

# After the Avalanche

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## Overview:

After the Avalanche is an organization focused on building a safer and more prepared backcountry community. Our aim is to provide education, training, and resources from the first moments of the slide, executing the rescue and initial resuscitation, to debriefing the incident and evaluating the circumstances to recognizing and responding to mental stress in our community. Our team envisions three areas of focus:

## First Aid and Resuscitation:

A large part of our effort has been to develop a comprehensive, approachable training for non-medical individuals. We will provide the basic/foundational lifesaving skills one would need to start resuscitating their backcountry partner following an avalanche burial. Opening the airway, initiating compression if indicated, managing exposure, and stabilizing trauma. Our team has developed a simplified algorithm for avalanche resuscitation. We plan to host rescue seminars with the help of local patrols and resources to help manage the initial response once the rescue has been initiated. Participants will be required to have an Avalanche Level 1 to participate.

## Debriefing:

After major incidents professional organizations have a means to review cases for their operations to focus on risks and identify means to prevent further incidents. Recreational backcountry users often do not have these tools. We are working to develop a set of recommendations on how to evaluate an avalanche accident, focusing on contributing factors such as terrain management, identification of weather changes, snowpack, and heuristic contributions to events. Our hope is that individuals and their backcountry crew can spend time constructively reviewing accidents, while gaining insight into their own group dynamics and risk management strategies.

## The Stress Continuum/ Psychological First Aid/ Building Resiliency:

There has been a growing awareness that traumatic accidents can impact mental health in the backcountry community negatively. Avalanches can create mental stressors and there is an increasing need to understand and navigate these stress injuries. Preloading the language and helping our backcountry community understand the stress continuum, psychological first aid (PFA), and how to implement a post-accident stress debrief can build a more robust and safer community after an avalanche accident.

## Implementation and Plans Going Forward:

1. Online Resources: We are in the process of developing online resources, full of video demonstrations, simplified avalanche first aid algorithms, and preloaded curriculum. The target audience will be professionals (ski patrols, search and rescue teams, avalanche forecasters, etc), and recreational backcountry users. These resources will allow users to conduct their own field seminars, training, and refreshers. Similar to how patrols train with avalanche scenarios – including burials, recoveries, resuscitation, and evacuation – we hope to offer resources that will allow any backcountry community to enact similar evidence-based training and preparedness, with ongoing recognition and management of mental health stress.
2. Field Sessions: By engaging backcountry users with the help of local ski patrols we aim to host small group field seminars. These will include a rescue scenario (complete with “body” recovery), initiation of resuscitation, airway management, hypothermia/exposure management, and initiating evacuation / rescue. Following the scenario, we will debrief and discuss how to approach an analytical risk management review of avalanche accidents. Most importantly we hope to introduce a sense of realism and trauma that might occur, while providing a safe environment for students to identify mental stress following an avalanche rescue. We will introduce mental health tools such as psychological first aid and the 3-3-3 post-accident stress debrief to give the students tools to address mental health.
3. Portability: Our overall aim is to create a platform for portability, one that a motivated individual in any odd corner of Ski Town World could take these resources and introduce them to their own community and expand the notion of how we can all prepare for after the avalanche.
4. Powerful Partnerships: We are currently pursuing partnerships with the Mountain Medical Academy founded by Paramedic and mountain guide Michael Buchanan for first aid curriculum development. Conversations are being pursued with the Utah Avalanche Center, Teton Bridger Avalanche Center, Backcountry Zero, and the Responders Alliance. Early on we hope to base this out of the Wasatch in Northern Utah.