Go Dig a Hole

Contributed by The Editors

Efficient rescue digging techniques

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Digging seems like a pretty self-explanatory task: move a pile of snow from one place to another. Easy-peezy, right? Well, when that pile of snow is avalanche debris, and your partner is buried and unable to breathe, digging becomes a lot more complicated— and important. Inefficient digging could cost your partner precious minutes, or even their life. Luckily, there's a proven method to move that debris fast. Study up, and dig like crazy. For a video demonstration of this technique produced by our friends at BCA (backcountryaccess.com), check out backcountrymagazine.com/digging.

Single Rescuer: Once the victim's location has been determined with a pinpoint search and probe strike, leave the probe in place as a point of reference. Dig immediately downhill of the probe, moving the snow to the sides of your hole. If the victim is buried deeper than a meter on your probe, start digging downhill approximately 1.5 times the burial depth to maximize snow evacuation and minimize compaction over the victim's air pocket. When your hole is waist deep, begin moving snow downhill, out the end of your excavation. Get to your victim's face as quickly as possible to establish an airway.

Multiple Rescuers: Two rescuers should proceed side by side as described above. Additional rescuers should begin digging downhill of the victim, 1.5 times the burial depth to accommodate the snow being moved by the primary diggers. Extra rescuers should be ready to rotate in as diggers tire, and prepare the site for first-aid treatment and victim evacuation.