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The avalanche destroyed an A-frame ski patrol cabin, buried the parking lot and caved in a wall of the Alpine Meadows lodge

3 MORE BODIES FOUND IN AVALANCHE

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high at the end of the parking lot by the lodge. There were trees four and five feet in diameter torn up and strewn about," said Tom Wagen, 25, of Mill Valley, who ran to the scene from a nearby condominium moments after the avalanches struck.

"They never knew what hit them," Nick Badami, chairman of the board of Alpine Meadows, said of the victims. "They heard a roar at the last minute, and things just let go like an earthquake. The ski patrol building is gone. The parking lot is mostly gone. Our small lake is gone."

The dead found Wednesday, who all suffocated beneath the avalanche, were David Hahn, 46, a Los Altos engineer; Nelson, 39, a

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Eureka orthopedic surgeon; and Jeffrey James (Jake) Smith, 27, an Alpine Meadows employee.

Still missing were Bernie Kingery, 40, the resort's mountain manager, and Annie Conrad, a 22-year-old resort employee.

There was some concern that there were more victims than the six whose bodies have been found and the two who are known to be missing.

"One eyewitness apparently saw some people above the lodge who were hit by the avalanche and covered with snow," said Placer

County Sheriff's Deputy Rick Meredith. "The new bodies were found in the parking lot area, so it's not known if the snow pushed those people down there or what. These may be people we didn't know about."

Faced with the continued danger of avalanches, crews worked to dynamite ridges surrounding the 20-year-old resort.

The avalanche Wednesday, coming after eight feet of snowfall since Monday, originated on an 8200-foot ridge near the top of the Summit chairlift about three-quarters of a mile south of the lodge. Hundreds of tons of snow roared across the valley floor, ripping up trees and finally coming to a halt after burying cars in the lodge parking lot.

"A slide began at Beaver Bowl, and then as it started to come down, it caused what's called a 'sympathetic slide' from Estelle Bowl. At the bottom of the mountain all the snow came down together," said Craig Badami, son of the chairman of the board. Resort officials said their slopes had been closed to the public since the weekend because of the bad weather.

"It was just total devastation at the bottom of the hill," said Tom Anderson, a member of the rescue team. He said the force of the snow had flipped tractors over the "blown apart" structures.

Inside the lodge, passageways were full of a tangled mess of snow, plywood and other pieces of debris, including bed sheets. One door, marked "keep closed at all times," had been blown wide open by the snow.

One of those at the scene who escaped injury was Heidi Blum, 17, stepdaughter of San Francisco's Mayor Dianne Feinstein. She telephoned her father, financier Richard Blum, to assure him she was all right.

Some of the searchers prodding the snow around the lodge were well aware of the difficulty of surviving in such a slide. Many experts say that if a person is caught, he can try to "swim" his way to the surface — grabbing trees or at least thrashing around enough to create an air pocket.

One veteran mountaineer, Dick Dorworth, said after the first half hour under the snow, the odds are against survival. But he said people have been known to live for days beneath snow if they have a big enough air pocket and aren't too badly injured.

Although blizzard conditions prevailed off and on, the skies cleared for a brief period yesterday morning, and other resorts in the Tahoe area reported brisk business.

"The sky was crystal clear. The lake was dark blue. Everything was white. It looked like God's country," said Lee Weber, an employee at Heavenly Valley resort about 60 miles south of Alpine Meadows.

"There were hundreds of skiers on the slopes. It looked like paradise. And that made it so hard to believe something so drastic could have happened over at Alpine." The avalanche was the second killer slide to strike the resort located northwest of Lake Tahoe in the last six years. In 1976, three people died in a slide that also originated at Beaver Bowl, but never reached the lodge.

KILLER'S WIFE WANTS S.F. TO PAY

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the offices of the Mission Insurance Co. in the 43-story office building, carrying a long white box that concealed a shotgun. He pulled the pieces of the pump shotgun from the box, quickly assembled it, then shot his wife, apparently in a jealous rage.

Then he turned and began shooting other office workers, chasing some of them down a stairwell to the 17th floor, firing wildly as he went. According to police officers, Contawe was aiming his shotgun at a man and a pregnant woman when they arrived.

Mrs. Contawe's attorney, Jack Burnam, charged that the city was negligent because the "police were not very speedy in getting down there. And the killing of Ricardo was unwarranted. I think the police were a little trigger happy."

The incident ended when the 38-year-old Contawe turned to fire his shotgun at police, who shot and killed him. The four officers in-

involved, one of whom was wounded by Contawe, have been nominated for medals of valor.

In her claim, Erlinda Contawe asks for \$500,000 from the city for the wrongful death of her husband. The claim, which blames the police, asks for \$495,000 for "loss of husband and loss of father to children" and for \$5000 for funeral expenses.

The Contawes, who had been married for 19 years, had two sons, Ron, 18, and Ricardo Jr., 16.

A second claim asks for \$500,000 for "loss of both legs, possibly permanently," for Mrs. Contawe.

A section of the legal form reads: "Police Department failed to protect and San Francisco General (hospital) failed to properly treat claimant."

The second claim itemizes a variety of hospital and doctors' expenses and loss of wages, adding up to \$20,000. It asks for \$480,000 for "permanent damage and injuries, pain and suffering."

Burnam said that he is still investigating all of the details, but was forced to file a claim within a 100-day deadline of the incident in order to protect Mrs. Contawe's rights.

"If the city denies the claim, which is usually automatic, then we'll have to put the pieces together and decide whether to sue," he said.

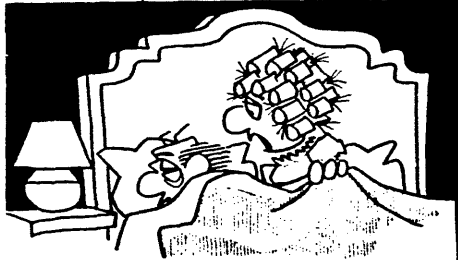
He said he was also preparing a suit against the One Market Plaza building and its security department. "They knew this guy was a problem. He had come before and been asked to leave," Burnam said. "She (Mrs. Contawe) requested it. Building security knew he shouldn't have been allowed up there."

Burnam said that Mrs. Contawe is recuperating with relatives and learning to walk again. "Right now we're fighting the insurance company, which is claiming Ricardo really died in a form of suicide. They don't want to pay off on the life insurance."

The claims against the city were filed on March 12. The city has until April 26 to answer the claim. If there is no response, then it is "deemed denied," said Linda Callahan of the city attorney's office. Mrs. Contawe can file a lawsuit against the city only after her claim is denied or if a settlement is not worked out.

The city attorney refused to comment until a final decision is made on the claim. Police Sergeant Bill Gay, who is investigating the case, also declined to comment, other than to call the claim "amazing."

THE LOCKHORNS/Bill Hoest



"BUT, I DON'T FEEL LIKE TALKING... I FEEL LIKE LISTENING."

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