

## Mountain School Tech Tips: The Avaluator

The newest tool available for recreationalists to avoid becoming an avalanche statistic is the Canadian Avalanche Centre's Avaluator. If you were at the recent Backcountry Avalanche Workshop in Nelson on Saturday, November 18, you would have your own nifty (and free) copy of the Avaluator. But, what exactly is the Avaluator and how will it help keep you safe this winter? The Avaluator is a trip planning card and booklet that helps you choose a trip destination suitable for (a) your own risk tolerance level, and (b) the current avalanche danger rating.

Essentially, all backcountry trips can be characterized as being in simple, challenging or complex terrain. While it is possible to develop your own rating for any trip you plan to undertake, you can take advantage of the work already done by the CAC and look up local trips on the CAC web page – go to <http://www.avalanche.ca/avaluator/Default.aspx> and select Kootenay/Boundary bulletin region – a list of common trips will appear (you can also select by activity type - backcountry or out-of-bounds skiing). Based on the current avalanche danger rating (extreme, high, considerable, moderate or low), the recommended action (not recommended, extra caution, or normal caution) is read off the chart. The recommended action is based on consensus opinion among avalanche experts.

The Avaluator also includes a checklist of “obvious clues” that help recreationalists assess the current hazard along their ski touring (or snowshoeing) route. The obvious clues are:

- **A**valanches – within the area within 48 hours
- **L**oading – by wind, snow or rain within 48 hours
- **P**ath – are you in a path or start zone
- **T**errain trap – gullies, trees, cliffs, etc. that increase the increase the consequences of being caught
- **R**ating – considerable or higher
- **U**nstable snow – cracking, whumpfing, hollow sounds
- **T**Haw instability – significant warming by sun, rain or warm air.

The first initials of the clues form the acronym ALPTRUTH. The total number of clues that you observe is summed, and a course of action (normal caution, extra caution or not recommended) is recommended. These recommendations are based on the number of accidents that could have been prevented had people limited their travel under similar conditions.

There is lots of information about the Avaluator on the CAC webpage (<http://www.avalanche.ca/>) and we will all see a lot more of the Avaluator as it appears in the regular avalanche bulletins put out by the CAC.