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## Fatal avalanche on B.C. glacier was tragic accident, police say

By DENE MOORE

- Winter race team lost, then found

REVELSTOKE, B.C. (CP) - The massive avalanche that killed seven back-country skiers on an eastern B.C. glacier appears to have been simply a tragic accident, RCMP said Wednesday.

Investigators returned from Durrand Glacier, about 55 kilometres north of here, Tuesday night with no evidence Monday's slide was triggered by the skiers themselves, Sgt. Randy Brown said. "There's nothing for us to believe that it's anything other than just an accident," Brown told a news conference.

The conclusion comes despite the investigators' discovery that there were actually three slides on the glacier, including one that let go just below where one group of skiers was traversing the slope.

Brown said there was no evidence the upper group set off the slide that engulfed 13 people, killing seven and injuring an eighth.

The police's role now is to support local coroner Chuck Purse's fact-finding investigation, he said.

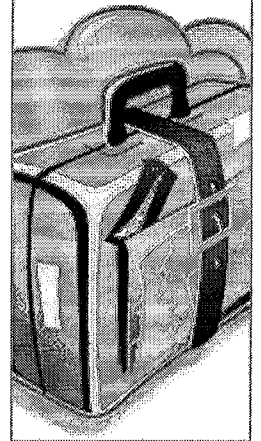
"We're not looking for any type of criminal negligence," said Brown.

Seven skiers and snowboarders died in the avalanche, including Naomi Heffler, 25, of Calgary, Dave Finnery, 30, of New Westminster, B.C., and world champion snowboarder Craig Kelly,



A rescue helicopter takes off from the Revelstoke, B.C. airport on Monday Jan. 20, 2003 in this image made from television. Eight American back-country skiers were killed and a number of others rescued after an avalanche crashed down a mountainside Monday in eastern British Columbia. (CP PHOTO/ HO - CBC)

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Photo

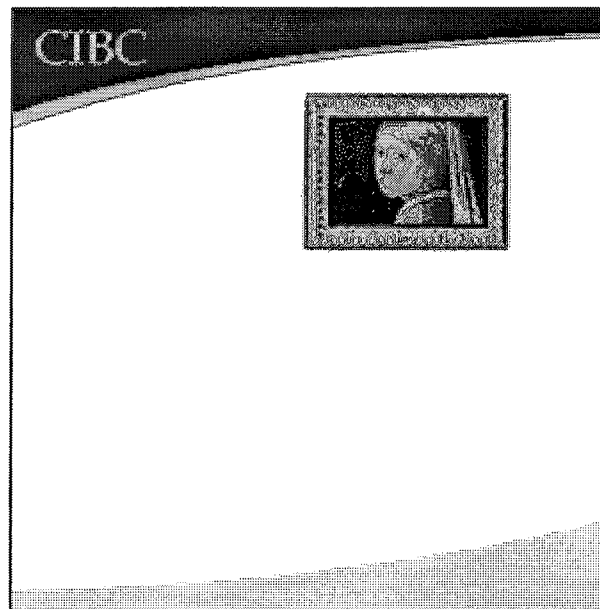

36, of Nelson, B.C.

Also killed were Kathleen Kessler, 39, of Truckee, Calif., Dennis Yates, 50, of Los Angeles, and Ralph Lunsford, 49, of Littleton, Colo.

After reaching his relatives, police identified the last victim Wednesday as Jean Luc Schwendener, 40, of Canmore, Alta..

Despite the tragedy, several members of the group involved in the slide were continuing their holiday.

"The other four skiers that were involved in the incident have elected to stay up at the ski lodge and they'll be skiing there at least till Saturday," said Brown. "So they will not be coming down."


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