

North Dakota Parks & Recreation Department

NEWS RELEASE

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Be prepared for an avalanche when snowmobiling

With winter in full force many North Dakota snowmobilers are planning trips in search of deep powder and steep slopes. But it's not only snowmobile season, it is also avalanche season

When snowmobiling in mountainous terrain, riders need to be prepared, remembering to bring avalanche gear. Thirty-one people have died in avalanches in North America this winter, with 20 of the victims riding snowmobiles. Snowmobilers cause twice as many avalanches as any other back country recreationist. Here is some food for thought:

- The noise from the snowmobile causes the snow to break loose starting an avalanche is false. Ninety percent of all avalanches are caused by the victim's weight and movement or by somebody in the victim's party. If someone is stuck on a steep incline, do you go help? Absolutely not. Many avalanches are caused every year by other people in the group climbing the mountain to go help someone get unstuck. With the weight and the movement of the two sleds this doubles the chances of causing the snow to break loose.
- "When an avalanche occurs I will be able to out run it," is next to impossible. Only a handful of people are around to tell about it. An avalanche can reach speeds of 60 to 80 miles per hour, reaching those speeds in about five seconds. If a snowmobiler is in a position having to out run an avalanche, the best strategy is to ride down and to the side.
- "If I do get buried I will just spit to see which way is up and dig myself out," does not work. Most people caught in avalanches are buried less than five feet from the surface. The people that live to talk about it say it felt like getting concrete poured on them. You do not dig yourself out. It is up to the people in your party to dig you out.

It is important everyone in a group brings a shovel, probe, and beacon when you go into the backcountry. Rescuers have about 30 minutes to dig out victims, any longer and the percentages for survival go down drastically. That is why a beacon is so important it helps find victims faster. Everyone should have their beacon on transmit when riding. Beacons can be rented for around \$15 per day. Most lodges and resorts that cater to snowmobiling rent beacons. Just do a little research before traveling.

The North Dakota Parks and Recreation website, www.parkrec.nd.gov, offers more about snowmobiling including avalanche tips and techniques. There are also links to web sites in other states providing avalanche danger ratings and weather reports. Know the conditions before going, always bring the proper gear, and be safe.

