

PRIDE Committee Reports

Executive Committee: Aluminum signs have been mailed to current PRIDE members who have completed the voluntary kennel certification program. If you have not received yours, please contact us at info@mushwithpride.org.

Education Committee: Mush with PRIDE helped the Fairbanks Junior Musers this season with their education program. Many school and scout groups learning about mushing across the US have had PRIDE board members visit and share tips on dog care this season.

PR Committee: PRIDE has worked hard this season to be more visible in various mushing-related media. You have probably seen our ad in Mushing Magazine, Team and Trail, various websites, and local club publications. We are also working on fun and exciting topics for the newsletters.

Guidelines Committee: Input from PRIDE members is being compiled and reviewed by the committee. Input from others (vets, specialists, etc.) will be used to ensure that updates reflect the current understanding of various subjects. Consideration is being given as to how to publish and distribute future revised booklets.

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Now you can show your PRIDE volunteer kennel certification status with these aluminum signs! (Photo by Jolene Giese)



Emergency Sled Repairs with Shawn Linendoll

People often ask what they should carry with them as far as a sled repair kit. In my sled, I carry a little bag with a knife, small saw, about 24 8-inch zip ties, a couple $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch by 4-inch bolts with nuts, and a roll of tape. All this weighs only ounces, and can make life much easier if needed. This article is intended to give you some ideas in the event that you are out on the trail and need to make some emergency sled repairs in order to get safely home.

Situation One: You find yourself and your team on the trail after just hitting the only tree within miles. The rear stanchion has snapped just above the cross member for the bed slats. Now the sled is too unstable to drive. First, tie off the dogs to the tree that just did you in. Take out your saw and cut off a limb of the same tree. Cut yourself two pieces that are long enough to fit about 4 inches above and below the crack in the stanchion. Sandwich the stanchion between the two sections of limb and secure with some zip ties that you always carry for just this reason. (If you don't have zip ties you can use tape, but use plenty - OVERDO it.) If you don't have either you can take your knife and cut a piece of shirt or clothing you are wearing to make a type of rope or binding material. (I don't recommend using your underwear as the rest of the run will be cold!)

Situation Two: You find yourself on the trail and it has been very icy. You go over a mogul come down hard - you hear that bad sound of a crack. WHAT was that you ask? Stop and look. Something doesn't seem right. Darn! The runner has cracked. Most times when this happens it is right at joint (weak spot). What to do? You are 30 miles from home. Tie the dogs off and calm everyone down. Go over and cut two long green branches about 1 inch in diameter and 6 feet long. Clean off any small limbs with either your knife, saw, or axe. As with the stanchion repair, sandwich the limbs on each side of the runner. Secure with zip ties or tape (tape works better for this type of repair). Yes it is going to be a hard drag home, but at least you are moving. Stop every few miles and check tape for wear. Replace it when needed. The greener the limbs for this type of repair, the better since you want flex and movement without breakage.

Situation Three: Cruising down the hill with the dogs flying, you hit a gully. You get thrown forward into the handle bar and SNAP!! It breaks into two dangerous jagged objects and leaves you with no way to steer. Again, stop and tie the sled and dogs off. Get out that trusty saw you always carry. You set off looking for smaller diameter green wood for the repairs. Well, that isn't going to work because there are no trees around... What to do? Go up and cut off your brush bow. Install this where your handle bar use to

be. Secure with zip ties or tape. No, this isn't going to be perfect, but at least you can safely drive the sled.

Situation Four: After a jazzed up run, the dogs are moving well. You know the next section of the trail is really steep. You brake to slow the dogs up before the decent and hear - THUNK! What was that? Suddenly you have no brake control. You look down at the brake and the bolts are sheared. The brake is dangling by the bungee. WOW this is bad.... You get safely to the bottom of the hill with some fancy foot/face dragging. Tie off the dogs and take a couple of breaths. Let's see what we have to work with... Darn we never did remember to put in any extra bolts in the kit. But we have a bundle of these easy to carry zip ties. Use the zip ties and run as many as you can fit between the holes (take up as much slack as you can). Don't fasten them too tight as we want them to last until we get home. Crisis avoided and we are on our way again. RIP!!! What now?? The zip ties didn't work because the brake caught the last stump and tore them all free. Tie off the dogs again. Go find a nice limb about 1/2 inch in diameter and make two dowels out of it, each about four inches long. Check the fit with the holes in the brake. Slide the dowels thru the holes and put tape or zip ties on each side to keep them from sliding thru for the rest of the ride home. Remember this is not a proper fix but will work in a pinch. SO drag you feet as much as possible for the rest of the run to keep your brake usage to the minimum.

-SL



Amanda Stitt of Willow, AK shows off her Mush with PRIDE patch at the Junior Don Bowers Race in January (Photos by Donna Quante)

Avalanche Awareness for Mushers

TC Wait

Although for most of us the sledding months are starting to draw to a close, there is still snow on the trails, and for the Rocky Mountains, some big spring storms are still likely to occur. Spring can be just as dangerous for creating avalanche conditions as the winter months. You may not think much about avalanches while out with your dogs, but many of the places we race and train are prone to avalanches. Whether you are still out on your sleds this spring, or maybe planning a race in an area that may have avalanche hazards, it is good to keep some thought to potential avalanche risks that you and your team may encounter. I have the opportunity to work with folks at the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC) and thought it might be a good idea to corner them with some questions that might keep mushers and their teams safer in the back country.

Q) *What terrain characteristics should I look for to determine whether an avalanche might impact the trail I want to take?*

A) Most large avalanche paths are obvious (when they are not obscured by clouds!): an open slope, bowl, or gully above timberline that leads to a swath through the trees. But small avalanche paths in the trees, in gullies or creek beds can be just as dangerous. Slope angle is the most important factor, so you should learn to recognize terrain that is 30 degrees or steeper. Bent or damaged trees are good clues that show where avalanches have run in the past. Trees that have been flagged (uphill branches broken off by previous avalanches) are a good indicator that avalanches have run through an area. Look to see how high the uphill branches are broken off to indicate how large of a slide has gone through the trees.

Be careful when you are on a trail that cuts across a steep slope, such as a road cut. A road cut can be a terrain trap for snow that will catch avalanche debris and pile it up higher than it would on the flats below an avalanche path. Other terrain traps include gullies, benches at the bottom of slopes, and stream beds.

Q) *Mushers don't generally travel across steep slopes, why should we worry about avalanches?*

A) About 90% of all avalanches start on slopes of 30-45 degrees. Avalanches release most often on slopes above timberline that face away from prevailing winds (leeward slopes collect snow blowing from the windward sides of ridges). Avalanches can run, however, on low-angle slopes well below timberline, such as gullies, road cuts, and small openings in the trees where your mushing trails often cross. Even if you are always on the flats below slopes, you still have to think about the avalanche hazard on the slopes above you.

On very unstable snowpacks, you can trigger an avalanche from the flats below a steep slope. This is sometimes called a telegraphed avalanche. It happens when you cause a collapse

failure in the flats. You may hear a "whumphing" sound or feel a slight collapse of the snow. This failure can race upward and cause a shear failure in the snow layers on the slope above you and trigger an avalanche. Think of a carpet laid over a table. If you pull the carpet from the bottom, it will affect the part above and pull it downward. Snow that acts like this is called a slab avalanche.

Q) *Do avalanches always travel in established chutes? Aren't I safe if I stay in the trees?*

A) Very dense trees can anchor the snow to steep slopes and prevent avalanches from starting; however, avalanches can release and travel through a moderately dense forest. We saw examples of this in Colorado following the March 2003 blizzard where avalanches occurred near Silver Plume in places where there were no established chutes. Again, look for flagged trees, even in thick forests. If the branches are broken off on the uphill sides of the trees, an avalanche has ripped through the trees.

Q) *What signs and indicators should I be looking for that could indicate avalanche danger?*

A) When the snow cover is very unstable, nature often broadcasts clear danger signals. Fresh avalanches are the best clue. Snow that cracks, collapses, or makes hollow "whumphing" sounds is also unstable. Weak layers that are found by digging snow pits are signs of unstable snow. Snow that has become wet from thaw or rain can be dangerous. Look for snow plumes off of high peaks and avoid slopes that are being loaded from the wind. Even if you find no signs of unstable snow, you should always travel using techniques to minimize your risk.

Q) *What weather conditions make for higher avalanche danger?*

A) Avalanche danger increases with major snowstorms, high winds and periods of thawing. More than 80% of reported avalanches occur during or just after large snowstorms. The key to increased avalanche hazard is snowfall intensity. The harder it snows, the faster the snowpack is loaded. Any month with an above average snowfall will be the most hazardous, but avalanches can occur in any month of the year.

Winds can load slopes faster than the heaviest snowfalls. Even on a sunny day, wind can load the lee sides of mountains and release avalanches. Look for plumes of snow blowing off of the high peaks on a windy day. When you see rocky areas where the snow has been blown off of the side of a mountain, remember that the snow had to go somewhere. Usually it is on the lee slope where the avalanche hazard has become greater.

Q) *What snow conditions make for higher avalanche danger?*

A) New snow, high winds, and unstable layers. The most common weak layer in Colorado is called "depth hoar". This is the sugary snow usually found near the bottom of the snowpack. It contains larger crystals from melted snow and bonds very poorly with the snow around it.

Another common weak layer is "surface hoar". These are the large feathery shaped crystals that form on top of the snow surface on cold mornings, the winter equivalent of summer's dew. While not a hazard when they first form, if they are buried they become a very weak layer that will cause any snow that falls on top of the surface hoar to form a slab avalanche.

Q) *Anything else we should keep in mind to predict avalanche hazards?*

A) There are four things to keep in mind that comprise avalanche prone areas: a steep slope (usually anything greater than 30%), snow cover, a weak layer in the snow cover, and a trigger (could be you, could be the wind, could be a heavy snowfall, could be a mountain goat...). You and your team are heavier than a lone person and therefore you put a heavier load on a slope than a single person does. You could therefore more easily trigger a lower angle slope avalanche, or trigger a slide on a day that had a lower avalanche hazard.

Q) *What safety equipment should I be carrying in my sled or on my body?*

A) You should always have an avalanche transceiver (or beacon), shovel, and a collapsible or ski-pole probe if you suspect you will be in avalanche terrain. You should practice frequently to be proficient in using your beacon. Remember: you should not take extra risks just because you have rescue equipment and try not to travel in these areas alone.

Q) *Is there anything I can do to protect myself and my team (or increase our chances of survival) if we are caught in an avalanche?*

A) You can reliably avoid avalanches by recognizing and avoiding avalanche terrain. Travel at the valley floor away from large avalanche runouts, along ridgetops above avalanche paths, in dense timber, or on slopes of 25 degrees or less that do not have steeper slopes above them.

If you are traveling in avalanche-prone terrain you can minimize risk by using good technique, such as crossing avalanche areas one person (or dog team) at a time and crossing a slope at the very top or bottom if possible. Travel with someone else. If you are climbing or descending a slope, stay by the edge of a slope rather than the center. Turn back or alter your route if you detect signs of unstable snow. It is best to carry and know how to use avalanche rescue gear if you are in suspect terrain.

Surviving avalanches can depend on luck; therefore, it is always better to avoid them in the first place. If you are caught, first try to escape to the side, or grab a tree or rock. If you are knocked down, get rid of anything attached to you that could get tangled. You may have to



Photo courtesy of CAIC – Battleship Avalanche Chute

let go of your sled, but probably you will not a choice. Swim with the avalanche to try to stay on top and avoid trees. When the avalanche slows down, reach for the surface with one hand and make an air pocket around your mouth with your other so you can breathe. Avalanches are very powerful and may tumble you head over heels. Chances are that some part of your team will be above the avalanche debris when it stops, so you will have a better chance of digging out the rest of the team. The gangline may or may not hold together during an avalanche event. Heavy-duty climbing ropes have been snapped like twine during avalanches, so you may have to probe to find your team if they are buried. Some dogs have been killed in avalanches, but many have survived.

If you are on top of the debris and there are others buried, stay and look for the buried victims. **DO NOT** go for help. You are the victim's best chance for survival. Half of all avalanche victims die within 30 minutes after being buried, so you must start your search immediately. If you are wearing a beacon, turn it to **RECEIVE** and begin a beacon search. If you do not have a beacon, probe the most likely areas with your probe or whatever you can find, a tree branch will work in a pinch. The most likely areas where survivors may be found are above large rocks and trees, in terrain traps, and anywhere downhill of the victim's last seen point. Look for clues on the surface such as article of clothing.

We can't give you all you need to know in this article, so for more information and to practice these skills you should take an avalanche course.

For more information, or to find an avalanche safety course in your area, visit www.avalanche.org.



Mush with PRIDE bumper sticker on Dave Wurts' dog truck at the Mancos Mush in February (Photo by TC Wait).

DID YOU KNOW?... The top 5 states with the most Mush with PRIDE members are Alaska, Wisconsin, Michigan, Maine, and Minnesota. Mush with PRIDE youth members live in New Jersey, Alaska, Minnesota, and Washington.

Mush with PRIDE Club Members



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www.mushwithpride.org

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\$15 individual, \$20 family, \$5 youth under 18, \$10 associate, \$100 business. Quarterly newsletter included for all memberships, a copy of Sled Dog Care Guidelines and Equipment Guidelines included with new memberships. PRIDE membership year starts October 1st (those received on or after June 1st are good through the following membership year). Don't forget membership for your local mushing club!

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Basic sled dog care and training advice from dozens of the most respected mushers. Includes information on dog yards, feeding and watering, training, husbandry, puppies and more. 36-page book \$5 each or \$3.50 each for 10 or more.

Equipment Safety Guidelines _____ **Quantity** _____ **\$** _____
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