



**canadianavalancheassociation**

# **Code of Ethics Implementation Guide**

**Approved February 3, 2015**

Canadian Avalanche Association  
Approved the Board of Directors, February 3, 2015

### **Summary**

The Canadian Avalanche Association adopted a new, revised Code of Ethics in May 2014. This guideline provides additional information to help members interpret and apply the Code of Ethics. The material presented in this guideline is not intended to limit or restrict the full application of the Code.

### **Contributions to Improvement**

We welcome suggestions from all sources for changes that will lead to the improvement of this guideline. Suggestions should be sent to:

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### **Acknowledgements**

The CAA Ethics and Standards Committee produced this guideline through the dedication and hard work of its members.

## **Preface**

### **About the Canadian Avalanche Association (CAA)**

The CAA was founded in 1981 and has grown to become Canada's self-regulating body for leading avalanche practitioners, setting national standards for snow avalanche risk management, and ensuring our diverse membership practices ethically in the public interest.

### **Our Scope of Practice Statement**

We define our members' scope of practice as:

*"snow avalanche risk assessment and management" means the profession in which a person (a) develops, directs and participates in the assessment of snow avalanche risk, (b) communicates information regarding avalanche risks and (c) designs and operates programs for managing avalanche risk."*

### **Our Vision**

The Canadian public has the highest degree of confidence in the avalanche safety programs and services delivered by CAA members.

### **Our Mission**

We ensure that our diverse membership of avalanche practitioners meets the highest standards, and adheres to best practices to secure the confidence of governments, industry and Canadians.

### **We do this by:**

- Protecting the public interest by ensuring members adhere to the CAA's Code of Ethics;
- Representing CAA members who are professionally engaged in avalanche work in Canada;
- Maintaining, monitoring and enforcing standards of education and qualifications for continued membership in the association;
- Facilitating the exchange of technical information between persons engaged in avalanche safety programs;
- Supporting public avalanche awareness by acting as a resource base;
- Encouraging and promoting avalanche safety research and development; and,
- Providing professional avalanche education.

### **Governance**

The CAA is a registered society in Alberta and British Columbia. The CAA board of directors, duly elected by CAA members, sets the direction for the CAA by a strategic plan available to members on our website. This plan is executed by the board of directors, appointed committees and staff based in our office in Revelstoke, BC.

To learn more about the CAA visit [www.avalancheassociation.ca](http://www.avalancheassociation.ca).

## **Overview: Scope of the Avalanche Risk Management and Assessment Profession**

CAA members participate in a wide variety of undertakings that can be collectively identified as the snow avalanche risk assessment and management profession. The CAA has adopted the following broadly-framed scope of practice for the profession:

**“snow avalanche risk assessment and management”** means the profession in which a person (a) develops, directs and participates in the assessment of snow avalanche risk, (b) communicates information regarding avalanche risks, and (c) designs and operates programs for managing avalanche risk.

The following list contains examples of the avalanche risk assessment and management activities carried out by members of the CAA. All of these activities contribute to the safety of people and property, whether they are exposed to the effects of avalanches when at home, at work or while traveling through the mountains. In turn, CAA members that participate in these activities contribute to the knowledge and skills of the profession as a whole. The list demonstrates the diverse nature of the profession.

Avalanche risk management includes:

- avalanche hazard forecasting;
- field work necessary to evaluate avalanches and avalanche conditions;
- avalanche hazard mitigations such as public warnings;
- restriction of human activities in avalanche-prone areas;
- guiding in avalanche terrain;
- avalanche control with explosives and other means;
- search and rescue in avalanche terrain;
- decision-making that affects the safety of persons and property with regard to avalanches and avalanche conditions;
- other activities to protect against seasonally-fluctuating avalanche conditions;
- education, training or consulting involving the transfer of expert knowledge and/or experience regarding avalanches or protection against avalanches; and
- scientific or technical services involving the assessment, development or delivery of information, products or services for protection against avalanches.

There are several CAA membership classifications. The CAA Bylaws set out eligibility requirements for each class of membership, based on training and experience. Every member of the CAA has an individual and unique scope of practice; their scope is derived from the individual competencies they have developed through the course of their career.

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## **Implementation Guide to the CAA Code of Ethics**

The CAA has had a Code of Ethics in place since the inception of the association. The CAA has undertaken periodic updates to ensure the Code of Ethics remains relevant and to enhance member accountability. The CAA Board of Directors accepted the most recent updates in May 2014.

Under the CAA Bylaws, all members are bound to act in accordance with the Code of Ethics as a condition of membership. In turn, the Bylaws contain a process for complaints, mediation, discipline and appeals to enable the public, the association and individual CAA members to bring forward concerns about the actions of members. This process provides a level of transparency and accountability required to safeguard the public interest.

The CAA provides this document to members and the public to ensure the intentions of the CAA Code of Ethics are transparent and to provide appropriate ethical guidance to each member in his or her day-to-day activities.

### **What is the Code of Ethics?**

The CAA Code of Ethics is a set of performance expectations that reflect the values of the profession in relation to the public, the CAA and individual members. The Code of Ethics reflects the collective expectations of professionalism that members are to apply in their daily practice.

CAA members practice in a wide range of circumstances. Each member of the CAA has skills that are individually acquired and are to some extent individually unique. The Code of Ethics applies to all members and all areas and types of practice equally. These ethical standards identify minimum expectations of accountability, competence, behaviour, independence, integrity, knowledge and safety in the everyday practice of each member.

The CAA has also established separate sets of Practice Standards that provide practical guidance to the membership in relation to the more technical aspect of their particular practices.

### **Why does the CAA have a Code of Ethics?**

The Code of Ethics establishes the minimum performance benchmarks that the CAA and the public will use to evaluate the behaviour and conduct of members. As such, the Code of Ethics guides and directs the practice of each member and supports the expectation that each member will strive for continual improvement in knowledge and competence.

Members will apply the Code of Ethics as the gauge for determining if their practices stand up to the expectations of the CAA, their peers and the public. In turn, the Code of Ethics sets the desired and achievable level of performance against which the public, the CAA and a member's peers will measure the member's practice.

The purpose of the Code of Ethics is to:

- promote a clear vision of the CAA's expectations of professionalism;
- inform the public that they can expect quality, fairness and the expert application of specialized knowledge from CAA members;
- establish conduct benchmarks that members will apply in their daily practice;
- supply guidance for the professional judgment and actions of members;
- provide the language that will ensure members understand the expectations of the CAA;
- ensure that members are aware of obligations attached to the privilege of membership;
- articulate principles that members will use for self-assessment, continual skill development, conduct review and peer review.

When a member assesses his or her individual practice, the Code of Ethics requires the member to evaluate whether there are areas of his or her practice that need improvement. They may seek improvement in order to expand their practice or it may be required in order to ensure their skills reflect current practices and advances in knowledge.

Agencies who become the clients and employers of CAA members are often primarily concerned with the timely delivery of an adequate level of safety for their specific operational needs. The Code of Ethics establishes a clear connection between delivery of those services and the need for members to have current skills and knowledge, and to maintain the attitudes needed to practice safely. Those attitudes include bringing a safe work ethic to all endeavours and understanding that exchanging information and experience with fellow members increases the effectiveness of their efforts.

The Code of Ethics is not a list of ideals to read once and then store away. The CAA expects all members to apply the Code of Ethics in their daily practice, ensuring that adherence is transparent to both the public and to members. This will encourage trust in the CAA and trust in the commitment of each member to uphold the Code of Ethics and use it to guide his or her actions.

Public trust in the CAA is founded on the public's ability to trust each individual member. When CAA members strive to exceed the benchmarks set by its Code of Ethics, the public trust is well placed; to fall short is unacceptable. The Code of Ethics also provides the benchmarks by which the Complaints, Mediation, Discipline and Appeals process will be used to measure the actions of a member in the event that his or her conduct is called into question.

Members will also use the Code of Ethics to help evaluate those whom they may wish to work with or hire, and to evaluate potential clients or employers. Those relationships are more likely to be successful if all share similar attitudes towards professional values. This extends to assessing those who seek sponsorship for joining one of the membership categories of the CAA. Potential sponsors should explicitly discuss the understanding of and attitudes toward all elements of the Code of Ethics with the prospective member before vouching for their readiness and suitability for membership.

Members should consult the separate Practice Standards for guidance in relation to the practical or technical aspects of their individual practices.

### **Implementing the Code of Ethics in Daily Practice**

In the following sections of this document, the thirteen statements that make up the CAA Code of Ethics appear in bold italic print. Each of those statements is followed by information that is intended to promote understanding and a consistent application of that section of the Code. Members should consider and apply this guidance in their own practice; it is a required component of their duties to the public, clients and the profession.

Members must consider each element of the Code of Ethics to be equal in rank. Implementing the Code of Ethics is not a selective process; the Code of Ethics is followed and applied as a whole.

### **Acting in the Public Interest**

***A member must uphold the public interest and promote professional standards, and in particular must strive to protect the public and clients from loss of life, injury and property damage caused by snow avalanches.***

If a member is acting in the public interest, that member is making decisions and acting in a way that considers and protects the community as a whole whether or not the member would benefit personally.

As a self-regulating professional association, the CAA demonstrates that it serves the public interest through its culture and structure, and by the accountability of individual members. The CAA structure includes methods for acquiring, maintaining and measuring member competency, along with a process that holds members accountable for their actions.

Members must earn the trust of the public by demonstrating competence, integrity and independence. Members support their peers, through the association, to ensure they act in the public interest and meet ethical and professional standards. The public must have confidence that the CAA will hold its members accountable to the ethics and standards of the profession.

The CAA is only valuable as a professional association if it maintains the public trust through a strong internal commitment to ethical behaviour, coupled with a culture of accountability that demonstrates a resolve to deter and correct member behaviour that is contrary to the public interest. The public, government, employers and clients must be able to rely on CAA members for their competent application of professional judgment, and to be assured that membership accountability is of paramount importance to the CAA.

### **Acting Competently**

***A member must exercise appropriate diligence, prudence, judgment, discretion and a***



***thoughtful attention to detail in his or her work and ensure that work outputs are complete and correct. A member must undertake only those assignments for which she or he is qualified and experienced.***

CAA members are committed to demonstrating they possess the abilities required to accomplish the tasks they undertake in the course of their professional lives. Competence is the integrated mixture of experience, skills, knowledge and attributes that are applied proficiently in the workplace to achieve an acceptable result. Each member must integrate these elements of competency in his or her own practice in order to achieve an acceptable level of performance.

Acting competently requires each member to cultivate, develop and maintain the currency of his or her professional abilities. The competent application of these abilities requires members to exercise the judgment needed to ensure they acknowledge—and work within—the limits of their current competency. This begins with members clearly and accurately representing the competencies they possess and the level of proficiency they have reached. Competence is demonstrated when work is completed accurately, thoroughly and in a timely manner. Every member must practice within his or her level of competence; this is a keystone principle for every member. Deliberate clear communication of abilities and professional limits will allow members to establish, maintain and conclude professional relationships in a manner that reflects the expectations of the CAA, the public and colleagues.

In many cases, working to CAA practice standards or guidelines will help to deliver consistency across the broad scope of membership practice. Following practice standards and guidelines alone does not establish competence; members must understand the limits of practice standards and guidelines, and be aware of the limits of their own competence. When a member finds that the work he or she is to perform exceeds his or her competence, the member must take appropriate steps to inform stakeholders and remedy the issue. Solutions may come from various sources: engaging in learning activities, seeking mentoring or consulting, or partnering with colleagues who are better prepared to undertake the specific task. These methods allow members to nurture their own abilities before judiciously expanding their own individual scope of practice.

## **Record Keeping**

***A member must maintain clear, timely and accurate records of all aspects of his or her work.***

Members must maintain clear, timely and accurate records to demonstrate competency in their practice. Records of past activities provide evidence that a member has developed abilities through learning activities, active practice and mentoring; the records illustrate the origins and depth of development that makes up each member's individual scope of practice.

The CAA has established standardized techniques for making and recording observations relevant to the operation of avalanche risk management programs and other activities that members participate in. The CAA publishes and periodically updates these standards in the CAA Observation Guidelines and Recording Standards for Weather, Snowpack and Avalanches. This document describes terminology, techniques and encodings intended to facilitate sound record keeping and information exchange between a wide variety of avalanche programs and personnel.

Beyond technical record keeping, every member is required to record actions taken, and the processes leading to those determinations. Each member must ensure that records appropriate to his or her role can identify the reasoning and decision-making behind each particular job or project that he or she participates in.

Competent record keeping establishes that the information is authentic and in context. This helps the member and others to understand past decisions and actions and ensure the information will withstand scrutiny as evidence.

## **Continued Competency**

***A member must cultivate, develop and maintain the currency of professional knowledge through education, training and practical experience as well as through knowledge gained while practicing alongside mentors and peers.***

As noted above, the Code of Ethics requires each member to confirm competence in all aspects of their work. Members must ensure their professional abilities are current and in step with new areas of knowledge, current standards and accepted methods.

An extensive body of knowledge accommodates the entire scope of the avalanche risk management and assessment profession. The CAA Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program sets out methods to ensure each member stays abreast of changing knowledge, ongoing research and the development of new methods and techniques. A member can apply his or her expanded knowledge base in the workplace, often under supervision or through collaboration with more competent colleagues. The member updates his or her competence and expands their individual scope of practice.

Continued competency is tied to the requirement to act competently and the need for record keeping. As mentioned above, the member's record of past activities provides evidence of how and where that member developed the competencies that frame his or her individual scope of practice. Members develop their abilities through formal education, training and from mentorship received in the active practice environment. Recording these activities illustrates the origin and depth of development that makes up each member's individual scope of practice. To this end, each member must maintain clear records that support his or her participation in the CPD program.

## **Privacy and Confidentiality**

***A member must collect, use, disclose and dispose of confidential, private information in accordance with current privacy legislation and, where applicable, employer policies.***

Persons, employers and stakeholders who interact with CAA members in the workplace expect that certain types of information are private and will be treated as confidential. Such information can be disclosed to others only when permitted or required by law. Confidentiality applies to areas such as personal information, financial information or information which relates to obtaining contracts or employment. Where there is uncertainty about confidentiality, a member should obtain the affected party's agreement prior to releasing or discussing that information with others.

A CAA member should be aware of the privacy legislation that applies to his or her particular situation, taking into consideration these questions:

1. Is the work I am doing under federal or provincial jurisdiction?
2. Am I working in the public or the private sector?
3. Am I working as a self-employed contractor or as a salaried employee?

In Canada, it is possible that a CAA member may be providing services that fall within the jurisdiction of either the federal or provincial levels of government. In turn, the federal government and each province have legislation that regulates access to public information and protects the privacy of certain information held by government and other public bodies. The federal and provincial governments also have privacy legislation that regulates the collection, use and disclosure of personal information within the private sector.

A CAA member who conducts business with or is employed by government or agencies that are subject to public sector privacy legislation must ensure they he or she knows of and takes active measures to achieve the objectives of this legislation. Individual members working in the private sector should conduct their practices in accordance with the applicable private sector privacy legislation and their own privacy policies. If a member is a salaried employee, that member's employer should have a privacy policy, which the member should then follow.

## **Safe Work Ethic**

***A member must demonstrate dedication to workplace and public safety through a safe work ethic that is employed in all aspects of their professional practice.***

CAA members are committed to a culture of safety where best practices and regulatory safety requirements are promoted, adopted and followed. This culture of safety is supported by the Code of Ethics, which recognizes that member work objectives frequently include protecting the public and workers from loss of life or injury. In light of this, a member must carefully match his or her abilities to the work assignments undertaken. Two cornerstone principles are fundamental to a safe work place. First, a worker should be

trained, equipped and supervised for the duties he or she has been tasked to perform. Second, achievable operational procedures should be in place, understood and followed.

Avalanche risk should be considered for all stages of an operation, and members should aim to reduce that risk to an operationally acceptable level. These operational activities may also carry risks of their own, which will need to be addressed prior to commencing work. A member can meet the objectives of this component of the Code of Ethics by ensuring that he or she understands and adheres to the roles and responsibilities for employers and workers under all applicable legislation, regulation and guidelines. Well-tested methods may reduce the risk that comes with working in avalanche terrain, but a level of uncertainty is always present. A CAA member's operational goal is often to reduce uncertainty in order to improve safety, both in the short and long term. Practitioners can increase knowledge to decrease uncertainty through an accurate, open exchange of information. The information exchange may include reviewing and adjusting practices based on noteworthy events reported by members, such as near misses, industry accidents and the environmental conditions that can contribute to uncertainty.

The inherently uncertain nature of operations carried out in avalanche terrain requires a member maintain a high degree of preparedness for dealing with unexpected events. Preparedness means considering safety at all levels of professional practice: planning, program development, implementation and ongoing operational phases. A member contributes to a high degree of preparedness and a culture of safety by ensuring appropriate planning, training and equipment are in place, and, where reasonable, considering redundant or overlapping safety measures as avenues toward achieving best practice in preparedness and planning.

## **Integrity**

***A member must conduct herself or himself honourably and in a manner that demonstrates individual integrity and reflects the integrity of the profession as a whole.***

Each member commits to exercising the honest, reliable and moral actions that embody the standard of integrity. The concept of integrity is often presented as an ideal, but because integrity is primarily a quality of someone's character it can be difficult to measure.

Some common definitions of integrity are:

1. firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values: *incorruptibility*
2. an unimpaired condition: *soundness*
3. the quality or state of being complete or undivided: *completeness*

To practice with integrity, a CAA member must always act in a manner that demonstrates personal integrity, as well as the integrity of the profession. Integrity is a quality of character held in an individual's mind, as well as a broad expectation held by the profession

and by those who interact with the profession. A profession cannot have integrity by itself; each member must individually bring personal integrity to the profession. As stated above, each CAA member must apply the interdependent and interconnected elements of the Code of Ethics as integrated components of a single package. This is perhaps most true of integrity, a quality demonstrated by a completely sincere, honest, and conscientious approach to professional and personal engagements that includes the values and requirements identified in the Code of Ethics.

Members display integrity by engaging people with a respectful attitude that demonstrates recognition of the value of others' perspectives. A CAA member is expected to show consideration for the dignity of those he or she interacts with, for their professional judgment and opinions, as well as their right to personal beliefs. In turn, the integrity of an individual is made apparent through the outcomes of his or her professional engagements and the respect members earn from the public and their peers.

## **Respect for Others**

***A member must not attempt, directly or indirectly, to injure the professional reputation, prospects, or practice of another person.***

Each CAA member has a responsibility to foster healthy, productive work environments through attitudes and behaviours that include mutual respect, cooperation and understanding. Members achieve this through respectful engagement and consultation with peers in the avalanche risk management profession, as well as the employers and other stakeholders who rely on CAA members.

From time to time, conflict may occur between members caused by differences of opinion or differing views of best practices or appropriate actions. As a preferred first step, members should engage in respectful dialogue to resolve these differences. In cases where conflict is not resolved by dialogue, the CAA Bylaws set out a complaints, mediation, discipline and appeals process as an alternative avenue for seeking resolution.

## **Professional Independence and Judgment**

***A member must ensure that professional relationships will not compromise the member's independence and judgment.***

A member commits to the independence of his or her professional practice. Independence is an essential characteristic of professionalism: it means that a member objectively applies judgment that should never be secondary to the direction or wishes of another person, the member's own self-interest, or any personal biases. Rules alone cannot always ensure that independence exists; it is integral to personal character and is a condition of mind rather than one imposed by rules or by law. In practice, societal standards will become stronger or weaker over time, but the quality of professional independence should not change.

An independent member conducts his or her work knowing that there can be competing interests held by individuals, clients, groups and organizations, and these interests may not be intended to safeguard the public interest or the interest of our profession. A member transparently upholds the public interest and the Code of Ethics to demonstrate professional independence where other interests can create conflicts.

A commonly held ideal of professional independence identifies two aspects of independence that must always be present: the fact of independence and the appearance of independence. A member demonstrates the fact of independence by providing his or her objective opinion unaffected by influences that would compromise professional judgment. The appearance of independence requires members to employ transparent processes that allow those directly involved and any third parties to recognize that professional judgment, integrity and objectivity have not been compromised.

Professional independence does not preclude informed advocacy for change to public or professional policy, standards, laws or regulations. Exercising the right to participate in change is a sign of healthy involvement in society and in the profession.

The CAA and each individual member build public trust on a foundation of independence. A member serves the public interest and upholds the Code of Ethics by demonstrating, in fact and appearance, that he or she executes professional duties in an objective and expert manner.

## **Conflict of Interest**

***A member must avoid conflicts of interest, but where a conflict arises, must then promptly and fully disclose the circumstances to the client or employer and take steps to resolve the conflict.***

Avoiding conflict of interest is closely related to the transparent application of professional judgment and independence. However, a member is not required to demonstrate that he or she has exercised professional judgment in the complete absence of all financial, economic and other relationships. It would be unreasonable to expect people who live and work in society to achieve that distance.

The CAA expects that, in each situation or engagement, a member will examine his or her relationships critically to ensure there are no corrupting influences. If the situation leads a well-informed third party to perceive that a member's independent professional judgment could be compromised, the member should take action to remove the conflicting elements of that relationship or disclose such a conflict and seek approval to proceed.

A member engaged to provide expert judgment compromises independence when he or she attempts to, or is invited to, enter into additional relationships that cloud the transparency of the independent relationship and diminish the fact or appearance of an objective application of expert knowledge and judgment. Such relationships include financial and

other inducements such as prospective employment or the prospective purchase or sale of goods.

## **Disclosing Interests**

***A member must not issue statements, criticisms or arguments on avalanche safety matters which are inspired or paid for by private interest, unless the member indicates on whose behalf the member is making such statements.***

A CAA member must apply professional judgment and independence transparently. In order to avoid compromising his or her professional independence, a member must disclose relationships that are the source of vested interests (for example, the views or business objectives of employers or stakeholders), prior to speaking on behalf of those interests.

## **Accountability**

***A member must be accountable to, and responsible for, ensuring that the member's practice and conduct meet the expectations of the profession, peers and the public. Additionally, a member will work within the sphere of the member's competencies.***

Accountability is the ability to account for one's actions. The CAA and the public must confidently expect that a member will behave in a manner that upholds the profession and the public interest. The CAA Code of Ethics sets out expectations and provides indicators of professional conduct that members are expected to achieve. Members also practice in accordance with relevant legislation including, but not limited to, legislation that prescribes the scope of practice of other professions.

Practices, standards, legislation, regulation and best practices all change over time. When a conflict develops between the practices that will yield the best outcomes and legislation, regulations or standards that govern those practices, it is the responsibility of members to advocate for change to resolve that conflict. Individual members may undertake this advocacy, but working in close consultation with the CAA may deliver better results for the profession as a whole.

Sometimes, the CAA, the public or an individual member will question the actions of a particular member. Member accountability also requires a conflict resolution process, clearly identified expectations of member conduct, and consequences associated with failing to meet conduct expectations.

The CAA maintains the public's confidence in the organization and its members by ensuring public trust in the organization's process for resolving complaints. The CAA contributes to overall public trust by ensuring that the complaint process is accessible and transparently fair. Again, the CAA bylaws contain a complaints, mediation, discipline and appeals process that is open to the CAA, the CAA members and the public for resolving complaints.

## **Duty to Report**

***If a member has a reason to believe that another member has acted or may act incompetently, unethically or improperly, or in breach of the Code or a standard, that member must promptly report that information in confidence to the Executive Director of the Association.***

Membership in the CAA carries the obligation to take appropriate steps to protect public and client safety. Consequently, a member aware that another member is practicing incompetently, unethically or improperly is responsible for reporting that information to the CAA.

The CAA does not impose the responsibility to report solely for the benefit of the CAA or for the benefit of the employer or client of the member who is acting inappropriately. All CAA members benefit when each member practices in an ethical and appropriate manner, keeping the bar for performance high and maintaining the esteem of all members. However, the public interest benefits the most from living up to this difficult but necessary responsibility. When the CAA and its members ensure accountability among their own ranks, the public has sound reasons to feel assured that the CAA is safeguarding the public interest.