



Local

CDOT Working Against The Weather Installing New Avalanche Mitigation System

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By Jeff Todd CBS4 Reporter

LOVELAND PASS, Colo. (CBS4) – Two of the most avalanche prone areas on Colorado highways are getting a multi-million dollar fix from the Colorado Department of Transportation.

“We were just putting so many explosives up on that mountain we needed to come up with a different method, a safer method,” said Ray Mumford, a Project Inspector and former CDOT Avalanche Mitigation Team member.

The system is called Gazex and uses propane and air to create an explosion above the snow surface and causing a small avalanche.



(credit: CBS)

“The explosion of those gases puts downward pressure on the snowpack and thus releasing the avalanche,” said Mumford.

State officials feel it can be a more reliable and safer way to [clear snow from above highways](#). Currently explosives are fired at slide paths from hundreds of yards away. It’s a very dangerous process that has resulted in accidents.



(credit: CBS)

Now crews are working against the weather to complete projects in the Seven Sisters slide path above Highway 6 near Loveland Pass and also on Berthoud Pass at the Stanley Slide area.

“We’ve brought people in from Canada and France to look at what would work the best on this and did different studies,” said Mumford. “Fire these on a more frequent basis and release more avalanches on a smaller scale that we won’t be putting as much snow on the road so that road won’t be closed as long.”



(credit: CBS)

The state says both projects are costing about \$1.5 million, but after completion, maintenance will include refueling the system once every summer.

“The goal for us in forecasting is to release small avalanches so you never really build up a snowpack that will release a large avalanche. We’re going to be doing that through frequent use of this,” said Dr. Ethan Greene with the Colorado Avalanche Information Center, a partner with CDOT in avalanche mitigation throughout the state. “Success is going to be an overall reduction in road closures.”

LINK: [Colorado Avalanche Information Center](#)

[Jeff Todd](#) joined the CBS4 team in 2011 covering the Western Slope in the Mountain Newsroom. Since 2015 he’s been working across the Front Range in the Denver Headquarters. Follow him on Twitter [@CBS4Jeff](#).