Avalanche Data: to Share or Not to Share?

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An obvious way to assess snow avalanche risk consists in consulting a database. The first data collection organized in France traces back to 1900, and comprises today 79,000 written records of avalanches. An electronic database was created in the late nineties, but access was limited to a small number of experts. The structure was renewed in 2002 in order to allow open access to records and synthetic maps. Today this information is freely available on internet. Due to questions of data reliability, we developed a new database accessible on-line since 2007. Avalanches are described with high standards of accuracy, and modern media techniques are used for presentation. Narrative accounts, photographic documents and precise localization in space are combined with traditional descriptive elements. The data input is performed by experts and experimented backcountry skiers. During the last winter, more than 50,000 avalanche descriptions were accessed. We carried out a survey in order to improve our understanding of user expectations. Questions such as data sharing and database structure are raised. Our hope is to rally the efforts for globalization of avalanche data and set up a tool of international significance by sharing knowledge and competence.