Patroller down: rescue, documentation and resulting operational changes

Michael Ferrari

Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe, Reno, NV, USA

By the start of February 2007, the snowpack at Mt. Rose in the Sierras was atypically shallow and weak. After the first significant storm cycle of the season, on February 12th, a veteran patroller was caught in an avalanche while doing control work in The Chutes terrain that had yet to open for the season. A rescue was carried out and the partially buried worker was transported to the local trauma center by helicopter with significant life-threatening injuries. The patroller would have a long road to recovery. Having occurred on USFS lands, the accident required prompt notification to the Forest Service and a thorough investigation. This investigation included filling out the USFS National Avalanche Center’s Long Form Avalanche Incident Form and developing operational alternatives to deal with atypical snow conditions. Similarly, the rescue itself was reviewed resulting in changes to the rescue plan. The result of the investigation and review of the rescue was the implementation of changes to make it safer for workers performing control work in the mid-slope starting zones of The Chutes.