
PUBLIC SAFETY BULLETIN

For Immediate Release
April 12, 2007

BC Coroners Service

AVALANCHE DEATHS PROMPT WARNING

VICTORIA – Five people have died from avalanches in B.C. so far this year and the Coroners Service is urging all outdoor enthusiasts to be aware of the risks and take precautions.

“Mountain conditions in B.C. can change dramatically with very little notice,” said Coroner Tom Pawlowski. “All backcountry travelers should check the avalanche bulletins posted by the Canadian Avalanche Centre and supplement this information with field observations. Adventure enthusiasts should also make sure they have the right equipment, know how to use it properly and leave a trip plan with a responsible person before venturing out.”

In addition to three deaths earlier this year, in the first week of April a large avalanche overran a heli-skiing party in the Skeena Mountains in northwestern B.C. Five of the six skiers and snowboarders were either partially or fully buried. Although located with transceivers and dug out within minutes, two died. One of the survivors carried an avalanche airbag system, an inflatable safety device. As a result, he was covered in light snow near the surface and was able to start the rescue effort.

The Provincial Emergency Program (PEP) shares the concerns of the BC Coroners Service about avalanche safety and the importance of being prepared. PEP works closely with the Canadian Avalanche Centre (CAC) and the Canadian Avalanche Foundation in promoting safety programs.

Following a review in 2003, the B.C. government announced funding of \$125,000 annually in support of the new Canadian Avalanche Centre, which resulted in subsequent funding from Parks Canada, the Meteorological Service of Canada, the Province of Alberta and others. As well, PEP provides additional funding when requested, which enables the CAC to issue special public avalanche warnings when there is increased risk of avalanches due to weather and snowpack conditions or expected increase in backcountry recreation activity such as during holidays.

The BC Coroners Service is responsible for the investigation of all unnatural, sudden and unexpected, unexplained or unattended deaths. It makes recommendations to improve public safety and prevent death in similar circumstances.

For more information on avalanche safety, please visit the Canadian Avalanche Centre’s website at www.avalanche.ca.

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