

AVALANCHE TRAINING REQUIREMENTS FOR DENVER TRIP LEADERS

Approved June 20, 2011

The Denver Safety and Leadership Committee adopted a new avalanche training program for Denver trip leaders, effective October 1, 2011.

APPLICABILITY

This program applies to Denver leaders of hiking, snow shoeing, ski touring, ski mountaineering, backpacking and winter camping trips.

It does NOT apply to Denver schools, climbing, Adventure Travel, Nordic Centers, downhill skiing, unless school directors or section heads require lead instructors to be trained and certified as Denver trip leaders.

CURRENT TRIP LEADERS, certified before October 1, 2011, ARE EXEMPT FROM THE NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR FIVE YEARS.

DEFINITIONS

“AIARE.” (pronounced “airy”). The American Institute for Avalanche Research and Education develops training curricula in accordance with the recommended guidelines of the American Avalanche Association and certifies training offered by providers such as the Colorado Mountain School and The Seattle Mountaineers. AIARE programs have become the national standard for avalanche training. The U. S. outdoor industry now considers AIARE Level 1 as the minimum avalanche training for winter backcountry travel.

“ATA.” Avalanche Terrain Avoidance, a 3-hour, avalanche familiarization class to recognize and avoid hazardous winter terrain, provided in-house by CMC instructors. An optional field day is also offered. Non-leaders and non-members are welcome to attend.

“Backcountry” is any area prone to avalanche, as determined by the trip leader. A greater risk of avalanche in backcountry requires comprehensive, AIARE Level 1 avalanche training.

“Non-Backcountry” is terrain not prone to avalanche, as determined by the trip leader. Determining low risk terrain requires training. Denver schedulers still have authority to approve or disapprove proposed trips. But schedulers can’t know trail conditions weeks

ahead of the trip. So leaders have ultimate responsibility for both planning and on-trail decisions.

“Open Space” is defined as terrain at near-zero risk of avalanche, which includes Golden Gate Canyon State Park, Roxborough State Park, all Jeffco and Douglas County Open Spaces and other city, county and state parks, as well as trail systems east of the Foothills. This category of terrain permits certain untrained but experienced, traditional leaders to continue leading winter hikes on the least-hazardous trails during transition to a fully-trained cadre of Denver trip leaders.

“Risk.” Some risk of avalanche must be accepted by anyone who travels among snow covered slopes. Avalanche theory involves too many variables to set firm rules for likely hazards. Such determinations require training rather than rules. Denver trip leaders must have completed avalanche training to safety judge the avalanche risk for their planned travel.

“Winter.” Winter season begins November 1st and ends April 30th. “Winter Leader” and “Winter Backcountry Leader” are separate qualifications that require different levels of avalanche training.

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To preserve local traditions while affecting a smooth transition to training requirements more consistent with national avalanche training standards, Denver trip leaders will be administered as two groups. The two groups will temporarily have different training requirements.

Traditional (or current) Trip Leaders are trip leaders certified before October 1, 2011.

Winter Trip Leaders. Traditional winter trip leaders are grandfathered-in for five years. These leaders may continue to lead winter trips, including winter backcountry trips, until October 1, 2016, without further avalanche training.

Summer-Only Trip Leaders. Traditional leaders who have not taken Avalanche Awareness School (AAS) and are therefore qualified to lead summer trips-only have traditionally been able to lead winter hikes in non-backcountry terrain. These leaders are grandfathered-in for five years and may continue leading winter hikes, but only on Open Space trails, until October 1, 2016, without avalanche training.

Recertification. Traditional winter trip leaders have no recertification requirements during the transition period. After September 30, 2016, they shall certify with AIARE Level 1 for winter backcountry travel or with ATA for all other winter trips.

Contemporary (new) Winter Trip Leaders are trip leaders certified after September 30, 2011 who also complete one of two avalanche training courses:

Winter Backcountry Leaders. Contemporary (new) leaders shall complete a 24-hour, AIARE-certified Level 1 avalanche training course prior to leading backcountry trips. L-1 training is not yet available in-house but may be acquired from commercial providers. When available, partial scholarships for L-1 training may be offered to selected applicants on a competitive basis. Certificates of completed L-1 training, with name of provider and contact information, shall be mailed to CMC Member Services or emailed to kristindepagnier@cmc.org.

Winter Non-Backcountry Leaders. Contemporary (new) leaders shall complete the 3-hour Avalanche Terrain Avoidance (ATA) class before leading winter trips into low-hazard, non-backcountry terrain or Open Space trails. This minimal training familiarizes leader with why they need avalanche training and enables them to differentiate between avalanche prone and low-hazard terrain. It also brings all new Denver winter trip leaders up to a minimum knowledge about winter travel in the mountains.

Recertification Training. Contemporary (new) trip leaders shall complete avalanche recertification training every three years.

- AIARE Level 1 recertification training shall include an eight-hour, one day refresher course provided by CMC instructors, or an alternative to be developed by October 1, 2012.
- ATA recertification training shall be the regular, 3-hour ATA class

Alternative Training. Waivers for prior training completed within three years may be requested along with an attached certificate of training completion. Applications for waivers of training shall include course description, date of completion, provider and contact information.

AIARE Level 1 Scholarships. Backcountry trip leaders shall acquire and pay for their own AIARE-certified Level 1 (L-1) training. DS&L shall seek and administer funding to help offset the costs of L-1 training for selected trip leaders and instructors.

- a. Funding. Scholarships for Denver Group leadership development funded from CMC sources, foundation grants or other outside agencies or individuals shall be coordinated, awarded and administered by DS&L
- b. Eligibility. Eligibility for scholarships shall consider the need, the amount of funding available and the applicant's enduring contributions to Denver Group,

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including backcountry winter trips and/or winter school field days led and/or avalanche classes or field trips assisted as instructor

- c. Amount of scholarships DS&L shall determine annually, in May of each year, the number and amount of Level 1 scholarships, if any
- d. Application for scholarships. Forms for Level 1 avalanche training scholarships may be downloaded from <http://www.hikingdenver.net/trip-leaders/trip-leader-forms>, when available. Application instructions will be announced with notice of awards.
- e. Disbursement of funds. Scholarship payment procedures shall be finalized before needed.
- f. Assurances. Trip leaders who accept scholarship funding shall sign a MOU that they intend to be available as instructors or assistant instructors for ATA classes during the 24 months following completion of Level 1 training. An MOU form may be downloaded at <http://www.hikingdenver.net/trip-leaders/trip-leader-forms>, when available.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why was this change necessary?

- A. The former, 12-hour, Avalanche Awareness School (AAS) was not serving the needs of either advanced avalanche users or those who wanted to completely avoid avalanche terrain. The standard minimum avalanche training for backcountry travel is now considered, nationwide, to be 24-hour AIARE Level 1.

2. What about leaders who felt the 12-hour CAIC training best suited their mid-risk trips?

- A. AIARE Level 1 is considered the minimum avalanche training for backcountry leaders. Mid-level training recommended by the American Avalanche Association is a 32-hour Level 2 program. There is no “mid-risk” backcountry travel. Either we have enough training to know our limitations or we don’t know what we don’t know.

3. Why are current leaders exempted for five years from the new avalanche training requirements?

- A. Many senior leaders have years of experience in winter backcountry and may have less need to take the avalanche training required of new backcountry leaders.

4. Why do new leaders have to take avalanche recertification training every three years?

A. Avalanche knowledge, technologies and safety techniques are constantly changing. And, of course, all humans forget critical information over time. Finally, followers expect their leaders to know and follow best practices.

5. Why is avalanche risk determined by the trip leader?

A. Avalanche science is very complex. Conditions on the ground change daily and often hourly. A trip scheduled a month ahead can't possibly anticipate the avalanche conditions for the day of the trip. With the right training, the best judge of risk is a leader who plans the trip, checks weather and avalanche conditions the night before and morning of the trip, and observes the actual conditions on the ground.

6. Why can't new summer-only leaders lead winter hikes in Open Space Parks when there is no snow on the ground?

A. Just because there is no snow when you leave the trailhead doesn't mean there will be none later. ATA trains leaders on which weather websites to use in planning winter trips and what to look for. More importantly, hikers expect trip leaders to know what they are doing in all conditions. Further, the respect of all Denver leaders could be compromised by the untrained few.

7. Why does a new summer-only leader have to stop leading trips on November 1, even if the weather is still sunny and warm?

A. No one can accurately forecast when winter weather will begin. It is administratively much more convenient use a calendar date than the actual weather. This way, leaders can plan trips with some certainty. If a new leader wants to lead in summer and winter, she must take the \$20, 3-hour ATA.

8. What will be the costs of avalanche training?

A. ATA will cost Denver leaders \$20 and others \$40. L-1 is provided commercially for approximately \$330. We plan to offer \$150 scholarships to help offset the costs of L-1 training to selected leaders and instructors