



Mar. 6, 2009  
PR# 09-029

## Being Safe Means Being Prepared

(ANCHORAGE, Alaska) – With temperatures starting to rise and the clouds parting to reveal beautiful blue skies, outdoor enthusiasts eagerly flock to the gentle slopes and wide open spaces to snowmachine, snowshoe, ski and more. It's already common knowledge to avid outdoor winter recreationists in Alaska: It is Avalanche season. Beautiful weather can provide a false sense of security to many people.

The danger truly lies on the mountains. The danger is in the snowpack. Unstable layers of snow below fresh new snow increase the risk of naturally triggered avalanches, not to mention human-triggered avalanches.

Personal responsibility must be a factor in an individual's decision to go out and recreate this time of year. What needs to be considered is where to go, what equipment to bring and who to bring with you. Troopers are scattered across the state and are constantly responding to calls for service. AST and AWT do not have resources available to have a trooper sit at trail heads "just in case" an emergency occurs. This also applies to volunteer search and rescue personnel. It may take more than an hour to gather gear, respond and deploy. If caught in an avalanche, your best bet to be recovered quickly is to have other people with you who know the basics of avalanche safety and have the proper avalanche rescue equipment and the know-how to use them: probes, emergency locator beacons and shovels.

It is important to bring communication devices with you as well. It is just as important to know the limitations of the devices. Mobile phones are a great tool. Most mobile phones do not have GPS devices in them; while law enforcement can get your "general location" it can still take a great deal of time to discover your exact whereabouts. Mobile phones have limited coverage area and may not function in locations you choose to recreate. Always have an extra mobile phone battery to use as back-up. When reporting an incident, the caller needs to stay available by phone to give updates to emergency responders. Other devices such as personal locator beacons are ideal to pinpoint your exact location and to send a signal to others to let them know you are in need of immediate help.

Before hiking into Alaska's wilderness, educate yourself on the dangers of the terrain and weather. Learn how to keep yourself safe and how to "self rescue." Being prepared is the best way to save your own life. Alaska Avalanche School is holding a series of free avalanche safety courses statewide. For information on these courses visit its website at [www.alaskaavalanche.com](http://www.alaskaavalanche.com).

Alaska volunteer SAR personnel are continually conducting training exercises. The exercises are designed to familiarize them with new technology, to provide "refresher" information and to practice interoperability. Next month in Southeast Alaska, a local search and rescue group, and its rescue dogs, will be going through an intense training exercise. If you are interested in learning more about the various SAR groups around the state of Alaska, contact Megan Peters at 269-5413.