

Check Those Beacons and Check Them Carefully

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A recent experience passed on by the ACC's Vancouver Island Section should serve as an additional reminder to all backcountry snow enthusiasts to be extra diligent in checking their avalanche transceivers.

Usually, most people will check to make sure that their batteries are in good condition and will almost always do a "ski past" check where each individual will monitor the transmit signal of the beacons of each other member in the group. As the VI Section discovered, that might not be enough.

During a recent Advanced Recreational Avalanche Course, they discovered that the usual battery check and the normal "transmit" check could miss something very important. A beacon with a broken antenna may transmit OK at close range (during the typical beacon check), but it will ****not**** work properly in search mode and will not transmit a signal at any great distance. Obviously, this would make it very difficult to locate a buried person, with exceptionally serious consequences.

The conclusion drawn from this experience is that everyone with a beacon should also make sure that their beacon works over a distance, both in transmit and receive mode. You should do this check at your beacon's maximum range. To summarize:

- If you are borrowing a beacon, do this distance check every time.
- Do NOT trust that a transceiver is working just because you got it from the Club or from a rental store.
- Do NOT assume the other people in your group checked their transceivers – do it as a group.
- A final word of caution: transceivers are fragile and are not waterproof!

Thanks to the Vancouver Island Section for this information.