Avalanche Risk Management Policy

Revised 2025-04-11

(part of Appendix 1 of the Outdoor Guide: Risk Management Policies and Guidelines)

Avalanche risk

Any travel in snowy terrain carries risk. At times the risk is not apparent, especially if the traveler is not versed in the mechanics of snow pack failure. Examples include moderate trails that traverse open glades, and steep road cuts or creek banks in otherwise simple terrain.

In situations of significant risk, RMRA policy requires that participants have an introduction to avalanche practice through the AST1 course, participate in regular review sessions and carry specific avalanche gear. In situations of lesser risk, the policy recommends training and avalanche gear, but the requirement is left to the discretion of the coordinator. Participants should be aware of the question of avalanche risk and participate in trips accordingly.

Coordinators' responsibilities

For trips into avalanche terrain in the winter, it is the coordinator's responsibility to:

- ensure the trip requirements are met as stated in this Policy.
- if the policy recommends avalanche gear, decide whether it will be required for the trip.
- if avalanche gear is required, ensure that trip participants have the required training as per this policy.
- on the morning of the trip, check the latest regional avalanche danger level.
- at the trailhead, check to ensure all participants have the required avalanche gear.
- have an alternate trip planned.

Participants' responsibilities

For trips into avalanche terrain in the winter, it is the participant's responsibility to:

- determine the current avalanche risk and ensure that they consider it acceptable.
- ensure that their avalanche training meets this Policy's requirements.
- bring all required equipment in proper working condition.
- be familiar with the equipment's use.
- prior to the trip, confirm that their transceiver battery life is at least 50 percent.

Avalanche Policy

RMRA avalanche policy factors the expected terrain and danger rating into the decision as to whether avalanche gear and training are required. The requirements are shown in the table below.

- **No Trip** means that the trip cannot be done as a RMRA trip.
- **Required** means that avalanche gear and associated training are required for all participants.
- **Recommended** means that neither avalanche gear or training are required, but risk may still exist and the need for gear and training should be considered by the coordinator and participants.

Terrain:	**simple terrain**	**simple terrain with overhead exposure**	**challenging terrain**	**complex terrain**
	class 1	**class 1A**	**class 2**	**class 3**
Danger				
extreme in area of travel	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip
high in area of travel	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip
considerable, moderate, low or spring in area of travel; high or extreme above	Recommended	Required	Required	Required
considerable or spring in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Required	Required
moderate in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Required	Required
low in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended	Required

Avalanche Gear Requirements

Participants are required to use an avalanche transceiver for the duration of the trip. The transceiver must have at least 50 percent remaining battery life. In addition, participants must carry an avalanche probe, a shovel appropriate for rescue work, and warm clothing appropriate for emergency situations.

Training Requirements

For those trips where avalanche gear is required, either by policy or at the discretion of the coordinator, participants are required to have taken an Avalanche Skills Training (AST1) course or have equivalent experience. Unless a participant has taken the course within two years prior to the trip, they are required to have participated in a Rambler in-house avalanche rescue refresher workshop (or equivalent other refresher) within the last two years.

All members are responsible to record their avalanche training in their member profile to allow coordinators to determine their suitability for trips. This includes keeping information on their latest refresher current.

The Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale

The Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale is a system of rating backcountry terrain based on its exposure to avalanches. It divides terrain into five categories.

RMRA has added a sixth category: a variation on class 1, denoted 1A, to identify trips which are through simple terrain but cross major avalanche paths which are risky when the avalanche danger is high in the starting zones above.

Terrain rating	Class	Description	Examples
Non-avalanche	0	No known exposure to avalanches	• Cascade Fire Road • Baker Creek • Pipestone Trails
Simple	1	Exposure to low-angle or primarily forested terrain.	• Skoki via Deception Pass • Tower Lake • Taylor Lake
Simple with overhead exposure	1A	Exposure to low-angle or primarily forested terrain, but with exposure to avalanche paths that present significant risk when avalanche danger is high	• Redearth Creek • Healy Creek • James Walker Creek • Baldy Pass
Challenging	2	Exposure to well-defined avalanche paths, starting zones, terrain traps or overhead hazard.	• Cirque Peak • Hidden Lake • King Creek Ridge
Complex	3	Exposure to multiple overlapping avalanche paths or large expanses of steep, open terrain.	• Pumpkin Traverse • Mt. Jimmy Simpson • Hero Knob circuit
Extreme	4	Exposure to very steep faces with cliffs, spines, couloirs, crevasses or sustained overhead hazard.	• Mt Baker • Mt Rae • Mt Field

The RMRA database provides information on the avalanche terrain rating for any given trip. As well, comments have been added to many trips about avalanche considerations. Other sources of information include Parks Canada's ratings for various trips and the Kananaskis ATES map.

The terrain rating assumes travel along the normal route. Departure into areas of steeper slopes, convex slopes or terrain traps increases the risk beyond that expected for normal travel.

The Canadian Avalanche Danger Scale

Backcountry areas are evaluated for danger by avalanche professionals and assigned one of five ratings:

Danger Level	Travel Advice	Likelihood of Avalanches
5 - Extreme	Avoid all avalanche terrain.	Natural and human- triggered avalanches certain.
4 - High	Travel in avalanche terrain not recommended.	Natural avalanches likely; human-triggered avalanches very likely.
3 - Considerable	Careful snowpack evaluation, cautious route-finding and conservative decision-making essential.	Natural avalanches possible; human-triggered avalanches likely.
2 - Moderate	Evaluate snow and terrain carefully; identify features of concern.	Natural avalanches unlikely; human-triggered avalanches possible.
1 - Low	Generally safe avalanche conditions. Watch for unstable snow on isolated terrain features.	Natural and human- triggered avalanches unlikely.

Ratings are provided for each of below treeline, treeline and alpine. In addition to the current day, forecasts are provided for the following two days.

In planning trips, it is imperative that members access the danger ratings from Avalanche Canada, use them to determine the avalanche risk for any given trip and ensure that the proposed trip is in accordance with policy.

In the spring, the danger level may be rated simply as Spring. Snow conditions change through the day and strong sun can cause snowpacks to become isothermal, greatly increasing the chance of wet snow avalanches.

If danger or terrain ratings are not available, it is the coordinator's responsibility to make best efforts to evaluate the danger and terrain, apply the RMRA avalanche policy and ensure that all trip participants are in agreement with the risk assessment.