



2.08 AVALANCHE SEARCH AND RESCUE

2.08.1 GENERAL

The policy is in effect whenever a search and rescue (SAR) Group is conducting training, exercises or is tasked to a known avalanche incident, avalanche recovery or if a ground or inland water search and rescue operation is or may be taking place in an avalanche risk zone.

Related Policies:

- [2.02 Task Authorization](#)
- [2.06 Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer Safety](#)
- [2.12 Search and Rescue](#)
- [5.07 Injury, Disability, and Accidental Death Coverage](#)
- [5.08 Liability Coverage](#)

2.08.2 DEFINITIONS

See [Terms and Definitions](#)

Avalanche Safety Officer: A member of the Command Staff responsible for assessing the avalanche hazard, monitoring weather and avalanche conditions, and for developing and implementing the Active Avalanche Safety Program. Typically, CAA qualified avalanche workers (with a CAA level 2 or 3 certificate) will fulfill the role of Avalanche Safety Officer and oversee and implement the program.

Avalanche Site Safety Officer: A Site Safety Officer is located at the site of an avalanche and is responsible for evaluating the risk of further avalanches, identifying safety hazards or unsafe situations, monitoring on-site rescue operations, conducting field assessments and gathering observations, and for implementing and supervising measures for ensuring personnel safety. The member of the search and rescue team tasked with fulfilling the role of Avalanche Site Safety Officer and with implementing and supervising the measures specified in the Active Avalanche Safety program will normally have completed, at a minimum, a CAA level 1 certificate or JIBC Organized Avalanche Response Team Leader course.

Avalanche Safety Plan: Means a documented plan meeting CAA guidelines, specifying passive measures to mitigate or reduce the avalanche risk to any person working at the workplace and any active avalanche safety program necessary to monitor and manage any avalanche risk that has not been mitigated through use of passive measures.

Active Avalanche Safety Program: Means a program for monitoring daily, or more frequently if conditions warrant, the weather, snow and avalanche conditions, determining temporal fluctuations of avalanche hazards and implementing safety measures, closures or other methods specified in the program to reduce avalanche risk that has not been mitigated through use of passive measures.



Avalanche Risk Assessment: The determination of the characteristics of the terrain in and around a geographic area based on an analysis of topographic variables, the snow climate, the estimated return periods and magnitudes of avalanches, and the type of activity that is to be done in that area.

Avalanche Risk Zone: A workplace or part of a workplace where an avalanche risk assessment determines that avalanches pose a risk to any person working at the workplace and risk control measures are required to make the area safe for work to be conducted.

Rescue Response Plan: The response plan is a set of guidelines developed by the SAR group that specifies a series of steps that a SAR manager would take to respond to a particular type of incident.

2.08.3 POLICY STATEMENT

The purpose of this policy is to:

- (1) Reduce the risk of avalanche to search and rescue responders.
- (2) Promote a coordinated, integrated, and layered response to SAR incidents in avalanche risk zones.
- (3) Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the Avalanche Search and Rescue operations.
- (4) Provide a provincial framework that enables a rapid response to avalanche incidents, while maintaining a balance between rescuer safety and subject survivability.

2.08.4 CONDITIONS/RESPONSIBILITIES

- (1) A task number will be issued to the SAR Manager of a SAR Group that meets the following criteria:
 - a. Has an Avalanche Rescue Response Plan.
 - b. Has an Avalanche Safety Officer available either remote or on-site.

CONDITIONS FOR ON-SITE OPERATIONS

- (1) Onsite operational requirements include the following:
 - a. The EMBC Interim Avalanche Safety Plan is implemented.
 - b. The completion of an Avalanche Risk Assessment by an Avalanche Safety Officer to ensure situational awareness and identify the level of avalanche danger to SAR personnel.



- c. The establishment and documentation of an Active Avalanche Safety Program to implement risk mitigation measures identified in the Interim EMBC Avalanche Safety Plan.
 - d. The activation of an avalanche trained Dog Team for all avalanche rescue and/or recovery operations.
- (2) All SAR personnel working within an Avalanche Risk Zone must have completed, as a minimum, one of the following training courses:
- a. The Canadian Avalanche Association (CAA) Recreational Avalanche Course.
 - b. The CAA Avalanche Skills Training Level 1 Course.
 - c. The Justice Institute of British Columbia's (JIBC) Organized Avalanche Response Team Member course.
- (3) Evaluating the potential consequences of anticipated avalanche activity in specific situations is critical to determining potential avalanche risk. The Avalanche Safety Officer, in consultation with the SAR Command staff and the Avalanche Site Safety Officer, exercises expert judgement in making an overall evaluation of the risk to SAR personnel and the subject versus the benefit of an immediate and rapid response and the exposure of SAR personnel to Avalanche hazard. No Search and Rescue personnel are to conduct on-site operations in an Avalanche Risk Zone prior to the approval and direction of the Avalanche Safety Officer or their delegate.
- (4) The Avalanche Safety Plan identifies specific active safety measures. Typically, CAA qualified avalanche workers (with a level 2 or 3 certificate) will fulfill the role of Avalanche Safety Officer and oversee and implement the program. The Active Avalanche Safety Program establishes condition for onsite operations such as the qualifications of the volunteers who will fulfill the role of Avalanche Site Safety Officer and implement the Active Avalanche Safety Program.
- (5) The member of the search and rescue team tasked with fulfilling the role of Avalanche Site Safety Officer and with supervising the measures specified in the Active Avalanche Safety program will normally have completed, at a minimum, a CAA Level 1 certificate or JIBC Organized Avalanche Response Team Leader Course.

This policy and the EMBC Interim Avalanche Safety Plan will be reviewed annually.

2.08.5 AUTHORITIES

N/A



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Duffy", written over a horizontal line.

Chris Duffy
A/Assistant Deputy Minister
Emergency Management BC

August 4, 2016

2.08.6 RELATED DOCUMENTS

- [2.08 Avalanche Search and Rescue FAQs](#)