

Danger of Avalanche Means Danger to Life

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Abstract

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Glistening powder snow, sparkling sunshine - and suddenly the thunderous noise of an avalanche. Last season, 21 people died in Switzerland as a result of an avalanche. An unnecessary waste of life - a study has shown that that well over half of fatal avalanche accidents could have been avoided.

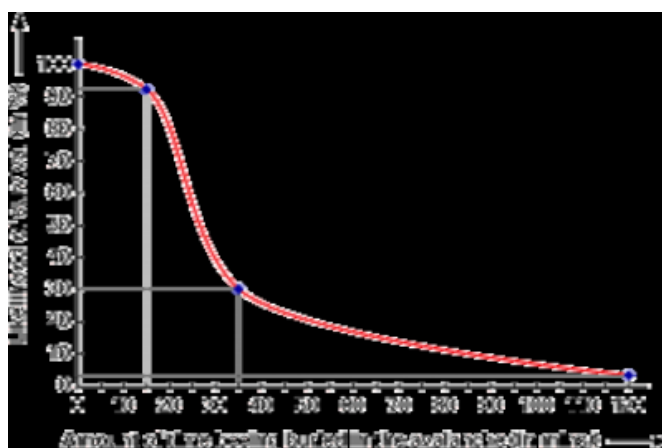
Figure 1

Rescue teams at work.



Danger of avalanche means danger to life. While the chance of recovering a person alive is 92 percent if he is found within 15 minutes, already after 35 minutes this figure has sunk to 30 percent, and after two hours to a mere 3 percent. Around two-thirds of victims suffocate under the snow, while the remaining one-third succumb to their injuries or to hypothermia.

Figure 2



With avalanche accidents, time is of the essence. An immediate search by skiing companions who have escaped being caught by the avalanche offers the best chance of survival. For although rescue parties with search dogs, avalanche probes and search equipment can arrive at the scene of the accident very rapidly thanks to helicopters, even this short delay can prove fatal for the victims.

Figure 3

Rescue units at work.



Figure 4



So what can powder snow enthusiasts do to avoid being caught in an avalanche?

- Find out about the risk of avalanche from the Swiss Federal
- Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research (SLF), which issues a daily avalanche bulletin throughout the winter months.
- Off-piste skiers and snowboarders should at least wear Recco reflectors. Although these special reflectors, which only weigh a few grams, might not help skiers who are searching for their companions, they do aid professional rescuers to locate avalanche victims.
- Guidelines on the correct conduct of skiers and snowboarders, as well as other useful tips, can be

obtained from the Swiss office for the prevention of accidents, Schweizerische Beratungsstelle für Unfallverhütung bfu.

- Pay attention to the danger signals at the mountain railway stations, and respect the barriers set up by the piste rescue service.

IMG4 Equipement for rescue mission.

Figure 5



Additional links regarding the weather in Switzerland:

«Meteo» weather forecast (on Swiss TV channel, DRS):

<http://www.sfdrs.ch/sendungen/meteo/>

Live weather pictures

<http://www.topin.ch/ch/overview.xhtml>

Satellite picture of Europe

<http://www.ccc.nottingham.ac.uk/pub/sat-images/D2.JPG>

Various weather links

<http://www.sfdrs.ch/linkpage/meteo-links.html>

<http://www.dkrz.de/sat/sat.html>

Snow conditions:

<http://www.snowforfun.ch/gebiete/default.asp>

<http://www.rsag.ch/snow/e/overski>

References

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