

PROFESSIONAL DEFINITION OF AVALANCHE WORK IN CANADA

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ABSTRACT: Practitioners in the profession of snow avalanche risk assessment and management in Canada generally understand what it takes to do their work and form a career in the avalanche industry. However, there is no compendium of the expectations, many facets and structure of being, practicing, and improving as an avalanche professional other than a general sequence of courses with limited traineeship requirements. A multi-committee approach is currently underway within the Canadian Avalanche Association (CAA) to organize existing structures, identify and fill gaps, and expand and formalize various standards and programs. This poster presentation introduces the initial topics that have been identified to advance the definition of the avalanche profession in Canada.

KEYWORDS: professionalism, policy, CAA, avalanche worker, standards

1. BACKGROUND

The CAA formed the Professional Practices Committee in June 2011 to consider all matters relating to professional practice in the avalanche risk management industry, primarily focusing on limitations, standards and guidelines as they pertain to Association membership. An impetus and initial focus centered on the Qualified Avalanche Planners (QAP) membership category that was included in WorkSafeBC (WSBC) regulation regarding avalanche hazard and the workplace. A timeline illustrates the various exercises and efforts undertaken by the committee since its inception.

2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two day needs assessment workshop held to establish committee direction; • Committee and governance terms established;
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure review, catalogued the key elements in existing CAA governance documents; • Researched the basics of Professional Standards • Identified a desirable structure for CAA standards; • Articulation of the “pillars” of professional avalanche work;

2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmental work on professional standards; • Draft standards document circulated among other CAA committees for comment; • Interpretation guidelines formulated for professional standards document; • Submitted proposed Professional Standards to CAA membership; • Blended professional standards with existing Code of Ethics into a singular document; • Began developmental work on Scope of Practice, Body of Knowledge, and Competency Management Program; • Finalized proposed revision of Code of Ethics;
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic workshop between Professional Practice, Membership, and Education Committee representatives; • Finalized draft of Scope of Practice/Profession; • Membership adoption of new Code of Ethics; • Developmental work on Membership Competencies; • Draft guidelines for Code of Ethics; • Name change to Standards and Ethics Committee and Terms of Reference revision; • Developmental work on a Body of Knowledge document and a Risk

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of Harm analysis

2. OBJECTIVES

There are important objectives attributed to this effort by the Standards and Ethics Committee and supported by the CAA Board of Directors.

1. The work must consider the public interest first, will enhance the health and reputation of the CAA and provides the foundation for broader recognition of members as skilled avalanche risk managers.
2. The work is forward looking and will improve the practice of avalanche risk management now and in the future, potentially leading to the ability for self-regulation.

These changes are expected to clarify the public and employers' perceptions and expectations of our work; identify the key elements of how we evolve as practitioners; and lay the foundation for setting career benchmarks by following a well-structured competency management program.

3. CONTRIBUTIONS

This section provides descriptions of two elements of the work that have been completed thus far that contribute to the definition of professional avalanche work in Canada. The finalized Scope of Practice Statement and Code of Ethics are presented below.

3.1 *Scope of Practice Statement*

"snow avalanche risk assessment and management" means the profession in which a person (a) develops, directs and participates in the assessment of snow avalanche risk, (b) communicates information regarding avalanche risks (c) designs and operates programs for managing avalanche risk.

The Scope of Practice Statement offers a general orientation to what CAA professionals do. Subsequent practice standards will describe specific technical performance expectations required of members to demonstrate competency in various areas of practice.

Developing these practice standards will be part of the Standards and Ethics Committee's work in the coming year. To participate productively in forthcoming discussions it will be important for mem-

bers to distinguish between the Scope of Practice Statement and practice standards.

3.2 *CAA Code of Ethics*

CAA members are dedicated to upholding the highest standards of avalanche safety, and are committed to life-long learning and pursuit of excellence in their fields. It is stated in the CAA's Mission that we ensure our diverse membership of avalanche practitioners meets the highest standards, and adhere to best practices to secure the confidence of governments, industry and Canadians by protecting the public interest by ensuring members adhere to the CAA's Code of Ethics that follow.

Acting in the Public Interest

1. A member must uphold the public interest and promote professional standards, and in particular must strive to protect the public and clients from loss of life, injury and property damage caused by snow avalanches.

Acting competently

2. A member must exercise appropriate diligence, prudence, judgment, discretion and a thoughtful attention to detail in his or her work and ensure that work outputs are complete and correct. A member must undertake only those assignments for which she or he is qualified and experienced.

Record keeping

3. A member must maintain clear, timely and accurate records of all aspects of his or her work.

Continued competency

4. A member must cultivate, develop and maintain the currency of professional knowledge through education, training and practical experience as well as through knowledge gained while practicing alongside mentors and peers.

Privacy and confidentiality

5. A member must collect, use, disclose and dispose of confidential, private information in accordance with current privacy legislation and, where applicable, employer policies.

Safe work ethic

6. A member must demonstrate dedication to workplace and public safety through a safe work ethic that is employed in all aspects of their professional practice.

Integrity

7. A member must conduct her or himself honorably and in a manner that demonstrates individual integrity and reflects the integrity of the profession as a whole.

Respect for others

8. A member must not attempt, directly or indirectly, to injure the professional reputation, prospects, or practice of another person.

Professional independence and judgment

9. A member must ensure that professional relationships will not compromise the member's independence and judgment.

Conflict of interest

10. A member must avoid conflicts of interest but, where a conflict arises, must then promptly and fully disclose the circumstances to the client or employer and take steps to resolve the conflict.

Disclosing interests

11. A member must not issue statements, criticisms or arguments on avalanche safety matters, which are inspired or paid for by private interest, unless the member indicates on whose behalf the member is making such statements.

Accountability

12. A member must be accountable to, and responsible for, ensuring that the member's practice and conduct meets the expectations of the profession, peers and the public. Additionally, a member will work within the sphere of the member's competencies.

Duty to report

13. If a member has a reason to believe that another member has acted or may act incompetently, unethically or improperly, or in breach of the Code or a standard, that member must promptly report that information in confidence to the Complaints Investigation Committee or Executive Director.

4. CURRENT AND FUTURE UNDERTAKINGS

This section describes the current tasks underway by the Committee as part of its strategic work plan.

4.1 Competency Profiles

Initial work has begun on developing competency profiles that relate to levels of membership within the Association. The profiles will provide a means for members, the public, employers, clients and

regulators to gauge the abilities that an individual worker brings to the workplace and will draw upon according to the situation at hand using professional judgment. The competency profiles will work towards the public interest by insuring that the practice is safe effective and ethical.

4.2 Risk of Harm Analysis

A risk of harm analysis document is being drafted that identifies the critical decision-making points encountered during avalanche work that need to be made by a properly trained and qualified professional. Self-regulation of avalanche practitioners may also be a by-product of this process, ensuring that specific skill-sets are only performed by the right personnel. Extensive documentation will be appended for thoroughness and transparency.

4.3 Avalanche Body of Knowledge (AvBoK)

The Canadian Avalanche Body of Knowledge will support development of the competencies described by the competency profiles. It will prescribe the necessary depth and breadth of: knowledge, skills and manner of thinking required of a practitioner of avalanche risk assessment and management at the professional level. This is considered to be a "living" description of what is required to successfully practice in a profession.

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