Snow and Avalanche association in Spain: A merging of professional and amateur experiences.

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ABSTRACT: Since the eighties, some institutions in Spain have been working in avalanche forecasting and cartography but there was a lack of any association, where professionals and non-professionals could exchange experiences and worries. For this reason, the first snow and avalanche association was created and, nowadays, it has become a reference for avalanche education in our region. The Snow and Avalanche Awareness Association (ACNA) was created for the first time in Spain in 2006. ACNA is a non-profit organization with the aim of promoting knowledge on snow and avalanches in Catalonia and other territories. Today, the Association has about 195 members, professionals and non-professionals, from various mountain ranges of Spain. In addition, ACNA supports professionals who carry out their activity in avalanche terrain; constitutes a meeting point for both professionals and mountaineering amateurs, collects the latest information and supports research activities through its website (www.acna.cat). Moreover ACNA issues an annual magazine to disseminate relevant information and news.

One of the pillars of our organization is avalanche education. Over the years, we have developed and consolidated a training program for amateur mountaineers, which focuses on safety and which is based on the AST courses of the Canadian Avalanche Centre. On average, over 100 students attend our courses every winter season. In recent years, ACNA has also started teaching in the training of UIMLA and UIAGM mountain guides and other professionals. More recently, it has implemented activities for children. This latter project seeks to introduce the world of the snow to school children and ski clubs near mountainous areas.

Furthermore, every year ACNA organizes a meeting to discuss interesting topics, where all the members of the association are invited and its open to the public in general. Anyone interested in avalanche issues are welcomed.

KEYWORDS: Avalanche awareness, association, knowledge, training courses.

1 INTRODUCTION

Avalanche and Snow Awareness Association ACNA is a non lucrative association that was registered in June 2006 at the Register of Associations of the Department of Justice of local Government of Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya). The main objective of the association is to spread snow and avalanche knowledge over the users and professionals. Its structure consists on a managerial board and several commissions with competences on the main targets of the association. Currently the association has 200 members.

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2 BACKGROUND

In 2004 a small group of people gathered with avalanche business at a both professional and amateur level had a meeting to create and set up an association that allows the merging among professionals and amateurs in snow and avalanche field. ACNA, Snow and Avalanche Awareness Association, was set up once the rules and laws of the association were finished in 2006. From that date until present it became a reference in our country due to the frenetic activities organized during winter season, and in special regarding avalanche education.

3 OBJECTIVES AND TARGET AUDIENCE

The main goal of ACNA is to promote, develop and disseminate snow and avalanche knowledge and culture among both professionals and users. Avalanche hazard and risk culture is not the strongest point our country. For this purpose ACNA developed several strategies in the committees of the association which include:
- Spread snow and avalanche knowledge including danger and risk associated to this natural hazard.
- Communicate and connect professionals and amateurs in this particular field
- Compiling useful and interesting information on snow and avalanches
- Support to professionals performing their activity in the snow and avalanche fields.
- Allow and facilitate meetings among amateurs and professionals and to promote the exchange of experiences
- Get relationship with other associations with similar scope
- Give support encourage and help snow and avalanche research.

Figure 1: Increase in the number of members over the years. In dark red the yearly increase and in green the total number of members.

4 ACNA AT PRESENT

ACNA is organised by means of a managerial board with a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary. The strategies are mainly attained by the managerial board and the committee. These committees are: avalanche safety, dissemination, publications, professional and technical committee, web and media and the last but not the least avalanche education.

Currently there are almost 200 members and according to the rules, the association is open to every person interested in the goals pointed out above. From the beginning of ACNA the number of members has been increasing as seen in figure 1. There are two kind of members: the regular ones and the protectors being these last ones those investing the association as sponsors. The statistics on the members’ profiles indicates that the 18% are female and 82% male. The majority of members are at the interval of 29 to 47 years old. We want to highlight the equality between professional members (45%) and non professional (55%). The 81% comes from Catalonia and the rest are divided among Asturias, Euskadi, Madrid, Aragón, Cantabria, and Valencia and finally Andorra.

From the beginning of the association the ACNA website was the most powerful tool to communicate and spread snow and avalanche information. Currently facebook and twitter are pushing strongly. The web is open to the public in general but with an private part only for members.

All this media are used to spread the activities performed during the season: courses, talks and conferences, meetings and the general assembly.

Every season ACNA issues a review addressed to the fellows. The contents are from the most practical snow and avalanche issues to scientific research in the same field. The review contains fixed sections like the summary of accidents for each season.

The funding of ACNA comes from the member taxes, the investment of protectors and public grants and subsidies.

Figure 2: Field practices during a rescue course.

5 ACNA ACTIVITIES

The association give the opportunity to get training courses, conferences and meetings.

One of the pillars of the association are the training courses that over the years have been established as one of the strong points of the association and becoming at the same time the reference institution in such a matter in the country. The ACNA courses are based on the Avalanche Skills Training AST courses of the Canadian Avalanche Centre All the courses were made up with theory classes and field practice. The first training course was given in 2009 and the consolidation of the list of topics and the set up of subjects was consolidated during 2010-2011 by the avalanche education commission with the endorsement of the managerial board.
During the last season 2012-2013 the taught courses were:
- Avalanche safety: level 1 and level 2 and rescue in avalanche terrain with a total amount of 147 participants (figures 2 and 3).
- Training courses for professionals UIMLA and UIAGM (mountain guides): level 1 and level 2 with four editions and an average of 55 participants
- Conferences and practices in mountain schools for children.
- Specific conferences on accidental slabs.

Training courses include teaching on snow science, hazard assessing, progressing in avalanche terrain, self rescue, first aids. Occasionally avalanche training courses on demand are organised.

Every season there is a general assembly of the association where conferences on interesting issues on snow and avalanches are given to the public by professionals (from the country and from abroad) and from amateurs. The general assembly became a meeting point to share experiences among snow and avalanche enthusiasts. A very fruitful assembly was the 2012-2013 assembly focussed on accidents. In this edition several talks on accidents were given and with the particularity of several presentations by some of the victims caught in avalanches in the Pyrenees. The debate was very positive, intense and fruitful and an extensive list of conclusions was addressed not only to the users but to the different public agencies with roles in avalanches business (figure 4).

One of the main goals is to increase the number of members in special taking care of those coming from other mountain areas so that the representation of all the ranges will be possible in the frame of ACNA.

At the end of this season contacts with the Department of Education of the Government have been attained to endorse much more our training course. We hope to continue consolidating the courses in the coming seasons.

The improvement of the website and the other media as a crucial point in the communication is another of the main goals to be reached in the near future.

To establish meeting points not only among the members but with other associations with similar concerns will be attained.

Figure 4: ACNA General Assembly focussed on accidents during winter season 2012-2013.

ACNA efforts and objectives have been expanding over the years and it is foreseen to continue this rising line.

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