



AVALANCHE FLOATATION DEVICES Avalanche Floatation Devices (AFD's) or Avalanche balloon packs have been used in some parts of the world (primarily the Alps) by ski tourers and off-piste skiers for many years now. They have also shown up in our areas occasionally when guests have brought them on their CMH Heli-Skiing trip.

At first glance the benefits seem positive. Tests in Europe have shown that wearing an AFD pack increases your odds of ending up on top of the debris rather than being buried in it, primarily in larger avalanches where the debris flow is turbulent.

However there are other considerations that have prevented us from fully endorsing their use.

- All the studies are from Europe where most skiing is done on open slopes and the leading cause of death is asphyxia. The only study on avalanche safety devices published in the peer-reviewed scientific literature cautions that “this study reflects the specific situation of avalanche accidents in the European Alps and should not simply be transferred to other regions, where a different set of risk factors may operate”¹.
- In North America we spend much more time skiing in the trees and trauma has been shown to be the cause of death in a significant number of avalanche fatalities². Other studies have shown that with some devices you are more likely to end up in a head downhill, face down position after they're deployed. Not a problem on an open slope, but potentially a big problem if you're being carried through trees. The Snowpulse has been designed to provide protection from trauma.
- Even with the few balloon packs we've had in our operations we've had a number of accidental deployments, and some of those around the helicopter. This is obviously a potential hazard.
- Together with Alpine we've worked really hard to eliminate unnecessary weight from the helicopters. Adding 12 balloon packs per group would reverse some of these gains.
- Because of regulatory requirements and the very small but serious risk of an accidental deployment during an emergency exit from the helicopter the packs cannot be carried in the main compartment of the helicopter. They must be stowed in the ski basket or a netted off jump seat. This means that the waist and leg straps must be unbuckled and the pack removed on every run. Even our guests who regularly use AFD packs outside of CMH have found that this can be inconvenient.

Jeff Boyd, medical consultant for CMH and member of the ICAR medical Commission, was involved in the above-mentioned study of the efficacy of avalanche floatation devices¹. The Canadian Avalanche Association has been coordinating a study of AFD packs in the Canadian context and we look forward to seeing the results of that study.

To use a pack or not is your choice; we aren't requiring or even encouraging their use. But we'll do our best to make one available through a rental program (see below) if you would like one for your Heli-skiing trip.

None of this lessens the importance of staying out of avalanches in the first place. As always, this will be the primary focus of our guides, each and every day.

How does the rental program work? - IMPORTANT - book before you go!!

To guarantee that a pack is available for your use, **please reserve one at least three weeks prior to the start of your trip.**

To reserve your balloon pack:

- Email your request to info@cmhnordic.com or call us at +46 8 716 11 90.
- Balloons packs are available for a weekly rental of \$200 plus tax (\$30/day + tax for shorter trips), a \$60 nonrefundable deposit will be taken at the time of booking.
- You will be required to sign a rental agreement / waiver at the area.
- We'll give you a orientation on its use before you start skiing.
- **REMEMBER** – you will be required to take the pack off and to secure the trigger device at the bottom of each run! We will supply you with a shovel and probe to use for the week.

Which avalanche balloon packs will CMH be offering?

There are two main suppliers of avalanche balloon packs.

- ABS (model: Helibag) designed and manufactured the first avalanche balloon pack and it has been undergoing continual development for many years - www.abs-airbag.com
- Snowpulse (model: Pro-Rider) is a more recent entrant onto the scene and has a different design - www.snowpulse.ch

These two models will be offered as follows:

- **ABS** will be offered for rent in the [Adamants](#), [Bobbie Burns](#), [Bugaboos](#), [Cariboos](#), and [McBride](#).
- **Snowpulse** will be offered for rent in [Galena](#), [Gothics](#), [Kootenay](#), [Monashees](#), [Revelstoke](#), [Valemount](#), Nomad North and South

More information?

Check out Dr. Boyd's posting on our blog: "[Avalanche Flotation Devices - Keeping Things In Perspective](#)"

If you have any questions please feel free to contact us at safety@cmhinc.com

On behalf of everyone at CMH I'd like to express our appreciation to you for coming to ski with us this season. We're really looking forward to hosting you and to sharing some unforgettable experiences in the incredible mountain playground we feel so fortunate to call home.