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Digging Out - The Interagency Snow Rescue Task Force

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How the Interagency Snow Rescue Task Force was well positioned to meet the challenges of Colorado's recent snowstorms and save many lives.

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[alex@alexmarcoux.com](mailto:alex@alexmarcoux.com)**Digging Out - The Interagency Snow Rescue Task Force**

*How the Interagency Snow Rescue Task Force was well positioned to meet the challenges of Colorado's recent snowstorms and save many lives.*

Inspired by life altering events, Art Seely of Safety One, Inc., has formed a unique team. The Interagency Snow Rescue Task Force (ISRTF) was initially conceived when EMS rescue attempts failed to reach a Denver victim stranded in less than one foot of snow. This was Seely's nightmare while he was a young paramedic in 1975, and it was this event that changed his life.

In 1984, Seely started a snow vehicle engineering and service company, and in 1987 he transitioned into snow survival and snowcat operations training to help utilities comply with OSHA's training recommendations. Today Seely, who has been dubbed "the world renowned snow expert," continues to certify utility snowcat operators through Snow Operations Training Center, an affiliate of Safety One.

According to Seely, by coordinating capabilities and resources of a utility company, a fire and police department, and a private company, an innovative concept for saving lives and emergency preparedness emerged. This revolutionary new approach requires minimal funds to set up, operate and maintain. The members of the ISRTF are: Tri-State Generation & Transmission, Jefferson County Sheriff's Department, Parker Fire Department and Safety One.

Each member has snow vehicle operators, who have been trained and certified through Snow Operations Training Center. With the exception of Tri-State Generation, which has a fleet of snowcats, the other members rely heavily on Safety One's Hagglunds BV206s. These rubber-tracked snowcats can travel at high speeds (35 mph), have a 200-mile operational radius and can carry up to 17 passengers or accommodate patients on stretchers. One of the snowcats has even been outfitted to include high-tech equipment such as thermal imaging, land radar and satellite imagery.

**SNOWSTORM STORIES**

Although the ISRTF was originally formed back in 1997, it's been the recent Colorado snowstorms that have brought to light the group's success. Recent missions have safely recovered more than 100 people. Some of the operations included rescuing stranded motorists, National Guard vehicles and ranchers. The members also assisted in locating and dispatching feed to starving livestock. Other more urban missions included supporting authorities while handling domestic violence assaults, transporting a woman in labor, as well as delivering insulin to a victim in crisis.

During one mission, with wind gusts up to 115 mph and white out conditions, the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department set out to rescue a stranded county driver who had lost control of a road grader and was forced onto a frozen lake where it partially plunged through the ice. There was zero visibility because of the blizzard and frozen windshields. Fortunately, the member's snowcat was equipped with thermal imaging and a land radar system, which successfully led the crew to the victim. The horrendous winds had blown out the cab windows of the construction vehicle. The driver was wet and exposed to frigid

temperatures and wind gusts exceeding 100 mph. Without the high-tech equipment, this operation would not have led to this man's successful rescue.

The ISRTF is no longer an unproven concept. Rather, it's been pushed to its limits meeting the challenges of the '06-'07 Colorado snowstorms and saving lives. Seely is encouraged by this success and receptive to assisting other communities that may be interested in coordinating similar emergency response systems in their communities. Utility companies in snow areas with snowcats and certified operators are prime candidates for leading such agencies.

For more information on ISRTF, call (800) 485-SNOW. ip

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