

BEYOND THE GO / NO GO DECISION MAKING PARADIGM

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ABSTRACT: Avalanche education courses and publications for backcountry travelers traditionally present decision-making processes in the context of whether or not to proceed into selected avalanche terrain, typically defined as: “Go” versus “No Go.” The juncture during a tour where this decision must be made is often referred to as a “Go/No Go point.”

This educational concept has inherent limitations, specifically when:

- The Go/No Go decision is less clearly definable, and
- The people making the decisions are more compelled to travel in specific terrain.

Go/No Go terminology implies that there are only two available options, when in fact there are usually many alternatives from which to choose. Students should be taught to make terrain choices before, and throughout, any given tour, rather than to make critical decisions at Go/No Go points. It is at these points where human factors tend to override prudent decision making. More successful decision making occurs when multiple Go options are developed in advance than when a Go/No Go decision suddenly presents itself.

This paper outlines a teachable decision making alternative to the Go/No Go paradigm. Rather than asking “whether or not” to go into selected terrain, this framework places emphasis on terrain selection, or “where” to go. Terrain selection is based on an analysis of three criteria:

- Relevant observations in each data class,
- The tour plan, and
- The human factors within the group.

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