

# ANENA - The French Association for Snow and Avalanche Study

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## ABSTRACT

ANENA (French Association for Snow and Avalanches Study), founded in 1971 after catastrophic avalanches, aims at developing the safety of persons and properties in the snow and avalanche field.

It groups all the public and private bodies, the elected representatives, as well as those (professionals or not) concerned in various ways by problems associated with snow and avalanches, i.e. at the present time more than 1000 members.

Avalanche is the only natural hazard in France for which such an organization has been created. As a forum, ANENA is very much appreciated because its membership makes it a favorable meeting place for experience feedback, exchange of ideas and encouragement of initiatives. ANENA organizes workshops and international congresses in order to create points of meeting and understanding among theoreticians and practitioners.

ANENA is also a partner of laboratories specialized in research and it supports individual projects of research.

Lastly, thanks to training (artificial avalanche release specialists, avalanche dog handlers,...), information and prevention (training courses, documentation, quarterly magazine), ANENA circulates know-how from snow experts to all sectors and in particular skiing and hiking circles, allowing people to spend time in snow-covered mountains being more conscious and more rational in terms of safety.

## 1. SHORT HISTORIC

ANENA has been created in October 1971. In fact, a dramatical avalanche killed 39 persons in a chalet of the northern Alps in February 1970. This accident was the starting point of a reflection concerning the safety in the ski resorts and in snow-covered mountains.

At that time, more than 15 organisms were dealing with snow and avalanche problems, but their bad coordination harmed their efficiency. That is the reason why the working group in charge of the reflection above-mentioned recommended to create an organism that will develop and coordinate the research in the snow and avalanches field. This organism could not be a French institute as the Swiss federal institute for snow and avalanche research because of many reasons. It is therefore an association that has been created with the following aims :

- to facilitate the coordination between specialists and users, and to promote the exchanges of experience and knowledge with the foreign countries;
- to encourage and to assist all research undertaken by any person or any organisation; to propose researches to begin;

- to distribute and to popularize information in relation with snow, avalanches and safety in snow-covered mountains.

In June 1976, ANENA was officially recognized as a public utility association.

## 2. THE ANENA'S ORGANISATION

ANENA groups any person and any organism interested by the snow and avalanche aspects as well as the safety in snow-covered mountains, for private or professional reasons: professionals (ski-patrollers, mountain guides, ski instructors, cable-car organisms, etc.), elected representatives of ski resorts, research institutes, rescue teams, French public administration, etc.

It is administered by an administration board, composed by 30 persons, elected among the members of ANENA. This board choose among its members an executive board composed by 7 of them. There is also a scientific and technical council that studies any question concerning research projects submitted to the association. In other respects, 6 committees work on particular points: communication, training, avalanche forecast, review, avalanche rescue and juridical aspects.

Finally, 5 permanent persons have in charge the smooth running of ANENA: one director, one accountant, one documentalist and two secretaries.

## 3. THE ANENA'S ACTIVITIES

Since 1971, ANENA has had 4 kinds of activity (research, training, coordination and information) and one mission : to make the safety and the prevention in the snow and avalanches field increase.

### 3.1. Research

In 1971, the priority is the improvement of knowledge. ANENA is then the place where practitioners and scientists can meet, discuss and define research projects. ANENA proposes studies to undertake, encourages researches made by specialized organisms and facilitate the coordination between them. Either ANENA controls itself the work, or it "only" makes the involved persons work together. Concerned above all else about efficiency, ANENA is resolutely situated at the meeting point of the basic research and the field practice. As a few examples, it is possible to mention: avalanches forecast improving, avalanche hazard mapping, artificial avalanche release, avalanche defense structures, rescue systems.

In 1996, ANENA has a different role. After having initiated the movement and allowed everyone to know each other and to know what everyone was working on, its action is more discreet. It manages research project involving many laboratories and supports individual research with some of its partners. The main reason of this evolution is the lack of money.

### 3.2. Training

Since 1971, ANENA has organized many training courses. It is the French organism for the artificial avalanche release training courses. More than 2000 ski patrollers have already followed such a course to learn how to use explosives to release avalanches. Just before each winter, the ANENA organises 4 or 5 training courses in the Alps and the Pyrenees, for about 100 persons. In the same field, it arranges as well the 2-day training course for future users of the French avalancheur system.

ANENA is also responsible in France for the training of avalanche dog handlers. During a little bit more than 2 weeks, about 20 dog lover teams learn how to localize a buried avalanche victim.

ANENA has also trained many safety responsables on the way to take into account the several parameters of the problems due to snow and avalanches and how to manage the avalanche hazard, in order to increase the safety of the area where they are working.

### 3.3. COORDINATION

ANENA has been created in order to offer to everyone the possibility to meet the other persons working on or interested in snow and avalanches, in France as well as in foreign countries. As it has done since the beginning, ANENA is still an organism facilitating meetings, experience exchanges and encouraging new investigations.

As an example, it organises each 4 year (the next one will take place in 1999) an international symposium in French and English, to create a point of meeting and understanding among theoreticians and practitioners, to clear up the contributions of scientific researches to safety and to see the concrete applications in the field. So ANENA is also a link between the French and the foreign communities involved in the snow and avalanches field.

ANENA plays also an important role in France: it is the place where many problems are discussed in order to solve them. All the involved parts are in fact represented in the association, so they all can give their opinion and take part to the elaboration of a solution. The application of the retained solution in the field by their "troops" is thus much easier. The current discussions concern: the "avalanche flag" (and, in a more general point of view, the information of the public about the avalanche danger in ski resorts), the systems to rescue avalanche victims and the writing of a dictionary of the terms in relation with snow and avalanches (so that everyone speaks the same language and understand better the other).

### 3.4. Information

It is the activity where the development has been the most important.

For its internal communication, ANENA publishes a 32-page quarterly review. Edited to more than 1400 copies, it is distributed in more than 20 countries. For our non-French readers, there has been English-written abstracts of the articles since 1995. It allows all member of the ANENA to be familiar with the ANENA's activities and to know the news in the French and international snow and avalanche field.

The information is also, of course, made in the direction of the public. The first way is indirect, thanks to the media (reviews, radios, TV), either specialized in skiing, snowboarding or mountaineering, or not specialized at all. The other way is direct, by distributing or selling booklets, books, written documents, slides, video tapes, edited by ANENA. Many conferences and displays on snow and avalanches are also organized. A lot of information is given to students and child of school age. And ANENA has completed, year after year, an important documentation center, where anyone can get more information on snow and avalanches.

In other respects, ANENA has been organizing since 1996 a 2-day practical training course for skiers, mountaineers, to teach them how to use a beacon and to give them snow and avalanches knowledge basis.

## 4. CONCLUSION

ANENA celebrates this year its 25th birthday: 25 years of research, training courses, coordination and information in service of the safety of the snow-covered mountain. An important work has been done, thanks to all the members of the association, and its activities have evolved: less research, more information for the public. But it is still very much in demand, proof of the importance of its existence, and of the interest caused by its activities.