

MINDSET FOR MITIGATORS

MINDSET	TYPICAL CONDITIONS	TYPICAL OPERATING STRATEGY
Assessment/ Season Opening	<p>There is a high degree of uncertainty about conditions, such as when first encountering the terrain for the season, entering new terrain, following a lengthy period with limited observations, or after substantial weather events.</p> <p>Season opening conditions are analogous to working in a backcountry snowpack where huge spatial variability and a host of avalanche problems are possible.</p>	<p>Identify terrain from which to get snow stability information safely. Look at your indicator paths for activity and identify suspect terrain based on season history and telemetry data. Be prepared for multiple passes and limited safe zones. You may be forced into large/consequential terrain given the nature of where early snowfall sticks, so early control efforts need to be especially cognizant of safe zone selection and to exposure from above.</p>
Stepping Out	<p>Conditions are improving and/or we are gaining confidence in our assessment. The ‘stepping out’ mind-set covers a range from stepping out very cautiously to stepping out confidently. Stepping out cautiously occurs when there is limited confidence in extrapolation from the available observations, for example when persistent slab instabilities are becoming less easily triggered and for large storm instabilities in the early stages of recovery. Stepping out confidently occurs when one is confident to extrapolate from the available observations.</p>	<p>Stepping out occurs when you are confident that your core terrain is mitigated to your best ability and you want to expand to your secondary terrain. Once you feel that you understand the avalanche problem(s) of the day, you may start opening new terrain, terrain that has been temporarily closed, or terrain where avalanche control results have successfully mitigated the hazard. Lack of skier traffic/mitigation measures may have affected this terrain in a different way and may warrant a different approach than the core terrain that has seen continuous avalanche hazard reduction.</p>
Status Quo	<p>There is no substantial change in conditions or in the hazard assessment. The evidence continues to support operating as before and the comfort level for exposure under these conditions has been reached.</p>	<p>Change nothing and continue operating as before. Remain vigilant for subtle changes in weather and snowpack conditions.</p>

NOTE: This version of Strategic Mindset for Mitigators builds on the original work by Roger Atkins published in the 2014 ISSW.
American Avalanche Institute 2017

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Stepping Back	Weather changes increase the hazard or when events or observations cause uncertainty about the validity of the existing assessment. A small step back may result from minor or subtle weather changes while substantial weather events or observations of unexpected avalanches may result in a large step back.	The typical strategy when stepping back is to close terrain that has become suspect based on weather changes or evidence that creates uncertainty. Stepping Back may be planned as a storm increases in intensity, or unplanned if timing or intensity is unexpected.
Entrenchment	Dealing with a well-established persistent instability. Entrenchment is not a preferred operating mode and requires discipline to sustain it for the necessary time; this is the last resort short of closing operations completely.	Avalanche hazard reduction is applied methodically and well documented. Any change in weather conditions is assessed for its potential impact on open and closed terrain. Closed terrain may still be mitigated during these conditions if they can impact open areas. Traditional safe zones may not be appropriate during these conditions.
Free Ride	The hazard assessment suggests that only small avalanches are possible in very isolated terrain features, and there is a high degree of confidence in the hazard assessment.	Any skiable terrain may be considered with due attention to the possibility of small surface avalanches. Small hand charges and slope cutting are the primary assessment and mitigation tools during these conditions.
Maintenance	Just prior to or just after the arrival of a storm system when the hazard has not yet increased significantly.	Mitigation is focused on maintaining skier traffic to disturb the storm interface and reduce the need for future closures and control work. Carefully monitor the terrain for indications that the hazard is increasing and requires stepping back and closing terrain.

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High Alert	Unusual avalanche conditions resulting from large storms and/or problematic persistent weak layers create the potential for avalanches to exceed historic extents or to occur in terrain that is historically not hazardous.	Extend closures as needed to areas that are not regularly closed and consider evacuating facilities that might be threatened. Maintain closures longer than usual and consider control work in terrain where it is not usually required. All 'safe zones' need to be viewed critically and threats to infrastructure need to be considered.
Spring Diurnal	The hazard assessment suggests that the only substantial hazard is from wet loose avalanches during the afternoon thaw phase of the diurnal freeze-thaw cycle.	Watch closely for adequate overnight freeze and consider closing avalanche terrain during the thaw phase of the cycle. Mitigation success is strongly 'timing dependent.'

Notes:

Designation and assignment of mindsets is useful as a check to see that everyone is on the same page when going into the field. Discussion on which mindset applies for the situation should be based on evidence and uncertainty. Evidence applies to how much actual data you have going into the day and how valid it may be to the situation. Uncertainty applies to the avalanche problem(s) you are dealing with and how the weather may influence the outcome during the day.

Morning discussion of mindset should also identify the possibility of the mindset shifting through the day as weather changes. An example would be a storm that intensifies through the day, where skier traffic is insufficient to support a maintenance mindset and you actively move into stepping back. Similarly, if a sustained storm intensifies a stepping back mindset might move into high alert if water amounts are extreme.

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