

Avalanche education video of the five European avalanche danger levels

Stephan Harvey *

Swiss Federal Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research (SLF), Davos

Abstract: To introduce basic knowledge of avalanche danger for off piste areas, the Swiss accident insurance company SUVA produced in close collaboration with the Swiss Federal Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research a video to appeal to young people. In “wrong-right”-scenes well known protagonists show how to behave at danger level 1 to 4 (“low”, “moderate”, “considerable”, “high”) and for a spring situation in out-of-bound terrain. The video also shows the several possibilities how to get the information about the actual avalanche danger degree in Switzerland. In addition instruction material supports teachers for example to educate avalanche prevention at school. Supplementing in some ski resorts the scene of the video for the corresponding danger degree of the daily avalanche bulletin is running.

Keywords: avalanche accident, avalanche incident, avalanche prevention, avalanche forecast, avalanche bulletin, avalanche danger degree, avalanche video, avalanche education.

1. Introduction

Avalanche accidents in off-piste terrain have increased in the last 5 years (Tschirky, 2000). 80 % of the accidents occur at level “moderate” and “considerable” (Harvey, 2002). The mean age of people caught in avalanches lies between 17 and 30 years (Signorell, 2001 and Harvey et al., 2002). Often casualties had no avalanche knowledge at all. For better basic avalanche education the Swiss accident insurance company SUVA produced in close collaboration with the Swiss Federal Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research (SFISAR) a video to appeal to young people. The video takes 15 minutes and educates how inexperienced people should behave if they want to ski off-piste. In “wrong-right”-scenes well known protagonists show how to behave at danger level 1 to 4 and for a spring situation in out-of-bound terrain. The video also informs what equipment is required for off-piste-skiing and where you can get information about the actual avalanche danger degree (Ammann, 1998). Linked to the video supplemental facilities are presented (Link with avalanche bulletin, instruction documentation for teachers). The video is available on tape or DVD in German, French and Italian language.

2. Message of education video

This instructive video answers following questions:

- How can you inform your self about the actual avalanche situation?
- How do you behave at the different danger levels in off-piste terrain?

For danger level “low” (1), “moderate” (2), “considerable” (3), “high” (4) and for a spring situation (danger increase during the day) a small completed story is played. The stories always have the same pattern. In a first part a “wrong” -scene shows how not to behave, which ends in an accident. A “try again” -part after each accident with a “right” -scene shows the proper behaviour and gives a main message for each danger level. For each danger level the following advises are given:

Corresponding author address: Stephan Harvey, Swiss Federal Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research, Flüelastrasse 11, CH-7260 Davos Dorf, Switzerland; tel: +41 81 417 01 29; fax: +41 81 417 01 10; email: harvey@slf.ch.

Danger level	What is to attend to?
1 low	On extreme steep slopes descend only one by one. Danger of fall.
2 moderate	Descend shady steep slopes one by one. Avoid steepest parts of a slope.
3 considerable	Inexperienced people should stay on the piste or join a professional guided group.
4 high	Stay on ski piste
5 very high	Stay on ski piste
Spring situation	Increase of avalanche danger in the afternoon. Descend before lunch time.

Table 1: Main messages in the video for the different danger levels.

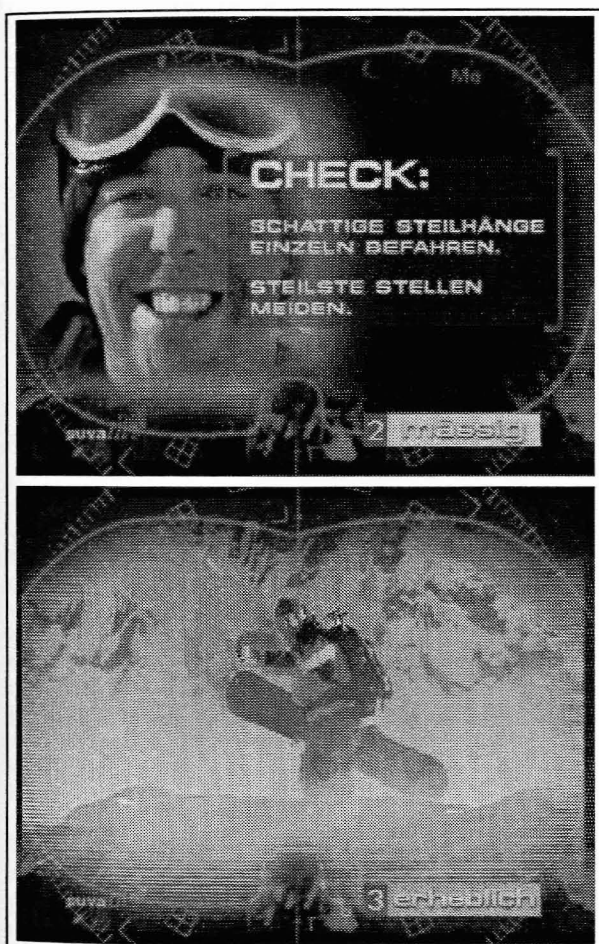


Fig. 1: Screenshots out of video. Top: Advices for "moderate" danger. Bottom: Picture of scene for "considerable".

3. Additional facilities

Supplemental to the video a instruction documentation supports teachers to educate avalanche prevention for at least two lessons. This brochure contains transparencies and worksheets to the video.

Furthermore in 10 ski resorts, which are famous for off-piste skiing, the according story of the present avalanche danger degree runs on big screens. To avoid the wrong film sequence these screens are automatically controlled by the Swiss avalanche warning service. Additional to the video the actual regional avalanche bulletin is also displayed on the screens.

4. References

- Ammann, W. 1998. Mitteilung Nr. 50. Interpretationshilfe zum nationalen Lawinenbulletin des Eidg. Instituts für Schnee- und Lawinenforschung, SLF, Davos.
- Harvey, S. 2002. Avalanche incidents In Switzerland in relation to the predicted danger degree. Proceedings International Snow Science Workshop, Penticton, 2002.
- Harvey, S., Signorell, C. 2002. Avalanche accidents in back country terrain of the Swiss alps: New investigations of a 30 year database. Proceedings International Snow Science Workshop, Penticton, 2002.
- Signorell, C. 2001. Skifahrerlawinenunfälle in den Schweizer Alpen. Eine Auswertung der letzten 30 Jahre. Diplomarbeit Eidg. Institut für Schnee- und Lawinenforschung, SLF, Davos.
- Tschirky, F., Brabec, B. and Kern, M. 2000. Avalanche rescue systems in Switzerland: experience and limitations. International Snow Science Workshop, Blue Sky MT, USA, 1-6 October 2000.