

February 2012

Emergency Preparedness Pointers

Prepare To Enjoy Winter Recreation

Winter recreation was put on hold this season waiting for nature to cooperate; the snow came a little later than usual and has been followed by some warmer, rainy conditions. This combination can lead to snow pack instability and avalanche on steeper slopes. Proper preparation before outdoor winter recreation or even highway travel through the mountains requires both awareness and equipment.

Getting There

If you are headed into the mountains to recreate or just passing through on your way to someplace else, you should always check road conditions before you travel. The Idaho Department of Transportation provides tremendous information on road conditions that includes warnings, closures and cameras.

It is available at: <http://511.idaho.gov/> Information is also available by dialing **5 1 1** on your phone.

After checking current road conditions, it is also advisable to check the weather. Weather information is readily available through a number of sources including Smart Phone applications. For a quick look at weather hazards, the interactive map provided by the National Weather Service is a great resource.

[National Weather Hazards](#)

When planning winter recreation activities, the final check before starting a trip should be at the avalanche information center closest to your chosen destination. Here are some sites for popular areas in Idaho.

[Idaho Panhandle National Forests Avalanche Advisories](#)

[Sawtooth National Forest Avalanche Center](#)

[Payette Avalanche Center](#)

Equipment Can Make The Difference

The following information was taken from the [National Snow and Ice Data Center](#)

Recreating on snow requires the proper equipment. The right skis, snowshoes, snow board or snowmobile can make the difference in success on the snow. Avalanche preparation also requires the right equipment. Avalanches kill in two ways, fatal trauma (collisions with rocks, trees) or suffocation after the person is buried in the snow. The right equipment can help prevent this second tragedy.

- * **Portable Shovels:** Lightweight plastic and aluminum shovels can be carried in a pack. Digging with a shovel is a much faster way to uncover an avalanche victim than using hands or ski poles.
- * **Collapsible or Ski Pole Probes:** These two foot tubular steel lengths join to form a probe that is 10-12 feet long. They are an essential tool for finding a buried person when there is no evidence on the surface.
- * **Avalanche Beacons (transceivers):** It is important to recreate with a group or at least with a partner. Every member of a group needs to have a beacon. If a person is buried and sets their beacon to transmit, someone on the surface needs to have one to receive the signal. Time is critical, statistically, most survivors are dug out within 15-30 minutes, victims buried longer than 30 minutes have a greatly decreased chance of survival.

Avalanche Survival

If you are caught in an avalanche, take the following steps to increase your chances of survival.

- * Drop ski poles and pack to make yourself as light and buoyant as possible to stay near the surface
- * Once the snow topples you, roll onto your back, feet pointed downhill and try to “backstroke” uphill.
- * If buried, immediately create an air pocket by placing your arm across your face and take a deep breath.
- * If you are near the surface, reach with an arm or leg and try to penetrate snow to make finding you easier. Creating breathing room and other movements must be done quickly; the snow will set like cement soon after it stops moving. To learn more, take an avalanche awareness class: [Payette Avalanche Edu](#)

