



Avalanche Warning Criteria (2016)

Purpose of document: To promote **consistency** among US Avalanche Centers in how and when Avalanche Warnings are issued with some variations to account for unique populations in unique settings, and to give the public a **clear understanding** of what an Avalanche Warning means. This document is not meant to encourage centers to issue warnings, watches, or other products if they do not already do so, but to provide a common framework if they choose to issue such products. Additionally, it is acceptable to develop more nuanced, or specific criteria if needed.

Objective of the FS Avalanche Information and Education Program: Improve winter safety by providing timely and relevant avalanche information and education to the public. This program enables individuals to make informed decisions, thereby reducing the public's exposure during dangerous avalanche conditions.

Purpose of Avalanche Warnings: The purpose is to **save lives** by alerting the public when avalanches are certain in many areas and/or when unusually dangerous avalanche conditions exist.

Agencies involved: Avalanche Warnings are communicated to the public and media, in part, through the National Weather Service. NWS coding is: AVW – Avalanche Warning, AVA – Avalanche Watch, SAB – Special Avalanche Bulletin.

Media involvement: Local and regional media help communicate Avalanche Warnings to the public. The specific warning message should be transmitted to them directly or via the NWS. It is desirable to ensure that a consistent message is communicated to the public through many different channels.

Basic Content (please use the official template):

Please refer to Appendix A for the official template (black text is static, green text is center specific, red text is changed with each warning).

1. Duration of the Warning, including time of issuance and expiration.
2. Area covered by the Warning.
3. Avalanche Danger and reason(s) for the Warning.
4. Precautionary action(s).
5. Instructions on how to obtain more information.

Criteria for issuing Avalanche Warnings:

1. Avalanche Warnings are ALWAYS issued when the avalanche danger is **EXTREME**.
2. Avalanche Warnings are issued when the avalanche danger is **HIGH in many areas**. Many areas can mean very large geographic areas. Many areas can also mean several aspects and/or elevations in a specific geographic area. Avalanche Warnings are typically NOT issued when the danger is HIGH in specific or isolated areas.
3. Avalanche Warnings can be issued when non-recreationalists or people who would not otherwise access the avalanche advisory are expected to be impacted.



4. Use text that is simple, clear, and concise using plain language, absent of jargon.

Additional criteria for Type 2 Avalanche Centers:

1. Type 2 Avalanche Centers do not issue avalanche advisories 7 days a week, but weather and snowpack conditions are typically monitored at regular intervals.
2. Type 2 Avalanche Centers may issue and terminate avalanche warnings if resources allow full-time staffing for the duration of the warning.
3. When Avalanche Warnings are issued by a Type 2 Avalanche Center, the most recent snow, avalanche, and weather summary should be updated or a new one issued. This summary should contain additional information beyond what is contained in the Warning message.

Areas covered by warnings: US Avalanche Centers have defined areas in which they issue danger ratings (defined as the *Supported Backcountry Area*). Avalanche Warnings are only issued for all or part of these areas, and only in places where Centers have current snowpack data and observations.

Areas outside of the Supported Backcountry Area: Avalanche Warnings are typically not issued for areas outside of the Supported Backcountry Area. In special situations, Centers may choose additional areas in which they will issue Avalanche Warnings. When Centers choose to do so, they should have a continuous record of data that ensures consistency and repeatability in issuing avalanche warnings for these outlying areas.

Timeframe for Avalanche Warnings:

1. Avalanche Warnings are issued with a clear start and end time.
2. Avalanche Warnings are updated or allowed to expire after 24 hours.
3. Avalanche Warnings can be reissued after a 24 hour period and can be reissued as many times as needed.

Other products - Avalanche Centers may also issue Avalanche Watches and/or Special Avalanche Bulletins. These are OPTIONAL products:

Avalanche Watches: The purpose of an Avalanche Watch is to warn the public that Avalanche Warning criteria are likely to be met in 24-48 hours.

Special Avalanche Bulletins: Special Avalanche Bulletins are impact-based products. These are issued by some avalanche centers when significant public use is expected and dangerous avalanche conditions exist, but the avalanche conditions do not meet the level necessary to issue an Avalanche Warning.



APPENDIX A – AVALANCHE WARNING TEMPLATE

BULLETIN – IMMEDIATE BROADCAST REQUESTED
BACKCOUNTRY AVALANCHE WARNING
FOREST SERVICE BRIDGER TETON AVALANCHE CENTER JACKSON WY
RELAYED BY NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE POCATELLO ID/RIVERTON WY
600 AM MST WED JAN 13 2016

THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE IS TRANSMITTED AT THE REQUEST OF THE FOREST
SERVICE BRIDGER TETON AVALANCHE CENTER

THE FOREST SERVICE BRIDGER TETON AVALANCHE CENTER IN JACKSON HAS
ISSUED / CONTINUED / CANCELLED A BACKCOUNTRY AVALANCHE WARNING.

* TIMING...**IN EFFECT FROM 6 AM MST THIS MORNING TO 6 AM MST TOMORROW.**

* AFFECTED AREA...**TETON RANGE IN IDAHO...BIG HOLE RANGE ...SNAKE RIVER
RANGE...CARIBOU RANGE...WEBSTER RANGE... AND PREUSS RANGE.**

* AVALANCHE DANGER... **THE AVALANCHE DANGER WILL RISE TO HIGH TODAY
AND POSSIBLY EXTREME BY TOMORROW.**

* REASON/IMPACTS...**RECENT HEAVY SNOW COMBINED WITH WIND WILL
CREATE WIDESPREAD AREAS OF UNSTABLE SNOW.**

PRECAUTIONARY / PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...**AVALANCHES MAY RUN LONG
DISTANCES, INTO FLAT AREAS, AND CAN RUN INTO MATURE FORESTS.**

TRAVEL IN AVALANCHE TERRAIN IS NOT RECOMMENDED.

CONSULT WWW.JHAVALANCHE.ORG OR WWW.AVALANCHE.ORG FOR MORE
DETAILED INFORMATION.

SIMILAR AVALANCHE DANGER MAY EXIST AT LOCATIONS OUTSIDE THE
COVERAGE AREA OF THIS OR ANY AVALANCHE CENTER.

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