

## **SFU Press Releases Collection**

These archival copies have been generated from web press releases maintained and originally written by SFU Communications and Marketing. Where possible, an effort has been made to preserve the public comments left on the website as well as any included photos or other images. All textual content should be faithful to the original press releases; contact numbers have been removed but they have not otherwise been altered in any way. However, this collection of documents spans multiple generations of web authoring software and not all formatting will be exact.

## **Avalanche book chronicles deaths, advocates safety**

Contact:

Pascal Haegeli, [Phone removed], [pascal@avisualanche.ca](mailto:pascal@avisualanche.ca)

Marianne Meadahl, PAMR, [Phone removed], [marianne\\_meadahl@sfu.ca](mailto:marianne_meadahl@sfu.ca)

January 28, 2011

Every winter an average of 14 people die in avalanches in Canada. Simon Fraser University avalanche safety researcher Pascal Haegeli hopes a new book he co-authored will help outdoor enthusiasts better understand the tragedies and prevent similar fates.

*Avalanche Accidents in Canada, 1996-2007* provides details behind the chilling numbers -- 155 fatalities in 105 accidents over the recent 11-year period -- along with analysis of events and related details to help avid snow seekers stay safe in areas where avalanches can occur.

Written by Haegeli and researchers Bruce Jamieson and Dave Gauthier from the University of Calgary, the book is the fifth and by far the largest in a series of books written to provide accident contexts and seasonal summaries that describe the weather history of winters and how they relate to the avalanche situations during those seasons.

While avalanches affect Canadians from coast to coast, most accidents covered in the book occurred in B.C. or Alberta. A common thread - particularly through the higher fatality winters - was that southwestern Canada, much like it is now, experienced challenging avalanche conditions because of a series of persistent weak layers in the snowpack.

Of the 155 deaths, 139 occurred during recreational activities, mainly backcountry skiing, snowmobiling and out of bounds skiing. The vast majority of accident avalanches were triggered by humans. While most victims died from asphyxia, approximately one-quarter succumbed to severe traumatic injuries they sustained during the avalanche. While avalanche transceivers are considered essential safety equipment for travelling in avalanche terrain, one-third of the fatal victims didn't carry them. Eighty-eight per cent of the victims were males and most were between 20 and 39 years old. The youngest was only 22 months and perished during a residential avalanche accident in Kangiqsualujjuaq in 1999, which claimed nine lives.

'The best way to survive an avalanche is not to get into one in the first place. If you get buried you only have a chance if your travel partners can find and dig you out within about 10 minutes,' says Haegeli, who spoke with numerous individuals personally involved in the accidents.

'I was tremendously touched by their willingness to share their stories,' Haegeli adds, 'and their determination to get the details right, so that other backcountry travelers can learn from their mistakes.'

The book is available from the online store of the Canadian Avalanche Association ([www.avalanche.ca/caa](http://www.avalanche.ca/caa)) and in the stores of Mountain Equipment Co-op.