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CAC SLEDCOM: FOR A SAFE SNOWMOBILE SEASON

The CAC Snowmobile Committee (SledCom) was formed by the Canadian Avalanche Centre in December 2009 in an effort to improve the dialogue between the CAC and representatives of the snowmobiling community. The committee is made up of 12 members from a wide variety of snowmobile-related backgrounds. What brings us, and you, together is a passion for snowmobiling in the mountains. We also share, as you should, a common goal of supporting the CAC in reversing the trend in preventable snowmobile avalanche deaths.

Our role is to serve in a constructive and proactive advisory role on issues relating to snowmobile outreach, training and educational initiatives. Skiers have naturally had a relationship with the CAC since its inception. Now we join them as equal partners. Together over the past year, we have worked in the best interests of the snowmobiling public by:

- developing a snowmobile stakeholder resource list for the CAC;
- offering recommendations for key safety messages to mountain sledders;
- building a future relationship between the CAC, snowmobile manufacturers, the Canadian Council of Snowmobile Organizations (CCSO) and the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association (ISMA);
- making recommendations on the design of avalanche awareness signage for snowmobilers on major transportation corridors throughout BC and Alberta;
- participating in the Newfoundland Lifesaving Society's SledSmart DVD avalanche safety project
- representing avalanche safety at trade shows;
- bringing the many voices of the various snowmobile associations of Alberta and BC to the table with respect to avalanche safety; and
- making recommendations for a CAC "Ten Commandments of Snowmobiling" presentation.

In early 2010, the BC Coroners Service published a report from a Death Review Panel convened to examine the avalanche deaths of snowmobilers in the winter of 2008 – 09. The 15th and final recommendation from that report was directed to the organized segment of the snowmobiling community and the CAC, suggesting we form a joint committee. You can read that recommendation on the following page, and see why working together is so important.

When it comes to avalanche safety, all snowmobilers have a role to play. We have a duty to protect ourselves and our friends. Not only because we rely on each other when we ride, but in tribute to the survivors and families of victims from incidents such as Harvey Pass and Boulder Mountain. Snowmobilers have always stuck together; we ride in groups. We need to help each other, and pass on the messaging we get daily from CAC bulletins, incident reports, and our own observations. Here's to keeping us all safe this season.

15. To Alberta Snowmobile Association,
Association of British Columbia Snowmobile Clubs,
British Columbia Snowmobile Federation,
BC Commercial Snowmobile Operators Association
and
Canadian Avalanche Centre

The Panel recommends that the above-listed organizations form a joint committee, working towards establishing ongoing dialogue between the Canadian Avalanche Centre (CAC) and the organized segment of the snowmobiling community, raising avalanche awareness and cultivating a culture of avalanche safety within the snowmobiling community.

Chair's comment: The Panel heard that through the efforts of the Canadian Avalanche Association, the Canadian Avalanche Centre and various partner clubs and organizations, the backcountry ski community was able to develop a level of avalanche awareness that has since been considered contributory to reducing the overall number of fatal avalanche incidents involving backcountry skiers. At the same time, the number of incidents involving snowmobilers is on the rise.

The Panel was informed that the CAC experienced challenges in its attempts to engage the snowmobiling community in a constructive dialogue aimed at developing co-ordinated strategies to prevent avalanche incidents and securing greater involvement of snowmobile stakeholders in prevention programs.

Whereas the CAC has the required expertise and is the leader in avalanche safety programming in Canada, the organized segment of the snowmobiling community has demonstrated its ability to harness resources and deliver results in various areas of interest to snowmobilers, including general riding safety. In order to ensure universal avalanche safety awareness, the CAC and the snowmobiling clubs need to be committed to working together.

The purpose of a snowmobiling advisory committee would be to provide constructive feedback to the CAC on the effectiveness of its safety programming specific to snowmobilers and to ensure that the CAC is able to deliver an effective avalanche safety message that resonates with the snowmobiling community.