

Survive an avalanche

Six people met at the Loveland Ski area on April 20, 2013, intending on doing a short tour. They walked along, about 50 feet apart, when they felt a large crack.

The avalanche took several seconds to run the length of the hill. Tragically, five of the six people were killed.

Colorado has an average of 2,300 reported avalanches a year. In the past 60 years, 159 Coloradoans have lost their lives to them. Most were snowmobilers or backcountry hikers and skiers.

The addition of weight to the snowpack is what triggers an avalanche. New snow, drifting snow, a skier, snowmobiler or hiker are all that is necessary to trigger one. There are some things you can do to prevent being caught in one.

Before you go, check with the Colorado Avalanche Information Center. They are current with all the conditions and danger areas.



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

You can easily check conditions on line at www.avalanche.state.co.us.

Be alert to the terrain you are on. Avalanches can occur on a 30-degree slope or steeper, but will run to a much lower angled terrain. Recent activity is a sure danger sign of snow instability and an area to be avoided.

If you must be in a danger area, carry an avalanche beacon with you. This allows rescuers to find you in the snow. A shovel and probe may help you dig yourself out. Most folks wear a helmet to prevent head injuries.

If you are caught in an avalanche, try to ride off the slab by angling yourself to the edge of the slide. Some people survive by "swimming" toward the rear of the slide. This allows you to slow yourself and let as much of the debris as possible go past you. If caught in it, try to stay on your back with your feet pointed downhill.

As the slide slows, try to keep one hand above you and the other in front of your face. The idea is to create an air space in front of you. The main cause of death in an avalanche is suffocation so this air space is important.

When trapped, try to see which way your breath raises. That is the direction to the top. You can also spit, and the direction it falls is opposite of the top. You can then try to dig yourself out.

You must act quickly. A report issued by the Canadian Medical Association Journal in 2011 found that chances for survival dropped to 79 percent after 5 minutes and 40 percent after 15 minutes. Longer than 15 minutes, the chances for survival dropped to less than one percent.

If any members of your group are missing, notify authorities as soon as possible. Once all members of your group are safe, leave the area as quickly and safely as possible.

Another avalanche can occur in the same spot so be as cautious as possible while leaving.

Avalanches are common in Colorado's backcountry, and everyone should be aware of them. There are many avalanche courses available. Check with The American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education at www.aiare.info to find a course near you. Until next time, stay safe and see you on the trail.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.



Colorado has around 2,300 avalanches each year. (Submitted photo)

Wildlife officials urge: Do not provide food to big game animals

Feeding big game is not only illegal in Colorado, it is deadly for wildlife.

"There's no doubt that life's tough for big game during the winter, but feeding these animals can make them sick and kill them," said Scott Wait, southwest region senior terrestrial biologist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Every year at about this time, Colorado's wildlife officers see evidence throughout the state that people are feeding big game animals. The problem is most common in rural, large-lot subdivisions.

The digestive systems of deer, elk, moose and bighorn sheep are specialized for natural food sources, not the common types of feed we give to livestock and pets - hay, corn, grains, alfalfa, birdseed and pet foods.

When big game eat food not suited to their systems, especially during the winter, they can develop digestive problems that will kill them within a few days.

Here's what happens: As fall begins, the digestive systems of ungulates change so that they can efficiently digest vegetation that is naturally dried out and low in nutritional value - such as leaves, twigs and grasses.

When they eat nutrient-dense food such as corn or alfalfa, their digestive systems produce high amounts

of acid which causes them to become dehydrated.

"When that happens they'll become sluggish but also drink lots of water; I will get reports from people who tell me a deer is barely moving and eating snow. That's a sure sign people are putting out food," said Conifer-area District Wildlife Manager Scott Murdoch.

Recently, Murdoch has seen numerous dead deer that succumbed to digestive problems after eating food provided by people. Because feeding big game is illegal, Murdoch has issued one ticket and four other warnings during the last month. The fine is \$70.50.

"Some people think they're helping wildlife, but it only causes serious problems for Colorado's big game animals," Murdoch said.

Last year in Murdoch's district, a bighorn ram died as a result of eating food provided by people.

Another problem with feeding is that it causes numerous animals to congregate in one area. That creates a perfect environment for disease transmission. Spreading hay, corn or putting out salt licks will attract animals to the food and their deaths.

Animals that bunch up can also be vulnerable to mountain lions or other predators.

Anyone who suspects that big game



Feeding big game animals during the winter when their digestive system is not prepared can lead to death. (Submitted photo)

animals are being fed is asked to call the nearest CPW office. Tips can also

be called in to Operation Game Thief at 1-877-265-6648.



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