

New Trends of Avalanche Accidents in Backcountry Terrain in Switzerland

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In the last 10 years equipment and knowledge of recreationists and organised rescue teams in avalanche terrain has developed. More and more people are travelling in off-piste terrain or on skitours. Avalanche prevention and rescue training as well as avalanche warning and the possibilities to get good information have improved. Time to look back 30 years (1977 - 2006) to analyse trends of recreational avalanche accidents. Although more people recreate in avalanche prone terrain, the number of fatalities has decreased. Though the amount of complete burials has not changed, burial time and mortality rate of completely buried persons developed into a positive direction. Companion rescue and organised rescue teams recovered more often survivors in recent years. Further the development of fatalities in guided groups is decreasing and shows higher professionalism. Over the years avalanche warning has also changed. We compared avalanche accidents with predicted avalanche danger degrees to find out, if the proportion of accidents to danger levels has changed and found out, that people do not tend to take higher risk. Comparison of accidents with danger levels did not show particular differences for specific climatologic regions. The avalanche accident risk at a certain danger level is not influenced by a regional factor.