



INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Justice
BC Coroners Service

BC Coroners Service urges proper preparation for backcountry outings

VICTORIA – Avalanche season is reaching its peak in British Columbia. The BC Coroners Service is encouraging all those going out into the backcountry – be it on skis, snowboards or snowmobiles – to take special care to ensure their own safety and that of others.

The BC Coroners Service, working with the Canadian Avalanche Centre (CAC) and Emergency Management BC (EMBC), has found that over the past several winters, avalanche awareness has been improving. A higher proportion of backcountry users are carrying essential avalanche safety equipment—transceivers, shovels and probes. Avalanche airbag packs are highly effective when worn/deployed properly (including the leg-strap).

However, many still have not taken enough training to use that equipment with maximum effectiveness. A person buried in an avalanche can suffocate in minutes – long before help can arrive – so the ability to perform quick and effective self-rescue and companion rescue is vital.

Information about training courses is provided through the CAC. On the CAC website at www.avalanche.ca – you will find a basic online course, as well as information on introductory and advanced Avalanche Skills Training courses. This training is essential for anyone planning to venture into the backcountry in winter.

A study by the BC Coroners Service of avalanche deaths from the past 16 years found that:

Between Jan. 1, 1996, and Dec. 31, 2012, there were:

- An average of 10.1 avalanche-related deaths each year.
- During this period 127 avalanches caused 181 deaths. Twenty-nine of these avalanches caused multiple deaths.
- The average age of the decedents was 36.1 years.
- 90.1 per cent of decedents were male and 9.9 per cent were female.
- 68.0 per cent decedents of avalanche-related deaths occurred in the Interior region, 21.5 per cent in the Northern region, 8.3 per cent in the Metro region, 1.7 per cent in the Island region and 0.6 per cent in the Fraser region.
- 40.9 per cent of decedents were snowmobiling, 30.9 per cent were skiing, 18.2 per cent were heli-skiing, 5.0 per cent were snowboarding and 4.4 per cent were hiking or climbing.

Virtually all of these deaths were preventable.

Learn more:

BC Coroners Service Avalanche Deaths 1996-2013:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/death-investigation/statistical/avalanche.pdf>

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