

STRATEGIC SHOVELING:  
THE NEXT FRONTIER IN COMPANION RESCUE

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ABSTRACT

With the widespread use of digital avalanche transceiver technology, search times for companion rescue have decreased significantly. Dedicated transceiver training sites and increased avalanche education opportunities have further aided both recreationists and pros in reducing search times. But the excavation phase remains the most time-consuming component of an avalanche rescue. This phase offers the most potential for reducing overall rescue times and increasing survivability. Field tests in Colorado in the spring of 2006 suggest that significant time savings may be gained in companion rescue with a strategic approach to the excavation phase. This can also lead to a more useful working area once the victim is recovered, minimizing compaction of the victim's air pocket and providing adequate space to roll and treat the victim. Avalanche educators should include these strategies when instructing students in avalanche rescue.