

Avalanche risk reduction in the continental climate: how to implement an effective boot packing program

Karen R. Sahn

Aspen Skiing Company, Aspen, CO, USA

Ski resorts in the continental climate are challenged with safely opening steep terrain early season. Providing a skiable product with timeliness correlates to increased revenue and maximizing profit. In the Rocky Mountains, a faceted, shallow snow cover prone to avalanching is typical. To retain snow, avalanche risk reduction methods such as boot packing are critical. Over the past 20 years, the Aspen Highlands Ski Area, located in central Colorado, has successfully developed a preseason program to address such problems. Implementing a boot compaction program improves both snow stability and quality of skiing. A successful packing operation requires extensive man hours and depends on outside assistance along with ski patrol personnel. This paper illustrates how other ski areas can benefit from a "Packing for Passes" program providing guidelines on organization, packer safety, logistics and cost .