

Are Your Workers Prepared for Avalanches?



Workers who work outdoors, especially out in the wilderness, are vulnerable to a wide range of unique safety hazards, from bear attacks to avalanches.

For example, [WorkSafeBC](#) recently reminded BC employers that workers whose jobs take them into the backcountry are at potential risk of serious injury or death in avalanche hazard zones and need to be diligent about understanding how those risks can be identified and mitigated.

In particular, workers in the primary resource and construction industries face risks:

- At their worksites
- On forest service roads
- During work-related snowmobile activity
- During highway maintenance.

In fact, since 1998, avalanches in BC have caused three worker deaths and 47 accepted time-loss injury claims. Although BC is the site of most Canadian avalanches, they can also occur in neighbouring jurisdictions, such as Alberta and the Yukon.

A [WorkSafeBC occupational safety officer](#) recommends that employers apply the following hierarchy of controls to manage avalanche hazards:

- 1. Administrative control:** Plan the work to include

closures or other ways to avoid the avalanche hazard by working in areas where the hazards are non-existent or very low because of meteorological or seasonal conditions.

2. **Engineering control:** Use barriers, guards, diverters, etc. to manage avalanche risks to people and infrastructure, such as snow sheds erected along highways.
3. **Avalanche control:** Actively manage avalanche hazards through the use of explosive bombing, blasting or shelling systems to produce avalanches under controlled conditions.
4. **Procedural control:** Implement safety procedures when the above-mentioned controls aren't practicable because of the type and nature of work to be conducted. Procedural controls rely primarily on worker training, experience, equipment and safe work procedures.