Ten years of avalanche deaths in the USA, 1999/00 to 2008/09

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After reaching a twenty-year low in the late 1980s avalanche deaths in the United States soared during the 1990s and spiked in 2007/08 with 36 deaths, the highest number killed in the modern era (post 1950). During the 10-year study period 281 people died in 237 fatal avalanche accidents. (In the previous 10 years—1989/90 to 1999/99 avalanches killed 220, an increase of 27 percent.) Data from these accidents have been compiled to draw a profile of the modern avalanche victim. The mean age for all victims is 33 (median, 31); however, the average age varies significantly by gender. The average age for men is 34, while the average age for women is 38 (M-W, P<0.0001). Ninety percent of the victims are men but only ten percent are women. For males the 20–29 age group suffered the most deaths; however, for females, surprisingly it is the 40–49 age group. Recreationists account for 96% of the avalanche deaths. Snowmobilers account for 40% of avalanche deaths—largest single category; however, the combined totals of all skiers and snowboarders is very close at 39%. January, February, and March are the most deadly months. Colorado experienced 19% of the fatalities in the last 10 years (down from 28% during the 1990s); however, Alaska’s fatality rate per population is nearly six times greater than Colorado’s. Additional data and information are presented regarding US avalanche fatalities by month, state, activity, and the shifting profile of the typical victim.