Compiling and studying professional avalanche worker incident data to improve worker safety

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Avalanche professionals work in a hazardous alpine environment, often under physical and emotional stress. Working in an uncertain, stressful, and risky environment takes its toll on the avalanche community. A growing number of studies suggest that decision-making errors are significant contributors to avalanche accidents. Although decision-making processes leading to avalanche incidents in professional settings are seldomly studied, we believe they play a significant role in avalanche incidents involving professionals. Therefore, attempts to reduce professional avalanche accidents should include improving decision-making. In this paper, we present a road map to improve workplace safety in the avalanche field. Our intention is to create a confidential online database where avalanche professionals can report avalanche related incidents and near misses. The data will be used to better understand the decision-making processes and snowpack, weather, and avalanche conditions associated with professional workplace incidents or near misses. In addition, this database will allow us to develop a decision-making focused training program, gain field experience without hazardous exposure, and improve awareness by sharing case studies across the industry.