

Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center
Avalanche Advisory

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Good Afternoon, this Oly with the Idaho Panhandle avalanche advisory, valid for today, March 29th, 2010. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and will remain in effect through midnight, March 30th. Thanks to the Schweitzer Mountain Ski Patrol for their continued support. This advisory is sponsored by Idaho Parks and Recreation.

WEATHER and SNOWPACK

Big snow, wind and rain have arrived in the Pacific Northwest with possibly the biggest amount of moisture recorded for the winter. There have been great fluctuations in the freezing level with rain reported to 6000'. I was with the Schweitzer Ski Patrol today doing avalanche control work before 75 mph SW winds shut down the ski hill. We found 16" at 6300' and at 4600' there was about 6" but absolutely blue with rain. The top 25 turns were pretty good but at 5700' the snow was unloading out of the trees and creating pinwheel point releases some the size of truck tires. At the bottom your skis created a wake like a water skier would. Interesting conditions.... Slope testing with high explosives produced limited results, however. The **avalanche danger will increase on wind loaded slopes**. On top of all this there is a warning from the National Weather Service that there could be up to 1.5—2.5" of SWE during the next several days with varying freezing levels and wind intensity. Predicted thunderstorms could greatly increase precipitation in local areas. Tonight the freezing level is predicted to drop, winds decrease and precipitation intensities weaken. Sounds like a great powder day in store for those that can access it safely.

To top off all this action, there was an avalanche fatality in the Missoula Lake area in the Superior Ranger District of the Lolo NF on Saturday 3/27/10 at 1800 hrs. The failed layer is suspected to be a buried surface hoar layer that was buried 2-3 feet deep. The warm afternoon and direct late spring sun were factors when a snowmobiler high marking a steep chute set off a slide at the 6200' level. He was carried 800' vertically, strained through trees, rescued quickly but succumbed to trauma from the ride.

Avalanche conditions for the Idaho Panhandle Mountains are rated as CONSIDERABLE on all aspects above 5,500 feet greater than 35 degrees above 5,500 feet. Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are likely. Prudence would dictate that back country travel be postponed until more stable conditions return to our area.

The last advisory of the season will be issued on Friday, April 2nd, 2010.

Avalanche conditions change for better or worse continually. Backcountry travelers should be prepared to assess current conditions for themselves, plan their routes of travel accordingly, and never travel alone. Backcountry travelers can reduce their exposure to avalanche hazards by utilizing timbered trails and ridge routes and by avoiding open and exposed terrain with slope angles of 30 degrees or more. Backcountry travelers should carry the necessary avalanche rescue equipment such as a shovel, avalanche probe or probe ski poles, a rescue beacon and a well-equipped first aid kit.

Have fun but be careful.