

Guidelines for Avalanche Control Services: Organisation, Hazard Assessment and Documentation - an Example From Switzerland

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Whereas for the stability evaluation process in backcountry skiing many tools have been developed in the last twenty years to simplify the decision making process, nothing comparable exists for services that are responsible for avalanche safety on highways or in residential areas. After the catastrophic avalanche winter 1998-99, the need arose to structure the documentation process of avalanche control services since the documentation is of particular importance if things go wrong and the service has to prove good diligence. However, as there was no written guidance on the decision making process, this had to be established first. In consultation with some leading Swiss avalanche control services standards were developed for the organization, the hazard assessment and the subsequent documentation of the decision making process. The guidelines suggest a three-step approach for assessing and mitigating avalanche risk: (1) Evaluating the local weather and snow situation, (2) Assessing the hazard for one or more specific avalanche path, (3) Deciding on the control measures to be taken (e.g. closures, evacuations). An electronic tool to facilitate the documentation process has been developed that also helps to structure the decision making process.