



**NORTHWEST AVALANCHE CENTER**

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A Message From Our Directors

February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

In the past week we have experienced more recreational [avalanche fatalities](#) than during any other period in the last 100 years. These deaths are geographically diverse and many communities across the country are dealing with tragedy. On Monday, it hit closer to home for all of us in the PNW, as we experienced our first avalanche fatality of the season. From all of us at the Northwest Avalanche Center, our deepest condolences go out to all who have been affected.

Although we are only halfway through the winter season, we are approaching our national annual average for avalanche fatalities. This should concern all of us.

Today's [National Avalanche Danger Map](#) displays a dangerous snowpack from Northern Washington to central Colorado. These conditions are very favorable for human triggered avalanches and are the primary factor in why we've seen an unusual occurrence of avalanche incidents.

We're also concerned about a secondary link between the accident cluster this past week and the individual and societal effects of the pandemic. There are more people in the backcountry than ever before, and more people in the mountains increases the probability of human triggered avalanches.

And while it's impossible to draw a direct line between the stressors of the pandemic and avalanche incidents, the virus clearly adds overt and latent stressors on all of our lives. These stressors influence our day-to-day interactions, and they likely impact our recreational mindset in the backcountry.

Your risk is determined by deciding where and when to go. Please consider the intersection of the snowpack, your experience, and the added stress of recent months on you and your partners. Are you feeling the need to push it, or could you pull back a bit? Life in the pandemic has undoubtedly added more uncertainty to our lives.

Remember this tenet from your avalanche education: as uncertainty in your plan increases—your exposure to hazards should decrease.

Avalanche centers across the US are focused on one thing: equipping the public with information and education that enables people to recreate safely in the snow. As you head out for that much needed time in the backcountry, we urge you to read and understand our avalanche forecasts, plan accordingly, and consider how the pandemic may be altering your recreational mindset.

Stay safe.

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