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MOUNTAIN RESCUE ASSOCIATION URGES OREGON LEGISLATURE TO IMMEDIATELY POSTPONE HOUSE BILL 2509

Rescue Leaders Say Mandating Safety Equipment May Actually INCREASE Number of Search and Rescue Operations

(March 21, 2007) — The Mountain Rescue Association urges the Oregon State Legislature to postpone indefinitely House Bill (HB) 2509, which requires mountaineers to carry specific electronic equipment.

Rescue mountaineers nationwide believe that legislation pertaining to any backcountry activity and the rescues of lost or injured backcountry users:

1. should be deliberate, and;
2. should include detailed planning meetings with the backcountry user group as well as the mountain rescue community.

The Mountain Rescue Association feels that Oregon's HB 2509 has been neither deliberate nor included such important meetings, particularly with the rescue community that serves Mt. Hood.

State and Federal lawmakers do have a duty to respond to public calls for action, but they also have a duty to the emergency medical service providers in the community. While Oregon's HB 2509 responds to a public call for action, its path through the Oregon General Assembly appears to not include detailed planning meetings with the mountain rescue community or the mountain climbing community.

While HB 2509 has public support, the public appears to be unaware of the dangerous unintended consequences that this legislation may create – consequences that could actually increase the number of rescue operations, thereby putting the rescue community in greater risk.

Under Oregon law, individuals can be fined for reckless behavior that results in search and/or rescue operations. Ironically, Oregon's HB 2509 could actually increase the number of search and rescue operations on Mt. Hood.

The MRA agrees with Portland Mountain Rescue assessment that HB 2509 could foster “an unrealistic expectation that carrying government-mandated equipment entitles climbers to rescue.” We also share the concern of North America's oldest organized mountain rescue team, Oregon's “Crag Rats,” who believe that, “A hurried review in the middle of a legislative session is neither sufficient nor appropriate.”

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About the Mountain Rescue Association

The Mountain Rescue Association (MRA) is "a volunteer organization dedicated to saving lives through rescue and mountain safety education." The MRA, established in 1958 at Timberline Lodge at Mount Hood, Oregon, is the oldest Search and Rescue association in the United States.

With over 90 government authorized units in the US, Canada and other countries, the MRA has grown to become the critical mountain search and rescue resource in the United States. The large majority of our membership is made up of unpaid professional volunteers who have been fully accredited in Mountain Search and Rescue operations.

For more information, go to www.mra.org