

Avalanche Search and Rescue

Helicopter Mounted Avalanche Beacon rescue Technique
SH94 Milford Road Avalanche Control Programme, New Zealand

Works Infrastructure Ltd, Te Anau New Zealand

ABSTRACT: As a result of an avalanche accident in September 1983 the Milford Road Avalanche Control Programme was established to forecast and manage the avalanche risk to the highway. Annual avalanche awareness and practice training days are an integral part of the management of the road and include training volunteer emergency services and the local division of the national Search and Rescue in avalanche rescue techniques.

The Milford Road experiences large, greater than size 5, avalanches with the surface, of the deposits, often containing large blocks of debris which are difficult for man or trained search dog to traverse. Many of the avalanche paths have multiple start zones and unconfined run out zones which results in many of the avalanches overlapping. There are very few safe areas to escape the potential risk of exposure from additional avalanches while searching.

In 1992 the helicopter mounted rescue technique was developed to reduce the risk of exposure to searchers and optimise the time available to effect a rescue. An avalanche transceiver is secured to the front of the helicopter skid and connected to an earphone, which the pilot wears. The helicopter flies quickly over the avalanche deposit once the signal is received the pilot despatches the on board SAR crew to define the search area and locate the victim. The helicopter remains close to the area to enable the searchers to be extricated in the event of further avalanche activity.

The benefit of this technique is the small number of personnel required to search and the low level exposure to the team combined with the expediency of which the area can be searched.

Poster Title: Japanese Traditional Avalanche Rescue and Weather Forecasting
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