

CANADIAN AVALANCHE CENTRE

This poster display is to describe developments at the Canadian Avalanche Centre (CAC) since the last ISSW which took place one year after the Centre opened. At that time the INDUSTRY INFORMATION EXCHANGE & PUBLIC AVALANCHE BULLETIN were in very early stages of operation. There has now been an opportunity to evaluate the use and acceptance of these products in Canada and show their benefits to the avalanche community and the public.

The Canadian Avalanche Centre provides a unique combination of services:

Canadian Avalanche Association Training Schools
Industry Information Exchange
Public Safety Services
Canadian Avalanche Association Membership Services

The policy and direction of the Centre are decided by the Members and Directors of the Canadian Avalanche Association at their Annual General Meeting.

INDUSTRY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

The INFORMATION EXCHANGE (INFOEX) has 44 subscribing operations including highways, parks, ski areas and backcountry operations. All operations are in Alberta & British Columbia covering the Coast, Interior and Rocky Mountains. Each subscriber sends the Centre a daily report on weather, snowpack and stability conditions in their area. This information is then put into a standard format for distribution to the subscribers. The format includes a data section and commentary for each area reported. The INFOEX is a confidential and technical exchange that is sent each evening by 2000h.

Some of the benefits of the INFOEX are:

- Subscribers receive current information from neighbouring areas, of particular interest is what is happening "upstream" in the flow of weather.
- Trends in avalanche cycles and the contributory factors may be more immediately identified and provide warnings to other operations.
- Notable occurrences in one area may be an important prompt for more distant operations.
- INFOEX is used to pass on technical information about avalanche involvements immediately after they happen
- Information about operational safety (new products, developments and problems) can be efficiently distributed to subscribers.
- INFOEX uses standard terms and observation techniques
- The INFOEX can be used as a training tool and includes updates on current research studies.

All subscribers to INFOEX are required to sign a confidentiality contract. This confidentiality contributes to a more open exchange of information which is so important to the effectiveness of INFOEX. Subscribers must be active members of the CAA, this ensures a high standard of input. Start-up funding was provided by the National Search & Rescue Secretariat. Now INFOEX is wholly paid for by subscriber fees.

PUBLIC AVALANCHE BULLETIN

The AVALANCHE BULLETIN started one year after the INFOEX. Public demand for avalanche information for areas outside the National Parks had been increasing however there was no agency to provide this service. The Bulletin has objectives similar to comparable services in some States in the USA and other countries. The INFOEX was the obvious source of good information for the BULLETIN.

The AVALANCHE BULLETIN is therefore a summary of INFOEX giving information for the Coast, Columbia and the Rocky Mountains. The Bulletin describes the prevailing weather & snowpack conditions. Avalanche occurrences, stability evaluation and a travel advisory are also reported. It is not an avalanche forecast. Distribution is by an 800 number, local numbers in Calgary and Vancouver, a fax network and PC Bulletin Board. The spoken message is about 2 minutes long for each of four regions and the complete printed message is two pages. In three winters it has seen tremendous growth. The Bulletin is mainly of interest for recreational pursuits however it is also used by some logging and mining companies in their operations.

The Bulletin is one of the Public Safety Services of the Canadian Avalanche Centre. A federal government grant made it possible to start the service. Cost sharing for the Public Safety Services is being established with joint funding from Federal, Provincial and Industry sources.

The more use there is of the Bulletin the greater the promotional benefits for the Industry participants.

The CAC is the national avalanche agency. Demand for the Public Safety Services is increasing. With continued support for these services from industry and government the Centre can continue to promote the highest standards of avalanche safety in the mountain environment.

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