AN ANALYSIS ON THE EFFICIENCY OF AVALANCHE VICTIM SEARCH
AND ITS CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Manuel Genswein, Rob Whelan and John R. Bezzola

ABSTRACT: A standardised avalanche rescue scenario with four buried victims representing one multiple burial problem with three victims in close proximity and a deep burial problem apart of this situation has been solved by over a hundred mountain guides. Several formalized criteria of their search process, like "recognizing the proper amount of victims", "systematic probing" or "systematic area search" have been numerically rated which lead to a systematic index value. Depending on the importance of a certain criteria for the entire search process, it has been weighed differently compared to the other variables.

The analysis of the results show a clear relation between the ability to conduct a systematic search and the success measured as the individual and overall search time.

The participants had to answer a few questions prior and after their search. The pre and post confidence level of each mountain guide has been numerically rated. Like experts in other fields, as well mountain guides seem to overestimate their abilities. Furthermore the influence of age, years of experience and mentality was analyzed. The set of recommendations based on the experience of this exercise mainly focuses on four points: 1: the importance of a systematic approach; 2: a good balance between search speed and precision 3: a continuous analysis of the burial scenario; 4: efficient use of the probe.

Looking at an individual result, the search time represents only a value of a single try; the systematic index value however, represents a generally valid rating for the capability of the mountain guide to solve similar search problems in a systematic and therefore efficient manner.

Objective test situations represent an important self controlling mechanism. It is however very important that the participants do not feel offended and do clearly benefit form individual coaching by the test leaders during and after the exercise. The personal results were therefore only accessible to the specific guide where as an anonymous result chart allowed comparison within the peer group.

Corresponding author address:

Manuel Genswein
General Willestr. 375
CH - 8706 Meilen
Switzerland
+41 (0) 79 236 36 76
manuel@genswein.com