

AVALANCHE ACCIDENT- Bald Mountain/Sun Valley Ski Resort

SUBMITTED BY: Sawtooth National Forest Avalanche Center

LOCATION: Near Ketchum, Idaho

DATE: January 22, 2010

SUMMARY: 1 skier caught, buried and killed

SYNOPSIS:

On Friday, January 22, 2010, a skier was killed by an avalanche in bounds at Sun Valley Ski Resort. The avalanche occurred in an off-trail area near the bottom of the Firetrail run on Seattle Ridge, and broke 2-3 feet deep, 40-50 feet wide, and ran 160 vertical feet. The victim appeared to have been traversing low on the path when the avalanche released. The avalanche propagated approximately 100 vertical feet above him and carried him into a dense stand of small trees just above a groomed run, where he was fully buried 5-6 feet deep. The victim was wearing a beacon and found using a transceiver search. Ski patrol dug him out 15 minutes after the initial report, began administering CPR, and transported the victim to the base of the ski area where he was taken to the hospital and pronounced deceased.

Janet Kellam and Chris Lundy of the Sawtooth National Forest Avalanche Center were at the resort that day, and conducted a site investigation shortly after the rescue was completed. Snow profiles near the top and in the flank mid-path showed 70-80 cm of soft (F to 4f) snow above a 20-30 cm layer of F-hard facets and depth hoar on the ground. Total snow depth ranged from 90-120 cm. The slab fractured at the top of the facet/depth hoar layer and scoured to the ground. An extended column test in the flank profile produced an ECTP25 Q1 on this layer. The avalanche was classified as a SS-ASu-D2-R2-O and occurred on a northeast aspect at an elevation of 7300 feet. Average slope angle was approximately 38 degrees, with a short rollover of 40-45 degrees near the likely trigger point.

Three storms during the 5-day period leading up to and including the day of the avalanche deposited 30 inches of snow and 2.6 inches of SWE at the resort study plot at 9000'. This fell atop a shallow and extremely weak snowpack consisting largely of facets and depth hoar.