

Low Probability, High Consequence Mod, Low, Low does not mean GO, GO, GO. There may only be a 'slim chance' of an avalanche, but if you are caught, what are the consequences? This should be front of mind while moving in and through avalanche terrain regardless of the grade rating of the activity.

Understand the Weather Conditions and their Effects on the Snowpack There had been new snow three days prior (up to 20cm) following two months of extremely low temperatures. The morning of the avalanche was significantly warmer than the previous morning. The evening's forecast was calling for more snow and high winds. The winds came earlier than expected. Pay attention to both forecasting and 'now-casting'. Pay attention to the changes, especially to wind and temperature. Remember that the solar effect high on the mountain is very different than at the base.

Be Mindful of the ATES (Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale) rating The ATES rating of Massey's is Complex, Class 3. This means that each and every year large avalanches run to valley bottom with limited chances to reduce exposure. Parks Canada provides pamphlets for backcountry touring and waterfall ice climbing in the National Parks. Many guidebooks also publish the ratings of each route whether you are hiking, snowshoeing, skiing, or climbing. Pay attention to the terrain you are travelling in.

The Most Experienced Member of Your Group, the Sponsored Athlete or Professional Guide cannot be Trusted with YOUR Safety YOU are responsible for your safety. Do not relinquish the responsibility for your safety to anyone else, no matter what their perceived 'authority'. Use your voice. Ask questions, participate in the planning of the objective, departure time, reasons to back off and the turnaround time. Be willing to walk away if you are not being heard. Hiring a professional guide is not a guarantee of safety.

Practice Companion Rescue Unlike guided heli-skiing trips I have participated in, we did not practice companion rescue prior to heading out ice climbing. Had we, perhaps a second shovel would have been on site earlier and not left behind by a client rescuer who didn't realize that a shovel was part of the 'rescue equipment'. Ensure your partners are as competent and able to complete a rescue as you are. Practice transceiver searches with your partners regularly.

Secure Your Safety Equipment You have carried your probe, shovel, communication device, warm clothes and first aid kit with you. Keep your gear secure. Ensure your partners keep their gear secure. If your safety equipment is blown away and buried in an avalanche, it's as good as leaving it at home. Wear your transceiver on your body.

A Real-Life Rescue is Not a Scenario You will likely not have enough resources to perform a 'textbook rescue' as you practiced for in an avalanche course. You will find yourself short of manpower, equipment, daylight and time. Be aware of the margins you cut by going for 'one more run', removing equipment from your pack, lingering in or above terrain traps or being complacent about the weather. Rescues in real-life are desperate, wretched and life altering.

There is No Such Thing as An Act of God Humans make choices. Humans choose their partners, activities, routes, terrain and start times. When you are in avalanche terrain, every minute you spend in the terrain increases your exposure to natural elements. Move with purpose and urgency. Pay attention. Don't be complacent. Get in and get out.

You may have booked the day off to climb, you may have paid for a guided trip, your friend may only be in town for the weekend.... Don't put yourself in the position to have to admit 'we pushed things; we knew we only had one day to climb, and we went for it', which is what Sarah Hueniken explained to me following the avalanche on Massey's.

Spend enough time in the backcountry and every so often you will get 'natured'.... But when you are intentional about your objective and attentive to the natural conditions around you, you increase your opportunity for a safe return home.