

Improving K-9 Avalanche Team Performance in Backcountry Missions: A Collaborative Approach between Ski Patrol and K-9 SAR Teams

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The goal of a K-9 avalanche search team is to find buried victims quickly and efficiently while reducing risk to all involved. Problems arise during backcountry avalanche missions because responding ski patrol and K-9 SAR teams have unique deployment weaknesses that may result in reduced effectiveness.

This subject is important because currently members of these two organizations train separately, and yet they often search together on missions. Because of this, they are not as effective as they could be operationally. Consequently, the avalanche mission may not result in a live rescue or body recovery.

Susan Purvis and Patti Burnett have over 35 combined years experience working as ski patrollers and SAR K-9 handlers in Colorado. They have observed and experienced the very positive importance of avalanche SAR and ski patrol teams training and mutually responding to avalanche searches.

This presentation will offer practical solutions as to how and why ski patrol and K-9 SAR team collaboration and cross-training enhances and strengthens K-9 avalanche resources.

Our goal is to foster cooperation and networking between these two organizations so multi-jurisdictional search operations result in more positive search outcomes with safer and more efficient body recoveries.