

TO: All Regional Directors
All Avalanche Technician Supervisors
All Avalanche Technicians

SUBJECT:

Response to Non-Highway Avalanche Incidents.

PURPOSE:

To clarify and to define levels of responsibilities that the Ministry of Transportation and Highways Snow Avalanche Programs involvement will be in coordinating and/or assisting with non-highway avalanche related incidents.

BACKGROUND:

The rising popularity of winter recreational activities has resulted in an increase in backcountry avalanche involvement's. Ministry of Transportation and Highways (MoTH), Snow Avalanche Programs staff have been contacted numerous times over the past several years to coordinate and/or assist with non-highway avalanche related incidents.

With the increasing frequency of these requests it has become necessary to define conditions for MoTH avalanche staff to participate in these events. It is also necessary to define levels of responsibilities of involved agencies (MoTH, Provincial Emergency Programs (PEP), RCMP and the Coroners Service). This document identifies the conditions for MoTH involvement and the responsibilities of other involved agencies.

NEW POLICY:

If Ministry, Snow Avalanche Programs staff receive a request to become involved in a non-highway avalanche incident, their first consideration must be whether or not their absence will adversely affect avalanche safety to the highway they are responsible for.

Ministry, Snow Avalanche Programs staff who become involved in a non-highway avalanche incident will be considered as working as a Ministry employee with full coverage, even if the response is made on a scheduled day off.

As every avalanche accident situation will have unique circumstances, it will be up to the discretion of the Snow Avalanche Technician to either respond or defer a response elsewhere (i.e., Canadian Avalanche Centre registry).

Ministry, Snow Avalanche Programs staff must not take on levels of responsibility for which they have insufficient knowledge or training. Ministry, Avalanche Programs staff with sufficient knowledge and experience may act as technical experts to advise other involved agencies.

Depending on circumstances of the incident, involved participants may also be called upon as a witness in legal proceedings.

Regardless of who requests the assistance of Ministry, Snow Avalanche Programs staff, the rescue plan should be mobilized immediately (if able to respond). The PEP task number and ASE number can be requested en route to the accident site or by other ministry staff not directly involved in the on-site rescue effort. If necessary call the PEP Emergency Response phone number:

- 1-888-344-5888 (24 hour - 7 days/week)

to request task number and/or ASE number. The task number is necessary to identify the rescue effort and to charge expenses related to the rescue. The task number also confirms that participants involved in the rescue are covered by the Emergency Program Act, liability provisions. The ASE number is necessary if any aircraft are used for the rescue effort.

Expenses incurred by the Ministry through the involvement of Snow Avalanche Programs staff and resources will be reimbursed by PEP, by reference of the task number assigned to the rescue effort.

If the call requesting assistance comes directly from PEP the task and ASE numbers will be issued at that time.

Avalanche accidents involving fatalities may result in a request from the Coroners Service for a report from Ministry, Snow Avalanche staff involved in the rescue.

Responsibilities of agencies likely to become involved in a non-highway avalanche incident include the following:

RCMP

- Is the agency responsible for the overall coordination of the rescue effort;
- Likely to be the first agency to receive request for assistance;
- Contacts PEP with preliminary accident particulars;
- Contacts Coroners Service if fatalities involved;

PEP

- Provide and/or coordinate resources on behalf of lead agency;
- Confirm site Safety Officer is a Canadian Avalanche Association Professional Member in Good Standing;
- Request assistance from Ministry, Snow Avalanche Programs, or other appropriate agencies (as necessary);
- Issues Task and ASE Numbers, as appropriate;
- Task, or approve the participation, of Search and Rescue (SAR) volunteers/groups;
- Reports fatalities to RCMP via the on-site SAR Manager;
- Reimburse authorized eligible cost of the rescue.

Coroners Service

- Takes over coordination of the accident (from the RCMP) if fatality;
- Depending on severity and circumstances of the incident may or may not initiate an investigation of the incident;
- May request involvement from Ministry, Snow Avalanche staff in preparing accident investigation report.

MoTH

- Obtains PEP task and ASE numbers if not provided with initial request to assist in rescue;
- To provide technical avalanche expertise in order to ensure on site safety to surviving victims and all participants in the rescue;
- To provide technical avalanche expertise in search techniques and use of rescue equipment to locate buried victims;
- To supply avalanche rescue equipment.

Ministry employees who become involved in non-highway avalanche related accidents are protected by all existing provincial government coverage.

There will be no loss of wages for participation in these types of incidents. Wages and overtime benefits apply (as if working for the ministry).

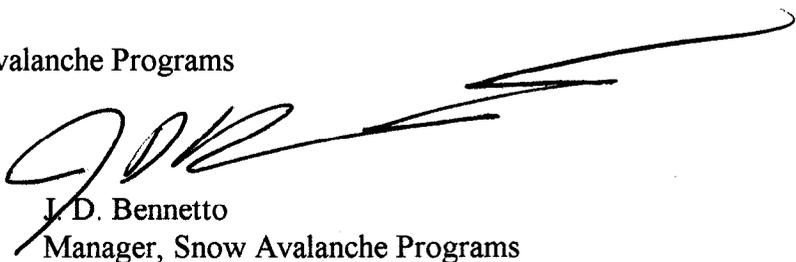
The Emergency Program Act, R.S.B.C. 1996, C. 111, Section 18 (Appendix A) states that no person is liable for their actions (or lack of actions) which may cause injury, death or damage, provided they were acting in "good faith."

The Canadian Avalanche Association avalanche involvement report (Appendix B) should be used to document pertinent information. In the urgency of the situation, it is important to take time to briefly record details of the incident as it unfolds.

Ministry, Snow Avalanche staff should be aware that any written notes in field books can be used as evidence in a court case. In consideration of this possibility, it is important to make field notes in accordance with the *Canadian Avalanche Association, Observation Guidelines and Recording Standards for Weather, Snowpack and Avalanches* (May 1995).

CONTACT:

Jack Bennetto, Manager, Snow Avalanche Programs



J.D. Bennetto
Manager, Snow Avalanche Programs

Attachments: Appendix A & B