

Avalanches

Thousands of avalanches occur in Canada each year. They happen in all regions of Canada but are more frequent in the mountains of British Columbia, Yukon and Alberta. Avalanches can be triggered by wind, rain, warming temperatures, snow, and earthquakes. They can also be triggered by skiers, snowmobiles, hikers, vibrations from machinery or construction.

Avalanche Facts

- An avalanche occurs when a layer of snow collapses and slides downhill.
- Avalanches are caused by four factors: a steep slope, snow cover, a weak layer in the snow cover and a trigger.
- Roads and railway tracks may be rerouted to reduce risks.
- Safe avalanches may be triggered in dangerous snow packs.
- Avalanches can travel up to 90 km/h.
- After one hour, only one in three victims buried in an avalanche is found alive. The most common causes of death are suffocation, wounds and hypothermia.

Avalanche Safety

- If you are planning to travel in the backcountry, **take an avalanche safety course.**
- Check [Avalanche Bulletins](#) before you head out.
- When traveling in the backcountry, always travel in a group. Ensure you have an experienced group leader. Always stay within view of your group and carry the appropriate safety gear, such as avalanche beacon, probe and shovel.
- When driving, observe the sign, "Avalanche Area - Do Not Stop."
- Drive carefully in avalanche areas. Avalanches may reach the road without warning.
- Obey road closures. When the avalanche hazard is high, control work by explosives may be carried out at any time.
- If an avalanche blocks the highway, remain in your vehicle with seat belts on. Wait for assistance. It is easier to find a car in the snow than it is to find a person. Drive to a safe area if possible.
- Avoid driving through even small avalanches.

During an Avalanche

If you become caught in an avalanche, try to:

- Push machinery, equipment or heavy objects away from you to avoid injury.
- To avoid being swept away, grab onto anything solid, such as trees, rocks, etc.
- Keep your mouth closed and your teeth clenched.
- If you start moving downward with the avalanche, stay on the surface using a swimming motion.
- Try to move yourself to the side of the avalanche.

When the avalanche slows, attempt to:

- Push yourself towards the surface.
- Make an air pocket in front of your face using one arm.
- Push the other arm towards the surface.

When the avalanche stops, begin to:

- Dig yourself out, if possible.
- Relax your breathing, particularly if you cannot dig yourself out.
- Stay calm and shout only when a searcher is near.

Be Informed

- Download the [Alberta Emergency Alert](#) app to receive current information about disasters or emergencies impacting your community.
- Check [Avalanche Bulletins](#) before you head out.
- For more information on avalanche safety refer to [AdventureSmart](#).
- Up-to-date [Avalanche Warnings](#) can be found on the federal government website.

For more information on hazards in Alberta, contact your municipality or community's Director of Emergency Management or the Alberta Emergency Management Agency at 780-422-9000 (Dial 310-0000 for toll-free access outside Edmonton). You can also visit www.aema.alberta.ca.