

Visitor risk management from avalanches in New Zealand

Don Bogie; Mike Davies

Department of Conservation, Christchurch, New Zealand

The Department of Conservation (DOC) manages a third of the land in New Zealand. This is also where the majority of avalanches occur. Many huts, tracks and popular recreational areas are in avalanche terrain. In 2009 DOC finalised a visitor risk management policy that included six underlying principles for managing risk to visitors. In summary they are: The Department will; preserve the range of recreation experiences, facilities are safely situated in accordance with the predominant visitor group and the Department will provide appropriate information about hazards. Visitors will; be responsible for the decision they make and be responsible for their own skills and competence. Concessionaires (tour operators) will be responsible for the safety of their clients.

DOC applies a range of avalanche risk mitigations to the six visitor groups it uses to classify visitors to land managed by the Department. This forms a continuum with a high level of care for the accessible front country through to minimal input for the remotest part of backcountry.

This paper will show how avalanche risk management is integrated with DOC's visitor risk management policy and system to manage visitor risk. Avalanche risk mitigations include avalanche path mapping of huts. The introduction of the Canadian Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES) for the backcountry and the application of site management using an avalanche hazard index for high use places where there are users with limited avalanche knowledge. In partnership with the Mountain Safety Council DOC assists with a number of avalanche hazard advisories.