

Avalanche Safety Topic of End-of-Summer Presentation

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

While some Kodiak residents are hanging onto the last moments of summer, others have already set their sights on the prospect of snow-filled mountains come winter. A gathering of these winter enthusiasts showed their allegiance to the prospect of snow by ditching the sunny weather last night to attend a presentation on avalanche safety at the Bayside Fire Hall.

Bruce Edgerly is the vice president of Back Country Access, or BCA, a company specializing in avalanche safety gear. Edgerly spoke about a recent survey BCA conducted among individuals who had experienced an avalanche to learn more about the ins and outs of these deadly phenomena. He said if someone is buried in an Avalanche, they only have about 15 minutes to live. Advancements in avalanche technology with the avalanche locator beacon have significantly diminished the search time for these individuals, but BCA's survey found that shoveling is now the greatest time consumer.

Edgerly offered shoveling tips to participants, what he calls the ABC and D's of shoveling.

"A means airway, so the first step is you want to protect a person's airway by not standing directly on top of your probe strike, because there's reasonably probability that you could be on top of their airway. And you know, the more air they have in their air pocket down there the longer they're going to last. So if you're stomping that down, they're not going to last as long. And also it freaks them out, you know we spoke to some people who had been buried and recovered and they said it was absolutely terrorizing that these people were on top of them when they were down there."

The probe is essentially a long stick that snow enthusiasts use to detect where a body may be below the snow. Edgerly said when you feel something on the end of your probe, you should back off down hill a bit before you start digging.

The "B" in his digging strategy stands for burial. He recommends people move downhill about one and a half times the burial depth based on how deep the probe goes in the snow.

The "C" stands for clearing snow, and Edgerly said you should always clear snow to the sides while you're digging.

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(Avalanche Talk 2 :26 "Why not just move the snow to the sides of the hole instead of out the back. Because if you move it out the sides of the hole first you preserve the back for later. Because if it's a deep burial, the hard part is getting it up and out of the hole. So if you can preserve the low part of the hole for later, when it's a

deep burial then you're not going to have to get the snow up and over, so you want to move it to the sides first.”)

Moving snow to the side also means you won't have to waste precious moments by digging it more than once, which just so happened to be his next point, D: dig only once.

Learning shoveling methods seems futile, especially for Alaskans who can spend most of their winter shoveling out driveways, but Edgerly said the survey BCA conducted said digging took the most time during an avalanche rescue, and with only 15 minutes to save a buddy, the less digging someone can do the better.

The talk last night was meant as an introduction to avalanches and to showcase new technology and techniques in helping back country enthusiasts survive them. Edgerly stressed that the best way to survive an avalanche is to not get in one, meaning educating yourself on snowpack and when it is or isn't safe to ride. Steve Wielebski, who owns Orion's Mountain Sports, said the Alaska Avalanche School will come to Kodiak in December to put on avalanche safety workshops that he encourages anyone interested in snow sports to attend.

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