



June 18, 2007

Prevention and Policy and Regulation Review Department  
Policy and Research Division  
WorkSafe BC  
Workers' Compensation Board of British Columbia  
PO Box 5350 Station Terminal  
Vancouver, BC  
V6B 5L5

Dear Sir/Madam:

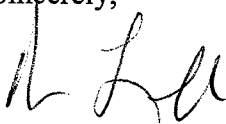
**Re: WorkSafe BC Proposed Amendments to Part 4: General Conditions OH&S  
Safety Regulations**

Please accept the attached written brief from Whistler Blackcomb (WB) regarding the proposed changes to Part 4 of the Regulations. These draft changes are important to WB as we conduct the most extensive avalanche forecasting and control program of any lift serviced resort in Canada.

We would be pleased to meet with you to discuss this critical issue but would prefer to follow the lead of the Canada West Ski Areas Association (CWSAA) and the Canadian Avalanche Association (CAA) in this matter. We feel that while the proposed regulation changes are well-intentioned, there are serious flaws in the draft that must be addressed prior to final approval.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Brian Leighton  
Safety Manager, Whistler Blackcomb

cc. Jimmie Spencer, CWSAA  
Doug Forseth, Sr. VP Operations, Whistler Blackcomb  
Clair Israelson, Executive Director, CAA

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS FOR PART 4: GENERAL CONDITIONS IN THE  
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REGULATIONS 4.1.2**

**WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO WORKSAFE BC**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Whistler Blackcomb is a leader in mountain resort operations within British Columbia and the world. Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains encompass the greatest lift serviced, above tree-line terrain area in North America, much of which is avalanche prone. Avalanche planning, forecasting and control have been conducted on Whistler Mountain since 1965. Currently, there are four full time avalanche forecasters and approximately 40 avalanche technicians (ski patrollers) employed during the November to June season.

This submission deals solely with the Avalanche Risk Assessment in the Province of British Columbia.

**2. GENERAL**

Whistler Blackcomb fully supports well considered regulations intended to improve the safety of workers exposed to avalanches. It is regrettable that the avalanche community was not given the opportunity to contribute prior to the drafting of new regulations pertaining to avalanches.

In the context of avalanche planning, forecasting and control, it is necessary to understand and appreciate that the operation of lift serviced mountain resorts is vastly different than other businesses affected by avalanche risk. Access, transportation and communication are strictly controlled in this setting. Avalanche forecasting and control measures are implemented daily in an organized and efficient manner by technicians trained and certified by the Canadian Avalanche Association.

**3. CROWN LAND**

Whistler Blackcomb operates on Crown Land through a long term tenure agreement with the Province through the Ministry of Tourism, Sport and the Arts. Prior to tenure approval, resorts are required to submit master plans that detail all aspects of current and future land uses. Avalanche zones and methods of control are identified and approved in the master plan. Each resort is obligated to abide by the terms of the master plan as breaches could result in serious consequences.

**4. OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Whistler Blackcomb has been a leader in avalanche research, planning, forecasting and control work for many years. The resort annually hosts professional level

Canadian Avalanche Association courses in addition to a multitude of entry level training courses.

Employees working in avalanche threatened zones receive orientation training outlining designated travel routes, emergency communication procedures and daily routines during times of increased risk of avalanches.

Ski patrollers/avalanche technicians are trained externally through the CAA Level I and II Professional Courses for Ski Operations. In addition, all patrollers are trained internally in avalanche rescue, explosive use and avalanche control techniques.

WB employs and facilitates training for 10 avalanche rescue dog handlers and is a founding associate member of the Canadian Avalanche Rescue Dog Association.

Avalanche technicians are trained and certified by WorkSafe BC in explosive use and handling for avalanche control. WB in conjunction with the CAA assisted WSBC in the development of a training and examination program suitable for avalanche workers. This program is dynamic and updates to the training and examination content occur regularly.

Snowpack, weather and avalanche conditions are assessed daily by a team of avalanche forecasters. These forecasters along with weather observers follow the industry guidelines of the CAA and Environment Canada in their data collection and procedures. Each morning, the forecasters develop a plan to address whatever avalanche risk may exist. This may vary from determining the backcountry avalanche forecast to planning a full avalanche control plan utilizing explosives, helicopters and avalancher artillery pieces. Ski Patrollers/avalanche technicians are briefed by the forecasters prior to employee and guest access to the avalanche zones. Specific duties are assigned at this time and forecasters maintain constant radio communication during and after avalanche control duties are completed.

## **5. BC SAFETY AUTHORITY**

All passenger ropeways and uphill transportation systems are governed by the Canadian Standards Association Z-98 Code. The BC Safety Authority officers are particularly aware of avalanche terrain and the potential of damage to ski lifts. Prior to new lift installation approval, avalanche zoning and mitigation measures are undertaken. When lifts are planned within avalanche terrain, independent studies are undertaken to determine design and potential impact resistance requirements. Visual inspections throughout the operating season and operator incident reports keep the BC Safety Authority officers apprised.

## **6. PART 4 GENERAL CONDITIONS – SUB SECTION 4.1.2**

We understand the draft changes to the regulations were written with the best intentions. There are problems with definitions and nomenclature that will be better addressed by the Canadian Avalanche Association's technical committee together with WSBC. We strongly encourage follow up meetings between these two parties in order to create a workable and useful document.

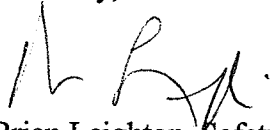
Perhaps the greatest concern we have regarding the draft regulations, pertains to the identification of a Qualified Registered Professional (QRP) as a person with expert knowledge in avalanche matters. The supposition that a QRP (engineer) has the knowledge and expertise to plan and implement an avalanche forecasting and control program is flawed. The only properly trained and certified personnel available to fill this role are persons that have successfully completed Canadian Avalanche Association courses and possess sufficient field experience. This CAA certification is the current standard within the Canadian avalanche community. We request that WSBC recognize this standard and support the efforts of the CAA to maintain the highest level of expertise in this field.

## 7. SUMMARY

Whistler Blackcomb fully supports any efforts to increase the safety of all company employees. Maintaining a safe workplace is critical to the success of the operation. The company and its management have supported the efforts of the Canada West Ski Areas Association and the Canadian Avalanche Association in creating a safer work environment. WB is proud of its avalanche program and the personnel that forecast and manage the day to day mountain operations. In order for WSBC to create workable regulations aimed to increase worker safety in avalanche prone regions, individual avalanche control programs and in particular the CAA must be included when drafting regulations pertaining to avalanche safety. We strongly encourage further dialogue between WSBC and the CAA in order to make any new regulations pertaining to avalanche safety as effective as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to address WorkSafe BC both verbally at the public hearing in Vancouver and through this written submission. Please contact the writer directly should you have any questions regarding these matters.

Sincerely,



Brian Leighton, Safety Manager  
Whistler Blackcomb