

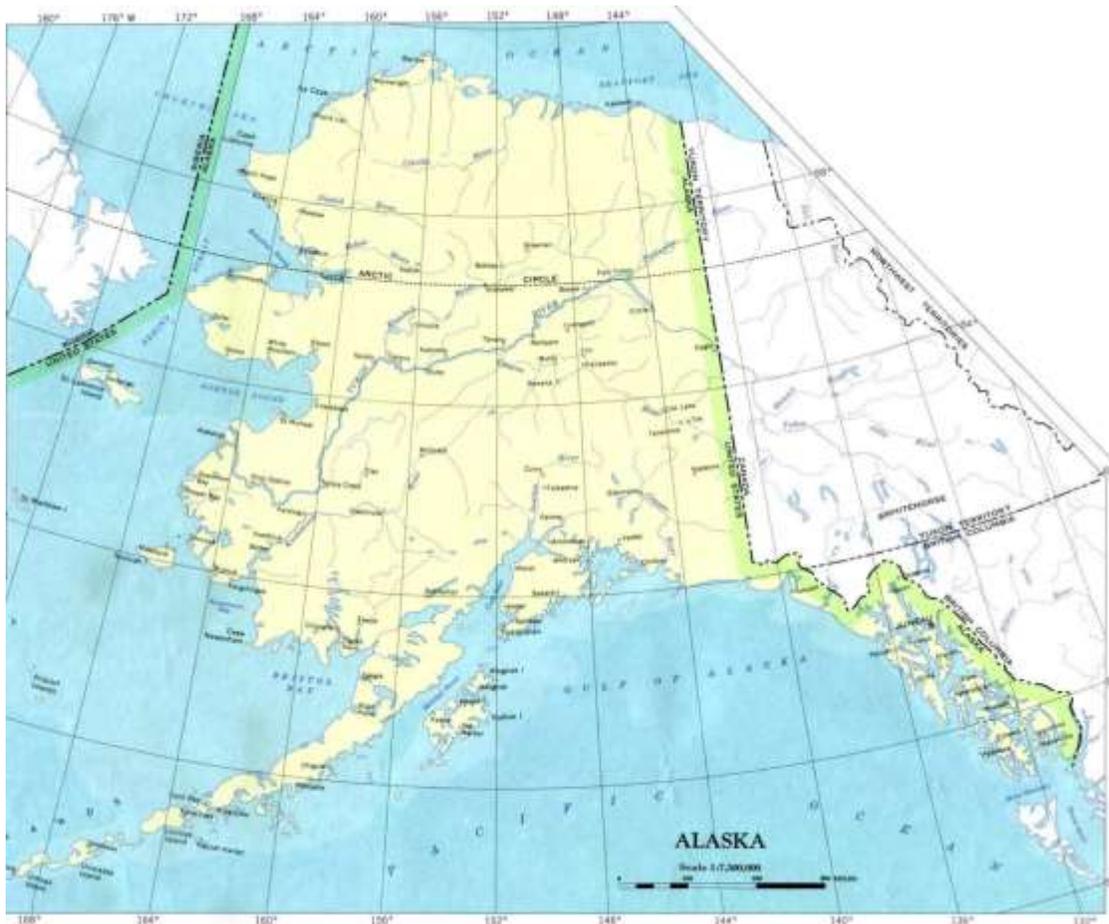


**Alaska Avalanche
Information Center, Inc.**

November 15, 2015

Alaska Snow Safety Summit

Building a unified network of safety



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Addressing Snow Safety in Alaska

HISTORY

The State of Alaska is typically blanketed under snow for more than six months every year. Vast, mountainous regions crisscross the more than 570 thousand miles of terrain attracting residents and visitors from around the world who live, work, travel and recreate in avalanche prone regions. The state is also ranked number one per capita in the nation for avalanche related injuries and fatalities. Without government supported avalanche forecast information centers or a unified system for addressing avalanche problems, the state is left with no winter safety program available for the public. This summit, organized and hosted by the Alaska Avalanche Information Center, a not-for-profit network of six avalanche centers, is designed to address that gap and help bring together resources for a grass-roots solution to benefit the general public. This is the 8th annual event which started in 2007. The first summit was held at Kincaid Park in Anchorage, October, 2007.

DISCUSSION

The 2015 summit was held at the BP Energy Center in Anchorage. It was attended by more than 50 individuals from a wide range of agencies and organizations. Alaskan resident and lodge owner Michael Hopper kicked off the event with his gripping tale of personal experience. Hopper and ski partner Erik Peterson were caught in the Delta Range near Black Rapids Lodge on December 6th, 2014. Erik lost his life, along with Hopper's beloved dog Rowdy. Hopper shared his experience before, during and in the aftermath of the slide. His personal story of survival and loss is a lesson to all and provided valuable research for improving the outreach and education for the general public.

Hopper was followed by Greg Kaplan, representative for US Senator Lisa Murkowski. Kaplan thanked the group for the efforts toward snow safety on behalf of all Alaskans. He said the Senator is committed to support this effort in any way possible.

The event featured two panel discussions moderated by volunteer spokesman, Christopher Constant. The first panel featured state and federal agencies as well as the general public who were asked the following questions.

1. Introduce yourself, tell us what your position is and what you or your agency needs or wants to know about snow safety?
2. How does or can your agency help Alaskans when it comes to snow?
3. Knowing there is a state statute that mandates the State of Alaska provide snow forecast and information for the public, and understanding we have a huge budget deficit, what can you or your agency do to help meet this statute?
4. Please share any other information about yourself, your job or your agency that you think might be relevant to Summit participants

Participants of this panel included:

1. Alaska Dept. of Public Safety - Lt. Dave Hanson, and Malia Miller, Search and Rescue
2. Alaska Dept. of Labor – Mike Buck
3. Alaska Division of Parks – Ben Corwin
4. Alaska Search and Rescue – Corey Aist
5. State of Alaska Legislative Representative Shelley Hughes, Represented by her aid and assistant Stuart Krueger

6. State of Alaska Emergency Operations Center – Claude Denver
7. US Forest Service – Alex McClain
8. General public Representative – Mike Hopper

The second panel was asked the following questions:

1. Introduce yourself and tell us what your position is and what services your agency/organization/company provides in regard to snow safety?
2. How does or can your agency/organization/company help Agencies/Alaskans when it comes to snow safety?
3. Please address any of the responses/questions/or information provided by the first panel members
4. What do you see as the greatest challenge those in the snow safety industry face this year
5. Please share any other information about your job or company that you think might be relevant to Summit participants

This panel featured

1. Alaska Avalanche Information Center – Jed Workman, Hatcher Pass
2. Alaska Avalanche School – Jeremy Allyn
3. Alaska Search and Rescue – Corey Aist
4. American Avalanche Association – Dallas Glass
5. Chugach National Forest Avalanche Information Center – Wendy Wagner and Graham Predeger
6. National Weather Service – Mike O.
7. Other – Representative working or studying in the field of snow science – Aleph Johnstone-Blume, Dave Hendrickson

View the Discussion Panel talks here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QySJzv-rEmQ>
Filmed and produced by DB Palmer and the Students of the PWSCC Expeditionary School

Lunch was provided thanks to Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. Announcements included: The Erik Peterson fun run scheduled for December 6th, 2015. This is a fundraiser in memory of Erik with funds going to support the Alaska Avalanche Information Center to purchase avalanche safety gear. Wendy Wagner with the Chugach Avalanche Information Center announced the Southcentral Alaska Avalanche Workshop (SAAW) scheduled for Friday, November 6th at Alaska Pacific University. Debra McGhan announced the Community SnowFest at the Loussac Library scheduled for Saturday, November 7th.

The afternoon portion of the summit was facilitated by Mike Walsh, Senior Vice President of the Foraker Group. Members from each panel were divided into four focus groups and the remaining attendants dispersed between them. The focus groups were then tasked with working to define what success for snow safety in Alaska will look like in one and five year increments.

The groups identified success in one year as:

- Having a steering committee in the Anchorage region working to provide avalanche observations and education opportunities
- Regular public service announcements airing on the radio and television
- A professionally contracted message airing on the National Weather Service
- A clearly defined hub for information sharing (identify the umbrella agency or hub for information distribution)

Five year success was identified as:

- Statewide information sharing system that is easy for all agencies, organizations, companies and individuals to access and provide quality observation/forecast information. Similar to the system called Info X in Canada.
- Central point of access for the public to reach all avalanche centers and education opportunities
- Curriculum available in schools that is clear and quantifiable
- Regular use of drones and thermal imaging for avalanche risk assessment and search and rescue missions
- A definite shift in culture that embraces avalanche safety education, information sharing and carrying appropriate safety gear

The focus groups were then tasked with describing what successful collaboration looks like. The final report presented from each group included:

- Community training programs with representatives from all avalanche education groups delivering a clear, consistent message
- People sharing information and submitting observations on a regular basis because it's the 'in, cool thing' to do
- All groups taking the initiative to host and collaborate on face to face meetings, workshops and networking opportunities
- All agencies participating in the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration information exchange system
- Looking to other states who have successful collaboration systems in place

Finally the focus groups were asked to make suggestions for a clear, consistent message

- Get the Gear, Get the Training, Get the Forecast, Get the Picture, Get out of harm's way. This message could be broken into a series of 60 second public service announcements that focus on describing each aspect. i.e. What it means to 'Get the Gear,' 'Get the Training...'
- Utilizing professional riders/skiers as role models... to deliver the message
- Professionals volunteering to mentor younger generation of instructors/forecasters
- Identifying the target audience e.g. high school students, snowmachiners, observers...

The next step is for all groups to keep the channels of communication open, build a collaborative network of training opportunities and share observations. The 2016 Summit was scheduled for November 3, 2016 to be held at the BP Center from 4pm to 8pm.

CONCLUSION

In addressing the challenge of providing snow safety information, forecasting, education and emergency response, all of us at AAIC recognize the critical need to include the thoughts and ideas of all stakeholders. Because it is not easy to get all those interested in snow safety together with enough time to address the challenges, it is our objective to continue to facilitate discussions and work sessions throughout the year that will ultimately result in valuable information and feedback that produces results. Our goal is to ensure that every mountain traveler has easy access to quality information and education opportunities that can help save their lives and reduce the number of avalanche related incidents.

How can you help make sure Alaska has a solid network of avalanche forecast center that you can locate easily, get dependable information from and learn about opportunities to get educated? You can join the movement. Become a member of your local avalanche center, use the website to get forecast information, or post a personal observation. Learn more at www.alaskasnow.org.

Get more information on the summit at: <http://alaskasnowsafetyconference.webs.com/index.htm>

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to gather input and feedback from all stakeholders
2. Define the problems with clear step by step solutions for addressing the problems
3. Provide an Information sharing forum
4. Provide a single point of entry for information available to the general public
5. Host a full-day workshop to allow ample time for gathering suggestions, concerns and ideas for ensuring the general public in Alaska has easy access to snow forecast and education information

SPECIAL THANKS

All of us at the AAIC would like to express our sincere thank you to Christopher Constant for moderating the panel discussion and Mike Walsh, Vice President with the Foraker Group, for facilitating the afternoon work session.

Thank you to BP for use of the Energy Center for this event. This service, provided free to Non-Profits in Alaska, made this event possible.

Thank you to our sponsors Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, First National Bank Alaska and Black Diamond Equipment.

Thank you to everyone that attended and provided your thoughts and input on this important topic.

Together we are working hard to ensure that every Alaskan and visitor to our state has quick and easy access to critical, timely professional information regarding snow conditions and education opportunities throughout our state.

This collaborative annual gathering is helping to bring together dozens of state agencies, organizations and individuals who are passionate about snow safety in Alaska.