

Digging Deeper: Uncovering the Real Issues in North American Multiple Burials

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For avalanche educators, time is precious. When teaching avalanche rescue to recreationists, what takes priority? To determine what the crux issues are in companion rescues, the authors analyzed North American avalanche incidents from 1995-2008, using the American Avalanche Association (AAA) database. We then interviewed numerous individuals who took part in the more complicated rescues, including multiple burials. Our findings are that 1) slightly over half of North American avalanche victims are wearing transceivers; 2) "multiple burial" statistics are often misleading and should be cited with more precise definitions; 3) "special case" multiple burials requiring specialized techniques (or technology) are extremely rare, especially in the recreational setting; and 4) in almost all transceiver rescues, the excavation phase is more time consuming and physically demanding than the search phase. When teaching recreational avalanche courses, educators should focus on single victim searches, shoveling technique, and organizing the rescue. Specialized techniques for "special case" close-proximity multiple burials should be limited to the realm of advanced professional instruction