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Abstract: The Association represents professionals engaged with the evaluation of avalanche hazards and the implementation of avalanche safety measures. It assists its members in maintaining their professional standards and acts as their voice for matters concerning governments and other organizations.

### HISTORY

Avalanche work by its nature is carried out by individuals in widely separated areas and within operations that have other principal objectives such as the maintenance of roads, operation of a ski area, guiding of skiers, or planning of structures. Because of this fragmentation, avalanche workers usually occupy a unique, often lonely position within their own organization and have a need to meet for personal contacts and the discussion of common problems. Problems involving other organizations and governments often can be solved best by joint actions.

In response to this need, senior staff of the four organizations most strongly engaged in avalanche work in Canada--the National Research Council, Parks Canada, Environment Canada, and the British Columbia Department of Transportation and Highways--formed an Avalanche Committee in 1975. The significant achievements of the Committee in the following six years were to organize two workshops, in 1976 at Banff and 1980 in Vancouver; to investigate the production of an avalanche safety film, including the drafting of a script: the preparation of reporting forms for avalanche occurrences and accidents; and to initiate a regular newsletter "Avalanche News." In 1981 the Avalanche Committee resolved that the demand on its activities had become too heavy, consequently, that it should be replaced by a stronger body, preferably an avalanche centre with permanent staff.

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In the meantime, the need for an exchange of information had expanded and as a result, the staff of avalanche safety operations in Canada met for informal discussions in 1979. The meeting was repeated in the next two years with an increasing number of participants, the result of a stronger concern for avalanche safety on roads, in ski areas, and for guiding. The discussions at the meetings confirmed the conclusions of the Avalanche Committee, that a formal association or a centre is needed and in May of 1981, the participants representing all major avalanche safety operations in Canada elected a committee with the assignment of forming an avalanche association. The Committee drafted a constitution and by-laws and had the Canadian Avalanche Association incorporated under the Societies Act of the Province of British Columbia on December 30, 1981. In the following year it was incorporated in the Province of Alberta as well.

### OBJECTIVES

The purposes of the Canadian Avalanche Association, as stated in its constitution are:

- a) To represent persons who are professionally engaged in avalanche work in Canada.
- b) To establish and maintain high standards of professional competence and ethics for persons engaged in avalanche safety programs.
- c) To exchange technical information and to maintain communications between persons engaged in avalanche safety programs.
- d) To establish and maintain standards of education in avalanche safety.

e) To organize training courses in all aspects of avalanche hazard control for professionals.

f) To promote and to act as a resource base for public awareness programs about avalanche hazards and safety measures.

g) To promote research and development in avalanche safety.

#### MEMBERSHIP

The Association distinguishes four categories of members: active, inactive, associate, and honorary members. In 1986 there were 62 active, 18 associate, and no inactive or honorary members. Professionalism is the guiding principle of accepting members.

Active members must have made extensive observations of the snow and avalanches, have experience with hazard evaluation, make decisions that affect the safety of the public or clients as part of their job, and have a sense of responsibility.

A person is eligible for active membership after four winters involvement in an avalanche-related activity in Canada on a full-time paid basis and having a supervisory position in field operation in two of these winters. A supervisory position means being responsible for others who take observations, or implement control measures, or travel in terrain subject to avalanche hazards. This would be the case for control team leaders, avalanche technicians on roads, and skiguide who travel extensively in the mountains.

According to the by-laws, a member ceases to be an active member after not being engaged in avalanche-related work on a full-time paid basis for three years, but then has the option of becoming an inactive member.

Associate members are corporations or associations: for example, ski areas, outdoor clubs, ski patrols, equipment suppliers, and government departments that are involved in avalanche-related activities or education.

It should be noted that the Canadian Avalanche Association does not allow individuals to become members unless they are professionally engaged in avalanche work, consequently, are eligible for active membership. Others interested in avalanche matters often participate in the activities through an associate member.

The Association annually elects seven directors who are responsible for the day-to-

day operation and the acceptance of members. They are assisted by a committee that investigates the qualifications of membership applicants and whether or not active members continue to meet the requirements for membership.

#### MEETINGS

The active and inactive members and representatives of associate members meet every year in the month of May for an exchange of knowledge, discussion of the events of the past winter, personal contacts and business required by the law. Active members only have a vote in business matters. Guests are invited for the discussion of special topics of interest, for example regulations concerning explosives, weather forecasts, or the functions of a coroner. Meeting others in the same trade and getting to know who is doing what in the avalanche business is felt to be one of the most important benefits of the meetings. The free discussions among colleagues are appreciated and in the past years have led to improvements of policies and working methods.

The Avalanche Association has promoted local, informal gatherings of members during the year, but very few meetings could be held because avalanche safety personnel usually is too busy in the winter and is engaged in other activities in the summer. The early part of May was found to be the only convenient time for meetings.

#### EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS

The activity of the Avalanche Association is not restricted to discussions, but in fulfilling its objectives it has prepared working standards for its members, aids for education, and briefs to government agencies. Following, are mentioned a few of the actions in the past years.

A committee drafted regulations for the application of handcharges, helicopter bombs, and the avalauncher. The regulations were accepted by the Workers Compensation Boards of British Columbia and Alberta and form the basis for control plans of individual operations. Having the regulations drafted by the Avalanche Association who could claim to be the voice of the industry and having expertise ensured quick acceptance by the authorities.

In co-operation with the Alberta Mountain Safety Council, individual members prepared lesson plans for a two-day introductory and a five-day advanced avalanche awareness course intended for the general public. The Avalanche

Association recommended the courses and held two-day introductory sessions with interested instructors.

The Association has assumed responsibility for the standards of the avalanche courses for operational personnel. It reviews the courses regularly at the general meetings and through committees.

A committee re-examined and revised the Guidelines for Weather, Snowpack, and Avalanche Observations used in all avalanche safety operations in Canada.

Regular meetings held with the Atmospheric Environment Service yielded improvements of the format and content of the mountain weather forecast. The Association was able to emphasize the need and significance of the weather forecast in avalanche operations.

The Association has recommended to the coroner's service the names of experts who would be available for the investigation of accidents and has drafted guidelines for these experts.

A code of ethics was prepared and must be observed by all active members.

## CONCLUSION

The Canadian Avalanche Association fulfills an important role in co-ordinating the avalanche work in Canada, in representing the avalanche safety operations and in developing a professional attitude among avalanche workers. Its success depends heavily on the dedication of the individual members who make available their time and resources. The Association has discussed whether or not it should support a permanent centre that would take care not only of the Association business, but would be responsible as well for the organization of professional and information courses; the testing, development, and exchange of equipment; research and information about avalanche hazards. The Association concluded that at this time it would not be strong enough to carry the responsibilities and financial burden of maintaining an avalanche information centre.

The Canadian Avalanche Association will prosper as long as avalanche safety is a concern to transportation, ski and other developments and as long as its members are dedicated to the common cause.