have been killed in avalanches this season, 12 of them snowmobilers. Many avalanche accidents are the result of riders approaching familiar terrain, riding where they've always ridden before without assessing the danger that day. "This is not a good habit at any time but this year it could be deadly," says Kelly.

So what are good habits for a backcountry trip? Here's an outline:

- Check the avalanche danger rating. The snowpack is constantly changing and professional avalanche forecasters are tracking those changes on a daily basis throughout the winter. Read the bulletins at avalanche.ca/bulletins and pay special attention to the forecaster's primary concerns and travel advice.
- Take an avalanche course. The CAC's Avalanche Skills Training (AST) course takes two days and could save your life. You'll gain a solid background in how to travel in avalanche terrain by learning how to pick safe routes, using safe travel habits and reading obvious signs of instabilities. You can find a list of course providers under the "Training" tab on avalanche.ca.
- Everyone in your group needs a transceiver, probe and shovel. It's essential to be familiar and practiced with your transceiver, and an avalanche course will teach some new shoveling techniques you may not know. Check out the CAC's online course, where you'll learn the best procedures for rescuing your friend or yourself from an avalanche—click on "Online Avalanche Course" under the Training tab of the CAC's website.
- Most importantly, select your trip according to the conditions. Using a trip-planning tool like the Avaluator (you'll get one of these and learn how to use it during your avalanche course) will take you through a systematic decision process before and during your trip. Discuss your decisions with the other members of your group and talk about the reasons behind your choices.

At the CAC we encourage the responsible, respectful use of our mountains. Last year alone, over 5000 people took an AST course, gaining skills that allow them to explore the natural beauty of the backcountry, push the limits of their sport, and return home to their families. Backcountry use is on the rise and the effects of this trend benefit individuals and society as a whole. Canada's majestic mountainous environment is part of our natural heritage but with that right comes a responsibility to use the backcountry wisely.

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