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## 19 Lost; Four Dead in 10 Days

(ANCHORAGE, Alaska) – The past 10 days in Alaska kept Search and Rescue personnel statewide extremely busy. Since Feb. 16, 2009, at least 15 search and rescue operations were conducted. A total of 19 people were lost or in need of rescue over that 10-day period. Four of those individuals ultimately lost their lives in the backcountry of Alaska. Nine of those operations involved missing snowmachiners.

The most recent SAR ended when troopers found the body of an 18-year-old snowboarder in Hatcher Pass. Royce Morgan, of Wasilla, and his brother were out snowboarding when the two became separated. The circumstances surrounding Morgan's death are under investigation.

Many search and rescue incidents can be avoided if recreationists are better prepared for excursions in the backcountry. In the majority of the incidents in the past 10 days, the missing individuals were not prepared for their unanticipated extended stay in the frigid Alaska wilderness. When packing for a trip, always include gear for emergency situations.

DPS encourages individuals to always travel in groups, carry a supply of emergency medical gear, provisions and extra cold weather gear. Know the skill level of the people you are with and know what gear they have with them. It is also recommended that outdoor recreationists carry with them, and know how to use, a 406 MHz Personal Locator Beacon. The more information you have and that you provide to friends and family, the better your chances of making it home safe. **Most importantly, file a trip plan with friends or family that will not hesitate to call for help if you do not return or make contact with them at the scheduled time.**

When you report an individual missing, be prepared to provide dispatch with as much detailed information as possible. Preferably, searchers would like to know who they are looking for, the general vicinity they went missing in, what the person was wearing (to include colors), what safety gear and provisions they have, how long the person has been unaccounted for, what the circumstances surrounding the incident are, etc. When SAR personnel have detailed information, they can determine what gear they will need to conduct an effective, efficient search.

In many cases, even in areas close to large populations, the deployment of resources can take up to an hour or more depending on the circumstance of the SAR. Resources cannot be deployed until we know someone is missing and until we receive good information to follow up on! The faster we get accurate information, the quicker an effective search can start and be resolved. In Alaska's cold, harsh environment, minutes matter. In Alaska, you do not have to wait a set amount of time before you report an individual missing. In fact, you are encouraged to report people missing as soon as possible.

The Department of Public Safety encourages outdoor enthusiasts to practice safe and sensible behaviors while recreating or traveling in Alaska's backcountry. The terrain and weather can be unforgiving for even the most established recreationists.

The preservation of life is one of the department's prime missions. DPS spends a lot of resources and time every year for SARs. DPS firmly believes that if recreationists better prepare themselves before heading in to the back country, the need for search and rescue operations will decrease.

Below is a brief description of the SAR incidents troopers were involved in during the past 10 days:

- On Feb. 25, 2009, 18-year-old Royce Morgan of Wasilla died after getting separated from his brother while snowboarding in Hatcher Pass. Morgan and his brother were not wearing appropriate cold weather gear for the conditions.
- On Feb. 25, 2009, near Dillingham, Alaska a man and two children, ages 7 and 10, attempted a trip via snowmachine from Clark's Point to Dillingham in blizzard conditions. The three were forced to stay the night as it was not safe for rescue personnel to initiate a search in inclement weather. Due to the heroic efforts of RCC, the lost individuals were rescued on Feb. 26, 2009. They were reported to be cold, wet and hungry. No injuries were reported.
- On Feb. 26, 2009, a snowmachiner was reported overdue on a trip between Kipnuk and Chefnak. Once the snowmachiner realized he was lost he waited with his machine until located by searchers.
- On Feb. 25, 2009, a bicyclist in the backcountry near Girdwood contacted troopers stating her riding partner was getting dizzy and his health was "rapidly deteriorating." The caller stated they couldn't go on. Troopers and EMS responded but when they located the victims, they refused medical transportation.
- On Feb. 25, 2009, a man- known to have dementia- was reported missing by family. The family waited 24-hours before notifying law enforcement as it was "normal" for him to go on long walks. The man was located by troopers in good condition at a house in North Pole the same day he was reported missing.
- On Feb. 24, 2009, a man and his 6-year-old child were reported overdue after they failed to arrive in Chefnak. They had set out from Kipnuk at 10:30 p.m. on a snowmachine. A hasty search team located the pair at 1:00 am. The man said he lost his way due to bad weather.
- On Feb. 24, 2008, two men were reported missing after they failed to arrive on a snowmachine trip from Hooper Bay to Scammon Bay. A hasty search assembled. The two men eventually arrived uninjured in Scammon Bay; inclement weather slowed their trip.
- On Feb. 22, 2009, Helo 1 launched out of Anchorage to assist in a search for a missing man in the Knik Glacier area. He was reported missing by fellow recreationists when he failed to meet up with them. Helo 1 began a search of the area, but the missing man was located by his friends when he drove into the parking lot, uninjured, on his ATV.

- On Feb. 21, 2009 a snowmachiner was reported overdue near Unalakleet after failing to return. The man was located by a privately charter plane later that day. The man stated he had mechanical problems and had camped out since Feb. 16, 2009. The man was well prepared for the unexpected troubles he experienced.
- On Feb. 21, 2009, four snowmachiners near Summit Lake reported to troopers that they were stuck and beginning to suffer from frostbite. Some of the riders were inexperienced and did not have adequate cold weather gear. After night fell and the temperature dropped, two of the snowmachiners left for help. The other two were picked up by rescuers later that night and transported to a hospital in Anchorage for medical treatment.
- On Feb. 21, 2009, a hiker near Powerline Trail called Girdwood troopers stating she was lost. Helo 1 located the missing hiker and transported her to safety.
- On Feb. 19, 2009 a Navajo airplane with six people onboard crashed outside of Nome. An extensive ground search was launched. Air assets couldn't be deployed due to poor weather conditions. All six people were located alive; some had to seek medical treatment for injuries sustained in the crash.
- On Feb. 19, 2009 the body of 18-year-old Christopher Phillip, of Kongiganak, was located by searchers. Phillip had set out on snowmachine from Tuntutuliak en route to Kongiganak on Feb. 15, 2008. When Phillip began his trip, a blizzard was moving into the area. Bad weather severely hampered search efforts and Phillip was unprepared for the extreme winter conditions.
- On Feb. 18, 2009, a snowmachiner traveling from Manely to Tanana was reported overdue. An extensive ground search was organized. On the 19<sup>th</sup> he was located by rescuers. The snowmachiner had gotten his machine stuck in deep snow and he was unable to free it on his own. At the time he got his machine stuck weather conditions were reported to be extremely poor with heavy, blowing snow. The man was well prepared for the unexpected emergency.
- On Feb. 17, 2009, the bodies of two Kiana men, 24-year-old Alan Atoruk and 27-year-old Loren Milligrock, were located 10 miles south of Kotzebue. The pair was reported missing on the 13<sup>th</sup>. At the time of the report, weather conditions were poor. Blizzard conditions hampered search efforts through the 16<sup>th</sup>; temperatures dropped as low as 50 below during the four-day search effort.

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\*\*\*After this release was published AST became aware of two additional Search and Rescue operations that occurred in this time frame. Below are brief descriptions of the incidents:

- On 2/25/09 at approximately 1600 hours, the Alaska State Troopers received a report that Francis Kakoona, 61 yoa of Shishmaref, was involved in a snow machine accident approximately 30 miles Southeast of Shishmaref. Kakoona was in need of medical treatment. A hasty team along with health aids responded to the cabin where Kakoona had been waiting. Due to a severe ground storm, the hasty team, health aids and Kakoona were forced to remain in the cabin overnight. Kakoona sustained injuries and was stabilized by health aides. After consulting with Doctors at Norton Sound Regional Hospital it was determined that Kakoona would be transported to Shishmaref via snow machine. Searchers and Kakoona arrived safely in Shishmaref.

- On 2/25/09 at approximately 1830 hours, the Alaska State Troopers received a report that Bertha Barr, 26 yoa and Martin Komok, 26 yoa and their 3 year old daughter, all from Brevig Mission, were overdue. Barr and Komok had taken their daughter to the store in Teller via fourwheeler. While returning to Brevig Mission from Teller the travelers were caught in a ground storm. A hasty team from Brevig Mission was sent and located Barr, Komok, and their daughter on foot two miles from Brevig Mission. Their fourwheeler became stuck and they were trying to get back to the village. No injuries were reported.