

**The Alaska Snow Safety Conference  
Strategic Priorities from the Planning Discussion**

**December, 2015**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As part of the Alaska Snow Safety Conference, held on November 6, 2014, participants were asked to identify the priority planning issues that must be addressed as part of any planning effort, in order to build a stronger “culture of safety” among the many stakeholders. At the request of Debra McGhan, Executive Director of the Alaska Avalanche Information Center, Dr. Michael, Foraker Group Vice-President, facilitated a planning discussion on the first evening of the conference that included all conference participants; represented at the conference were a wide range of private, government and nonprofit organizations and individuals interested in improving snow safety in Alaska. This document presents the results of that discussion, summarizing the overall priorities that any plan for improving snow safety in Alaska must address. After a brief summary of the main Strategic Priorities here, in the next section each priority is presented with bulleted details capturing the thoughts of conference participants.

The Strategic Priorities identified at the Alaska Snow Safety Conference session are:

- 1. *Develop a Statewide Strategic Plan focused on “Building a Culture of Snow Safety” in Alaska***
- 2. *Constitute a Statewide Advisory Body/Umbrella Organization***
- 3. *Improve Outreach and Awareness Building of Snow Safety among stakeholders and user groups***
- 4. *Develop an Information Hub that more effectively and efficiently collects, holds and distributes Snow Safety information***
- 5. *Focus on improving the availability of and access to snow safety education***
- 6. *Define Safety Snow Safety Standards***
- 7. *Develop a better understanding of expanding Snow Safety markets***
- 8. *Develop and pursue an Advocacy Plan targeted at implementing public policy related to snow safety***
- 9. *Build and support respectful and supportive relationships among stakeholders that allow better and more productive collaboration***

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**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES WITH BULLETED DETAIL**

Each of the Strategic Priorities is presented with bulleted detail below. They are not identified in priority order, although the top priority in the near term should be developing a Statewide Strategic Plan.

***Strategic Priority: Develop a Statewide Strategic Plan focused on “Building a Culture of Snow Safety” in Alaska***

- A statewide strategic plan must:
  - Identify who we are [the participant group] and what we do
  - Describe a five-year goal for the group
  - Identify key challenges and barriers
    - A focus group process could help with this
  - Tap into the experience of others who have built a forecast center from scratch, such as the Chugach center
- Make a “roadmap” for the future
  - Do-able tasks in chunks, accomplished over the next five years to get to the goal of a “Culture of Snow Safety”
    - And build a statewide structure to support it

***Strategic Priority: Constitute a Statewide Advisory Body/Umbrella Organization***

- A statewide body encompasses several important opportunities
  - One place for information to reside
  - One place for statewide discussions to take place
  - One place for statewide decisions to be made
- An umbrella organization can provide support to and not compete with members/stakeholders
  - Could consider a “shared services model,” through which some specific services are provided to all members
  - Should provide special supportive services to communities without infrastructure
- Look at the statewide Boating Safety program as a potential – potential model
  - It receives financial support from the Coast guard
- The Snowmachine Safety program does or could get money from snowmachine registrations
  - Raise registration fee to \$10 and use some of that for statewide safety

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***Strategic Priority: Improve Outreach and Awareness Building***

- Get the word out to stakeholders about what this group [the one gathered at the conference] is trying to do
- Rally user groups around the issue of improved snow safety
- Improve safety awareness of safety standards by companies
  - Incorporate safety standards across companies and land ownership
  - Having appropriate regulations and enforcement to put safety first
    - Methods to inspect? And who does that?
  - Get more agencies involved – who are the authorities/stakeholders that need to be at the table?
    - Motorized groups, Heli-Skier, Trail users
- Work with weather people, combine their expertise with avalanche people to build awareness of weather services that are available

***Strategic Priority: Develop an Information Hub that more effectively and efficiently collects, holds and distributes Snow Safety information***

- Centralize information because improving access to information will improve safety and reduce tolerance for risk
  - Achieving this priority is dependent on understanding who has got what kind of information
- Conduct an inventory of who does what, where, and how
  - There is a vast amount of good information out there but it's all in separate places, and the sources are not always talking well with one another
  - Address the information siloes
  - Establish an information-sharing culture among stakeholders
  - Pool knowledge from many local, regional and statewide services that cover the large continuum of Snow Safety
- Alaska OSHA can be a good source of information on pertinent regulations
  - They can also be helpful with enforcement, which is a necessary component
- Seek better information distribution to close the “Information Gap”
  - Share information better, like Canada does
    - Re-do the Observations Site to make it so other groups and organizations can add information from around the state
  - Pursue a “Hub and Spokes Model” as exists in Colorado
    - Don't need to reinvent the wheel (look to what other states are doing)
    - Identify existing sites and potential host sites
    - Who has the IT resources necessary? Host sites?

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- Offer better real-time reporting for users
  - They want to know “what’s going on today”
  - Statewide call-in #, like the Alaska Earthquake Information Center
- Develop a Snow Safety APP – Utah and Colorado have them

***Strategic Priority: Focus on improving the availability of and access to Snow Safety education***

- Recognize that some regions – Palmer/Wasilla for instance – have a lot of under-educated people who are hungry for education opportunities
- Identify what courses and classes are needed
  - What is the existing course curriculum?
  - Who is best to teach classes?
  - Have a website where people can see all the relevant course offerings
    - Pursue webinars that are offered via a centralized website
- Develop a comprehensive guidebook of educational offerings

***Strategic Priority: Define Snow Safety Standards***

- Do we know what “snow safety” is?
  - Are there consistent and accepted standards?
  - We have an Alaska Ski Safety Act, how about making one for Heli-Ski? Snow machines?
- Process must acknowledge the value of being part of the larger, national avalanche profession
  - Connect to best and promising practices from other state organizations, paying attention to systems in place that are working well
    - Colorado, Utah, others

***Strategic Priority: Develop a better understanding of expanding Snow Safety markets***

- Recognize the emerging “back country” customer base
- Get an better sense of the Heli-ski market
  - What is going on?
  - Who is doing what?

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***Strategic Priority: Develop and pursue an Advocacy Plan targeted at implementing solid public policy related to snow safety***

- Implement the statute
- Fix the permitting process
- Pursue better funding through the executive branch and legislature
  - After developing a Strategic Plan, seek funding from state agencies and the legislature
- Potentially use the Alaska Safety Council to put pressure on the legislature for funding

***Strategic Priority: Build and support respectful and supportive relationships among stakeholders that allow better and more productive collaboration***

- Fostering and developing relationships locally first, then regionally, then statewide – we are better and smarter together than we are apart
- Clarify agency responsibilities so we can better understand the key areas in which we can work together
- Encourage better coordination between groups and agencies
  - Have a master list on the web
    - Broken out by groups, with contact information
- Do a better job at incorporating motorized users into the fold
- And encourage continued active participation in discussions from a wide range of user and information groups
- Develop a regular communication process, communication mechanism and protocols
  - Regular meetings and consistent communication to encourage a strong and healthy network

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Michael Walsh, Vice President  
The Foraker Group