



## AAC Publications

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### **Fatal Burial — Faulty Transceiver**

California, Klamath National Forest, Etna Summit

**A backcountry skier and snowboarder were caught in an avalanche near Etna Summit, about 40 miles west of Mt. Shasta, at approximately 2 p.m. on February 3, 2021. Both individuals had many years of backcountry experience, carried avalanche rescue gear, and were familiar with the area.**

The avalanche occurred shortly after they reached the top of their intended descent route (immediately below a ridgeline) and were preparing to descend. Both riders were carried down the slope by the slide. The skier was pinned and buried against a tree within 20 to 30 feet. The snowboarder was swept through the trees and partially buried some distance down the slope.

The snowboarder extracted himself and immediately began a transceiver search, but the device malfunctioned. At this point, he began to dig in the most likely burial location and exposed a ski pole, which led to the buried victim. Approximately 25 to 30 minutes had passed between the burial and extrication. The survivor performed CPR for over an hour, but was unable to revive his partner.

### **ANALYSIS**

The avalanche occurred at 6,650 feet on a northwest aspect, near treeline and just below a ridge. The slope was 35 to 39 degrees. A hard wind slab up to two feet thick was triggered; the avalanche measured 70 feet wide and slid about 200 vertical feet.

The area had received “feet” of new snow in the previous couple of weeks. A few days of sun had helped consolidate the storm snow. On February 3, the day of the accident, an observer found 8 to 10 inches of fresh snow at a similar elevation in the Mt. Eddy area, 25 miles to the east, with moderate northwest wind and blowing snow.

The party had performed a transceiver check in the parking lot before they began their tour. Both transceivers appeared to be functioning and had good battery life. However, further investigation found a corroded battery compartment in the transceiver, which likely led to the malfunction. (Source: Mount Shasta Avalanche Center.)

Read the full report from the Mount Shasta Avalanche Center.

### **CLEAN YOUR BEACONS**

Corrosion in the battery compartment of transceivers is an insidious hazard, because the transceiver may function perfectly one minute and fail the next. Never leave batteries in the transceiver through the summer or for long in-season layoffs. (You should always install fresh batteries at the start of the season.) Avoid situations that allow moisture or condensation to get into the compartment. Inspect the batteries and contacts periodically. If you find corrosion (usually a whitish powder), gently clean it off with a Q-tip and rubbing alcohol or vinegar, a pencil eraser, or by snapping the batteries in and out of position to loosen the foreign material. Take care not to damage the contacts. If the battery contacts cannot be cleaned, contact the manufacturer.

**Images**

Article Details

Author	Mount Shasta Avalanche Center
Publication	ANAM
Volume	12
Issue	74
Page	125
Copyright Date	2021
Article Type	Accident reports