

As a result of the Stage 2 Programme redevelopment, a closer working relationship has been fostered between NZMSC, Otago Polytechnic and the CAA. The following article by Ian Tomm and Clair Isrealson from the CAA is a direct outcome of that affiliation.

CAA and NZ Avalanche Training Equivalency Explained

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The CAA receives numerous requests every year for equivalency comparisons between various international avalanche training programs and the CAA's professional avalanche training offered through the association's Industry Training Program (ITP). While this may seem like a simple request the opposite turns out to be the case. I hope to shed some light on this subject and clear up some of the misunderstandings and assumptions that are currently at play within Canada and internationally about international training and the CAA's courses.

Currently the CAA has no equivalency review process in place to assess international training to the CAA standard. We do have a process in place to determine if a student's prior avalanche training meets the minimum prerequisites for some of our courses. This Prior Learning Assessment Review (PLAR) is distinctly different than assessing training as equivalent. The PLAR process only determines if course prerequisites have been met to a minimum level and, if so, can grant an exemption to that requirement.

Here are a couple of concrete examples:

One of the prerequisites for the CAA Avalanche Operations Level 1 course is a two-day Avalanche Skills Training course (AST Level 1). These courses are run by members of the CAA, and the curriculum is standardized and managed by the Canadian Avalanche Centre, a sister organization of the CAA dedicated to public safety, awareness and education. A student who does not have the AST Level 1 course can apply through the PLAR process to have their training and experience evaluated against the prerequisites of the CAA's Level 1 course. If the student can demonstrate sufficient knowledge and skills equivalent to an AST Level 1, then they are granted an exemption to that prerequisite. The PLAR process does not grant an AST certificate to the student.

One of the prerequisite of the CAA Level 2 program is a CAA level 1 course. Through the PLAR process, a student can challenge that requirement. If they can demonstrate that their training and experience meets the intent of the Level 1 course, then that prerequisite is waived. Again, the PLAR process does not result in a CAA Level 1 certificate being issued.

To sum up, the PLAR process is not about equivalency. It is for students seeking an exemption to a prerequisite before taking one of the CAA's ITP courses.

So what does this mean to those who want to know if the training they receive in New Zealand is equivalent to CAA training? Recently the NZ Mountain Safety Council licensed the CAA Avalanche Operations Level 2 program for use in their redesign of the Stage 2 training at Otago Polytechnic. This lays the groundwork for a more formal relationship between the CAA and NZ in regards to equivalency of training. We hope to develop that relationship in the future with onsite audits of training in each country (CAA visiting NZ courses and vice versa). We'll be sure to report more on these initiatives as they progress.

There is another very significant development for avalanche work in Canada that will affect this issue even further. Just recently, WorkSafeBC (the government agency that oversees worker safety in BC) has come out with a series of regulations aimed at workers in avalanche prone areas. The new regulations reference a list of CAA recommended training and experience requirements for people who will serve in the role of a "qualified avalanche planner." At the request of our membership, the CAA is developing lists of recommended benchmark qualifications for other roles in avalanche safety operations – forecasters, technicians and assistant technicians. These recommendations are intended to help workers and employers demonstrate due diligence in regards to the qualifications of avalanche workers relative to their responsibilities. This may eventually affect international workers without standard CAA training or work experience in Canada. The CAA is looking forward to working with New Zealand authorities to resolve these issues and more.

Check out our website at www.avalanche.ca/caa for more detailed information and updates on the regulations and their implementation. Special thanks to Steve Schreiber of the NZ Mountain Safety Council and Peter Bilous of Otago Polytechnic in their continued efforts to foster closer ties with the CAA for avalanche training and international mobility of our workers.

In closing, it should be also mentioned that: Towards the goal of reciprocal programme auditing and establishing an equivalency standard, Peter Bilous will be attending (or has attended, depending on publication date) the CAA Modules 2 and 3 in Dec 2008. Modules 2 and 3 align with the NZ Field Training and Integrated Practical Assessment Courses, (respectfully), offered within the Otago Polytechnic Stage 2 Programme and Diploma in Avalanche Studies. Overall course improvement and moderation of delivery/content are other expected outcomes of attendance that Peter intends on sharing with the Stage 2 pool of instructors. Otago Polytechnic also intends to engage a CAA instructor on upcoming Stage 2 courses.