

A look back on the avalanche cycle in Queyras in December 2008

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Almost ten years after the catastrophic avalanche in Chamonix, which killed 39 people in February 1999, the French Alps has been the theatre of a new surprising avalanche crisis in the Queyras massif and the Tinée's valley, closed to the border with Italy. In the middle of December, about 3 meters of snow fell in 3 days in the village of Abriès at 1500-meter above sea level. In consequence, on the 16th of December 2008, many avalanches occurred in those two regions and some of them were unexpected. Classical big avalanches were observed and created big accumulation on roads and in wild valleys. Also, unpredicted avalanches occurred and created damages never seen before.

This avalanche cycle has been really surprising on different points. First, we have observed avalanches unknown in the human memory of a local mountain population. Moreover, a great number of avalanches in a short period have occurred. Several damages has been observed and we noticed that the biggest damages concerned sometimes relative small avalanches. We want to present and to analyse some events particularly surprising for the reasons cited higher.

We want to share in ISSW the results of this crisis and how French authorities took in charge the situation. We will describe the procedures used for the safety of population. We'll explain how those systems are linked and organised (communes, weather forecaster, decisions). We can notice that difficulties appeared in their application in time.