Youth avalanche education programs in the Pacific Northwest: analysis and recommendations

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In Washington State alone, avalanches historically claim more lives than earthquakes, volcanoes, and other natural disasters. With snow sports becoming more popular, many schools (both public and private), outdoor programs, even Boy Scouts of America, are taking teens into the winter backcountry, on skis, snowshoes, and snow machines. And, these same teens and others are now exploring the backcountry on their own, whether it is skiing out of bounds or headed off into the wilderness. However, little is known about what kind of avalanche education is occurring in these programs. Through a grant from Friends of the Northwest Weather and Avalanche Center, current uses of youth avalanche education were measured using a quantitative/qualitative survey. Of 48 possible recipients, 32 returned the survey, answering some sixteen questions. Through analysis of responses from individuals, plus interviews with several youth avalanche educators in Washington State and British Columbia, four recommendations were given to FOAC to consider. These included:

• Construct Beacon/ Avalanche Tool Box
• Develop FOAC supported instructor pool
• Offer Avalanche 1 Certification for Educators and Outdoor Program Coordinators
• Develop a youth (teen) focused Avalanche Awareness curriculum