

NEW METHOD FOR CLASSIFICATION OF AVALANCHE PATHS WITH RISKS

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After the Chamonix-Montroc avalanche event in February 1999, the French Ministry of the environment wanted to engage a new examination of the "sensitive avalanche paths", i.e. sites with stakes (in particular habitat) whose operation cannot be apprehended in a simple way. The ordered objective consisted in establishing a tool, a method, making it possible to identify them and to treat on a hierarchical basis them according to the risk which they generate, helping after the risk management (zoning, protection, alert, help).

The proposed tool is based only on objective and quantifiable criteria, with relatively fast access (less than 1 hour per path). These criteria are gathered in 4 groups : vulnerability concerned, the morphology of the site, known avalanche history, snow-climatology. Each criterion selected is affected by a " weight ", according to the group to which it belongs and relatively compared to the others. Thus this tool makes it possible to classify the sites subjected in a three dangerousness levels grid, which are :

- low sensitivity : a priori, the site does not deserve a particular avalanche study ;
- doubtful sensitivity : the site can deserve a study specifying the avalanche risk ;
- strong sensitivity : the site deserves a thorough study of the avalanche risk.

Less than one ten percent of the whole paths will be in a strong sensitivity.

To be recognized and used under good conditions, this tool was worked out by the search for a consensus of French experts in avalanches. This group supported its thought and its proposal on a series of practical tests. It looks easy to use the tool in others countries. The French avalanche paths, getting a piece of vulnerability, will be checked in summer and autumn 2002.

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