

PURPOSE AND PROGRESS OF NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL REPORT ON
SNOW AVALANCHES¹

Barry Voight²

The National Research Council (NRC), as the operating arm of the National Academy of Sciences and National Academy of Engineering, has organized a panel to examine the critical issues in avalanche mitigation, and to incorporate them into a report to be published in 1988 by the National Academy Press. The task for the panel is to conduct a study of the potential for loss of life and economic impacts from snow avalanches in the United States, and to recommend measures to improve public protection and to minimize impacts. Methods and programs available to reduce impacts (e.g., forecasting, control, data management, research, information transfer, and coordination of mitigation activities) will be reviewed, and their effectiveness compared to similar activities in other countries.

The panel recognizes the cold and bleak budget climate in which this endeavor has begun. We are concerned about the maintenance of financial support for hazard reduction programs. We are concerned that support for avalanche research has dropped to almost zero in the United States. Coordination of activities within the Snow Science and Management Community seems fragmented and in some cases inadequate.

The panel hopes to raise the national profile of avalanches as geologic hazards, in the belief that improved visibility will produce positive results on hazard reduction. The report should document the avalanche hazard in a proper perspective relative to other hazards -- not as important as some others, but worthy of organized funding and study. We are hopeful that the NRC report may open up some opportunities that would otherwise be unobtainable.

WE WELCOME YOUR INPUT! A study outline was prepared at the first panel meeting in April 1986 in Alta, and the first draft was well underway by the time of the ISSW. But further suggestions from the Snow Science Community are most welcome. What recommendations would you like to see underlined by the report? How can the report be made most effective as a catalyst for action in the public interest? How can your interests be best represented? Please send information to:

B. Voight, Chairman NRC Avalanche Panel
334 Deike Building
University Park, PA 16802

¹Paper presented with International Snow Workshop, Lake Tahoe, California, October, 22-25, 1986.

²Professor of Geosciences
Penn State University
University Park, PA 16802