

ALASKASNOW

A PRACTITIONERS' EXCHANGE FORUM

Peter E. Carter *, Sarah A. Carter

ABSTRACT: AlaskaSnow.org is the avalanche practitioners' exchange forum in the Alaska Chugach region using the Avert Online Snow Science Systems.

KEYWORDS: online data sharing

1. INTRODUCTION

AlaskaSnow* hosts two of three online public avalanche bulletins in Alaska. The Valdez and Cordova avalanche bulletins include rating snowpack stability and danger. The web page posts stored online data, snowpack profiles from the Valdez and Cordova avalanche offices, archived snowpack profiles, online weather stations, web cameras, science papers, maps, forms, charts, scales, and tables.

AlaskaSnow supports the sharing of avalanche, snow, and weather observations between avalanche professionals in the Valdez and Cordova Chugach.

2. AVALANCHE INDUSTRY STANDARD

The first of three goals of AlaskaSnow is to improve safety for the various commercial operations and Department of Transportation via a standardized data collection system.

The American Avalanche Association, the Canadian Avalanche Association (CAA), and government agencies including the US Forest Service define the standards.

Case law (Scurfield v. Cariboo Helicopter Skiing, 1993) and regulatory bodies like the British Columbia (BC)

* *Corresponding author address:* Peter E. Carter, State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Valdez, AK, USA 99686-0507; tel: 907-835-3602; fax 907-835-5428; email: peter.carter@alaska.gov

Workers' Compensation Board and the BC Coroner support the performance of observations at the avalanche industry standard.

It is argued a significant part of "performing at the industry standard" now includes the sharing of snowpack stability information between operations. The CAA InfoEx grew from a desire to share snowpack stability information within relevant climate regions.

3. THE CHUGACH OPERATORS

The operations include the State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities avalanche programs at Thompson Pass and Cordova, the Valdez Avalanche Center, the City of Cordova, the Cordova Electric Cooperative, and, with varying degrees of participation, four of the six heli-ski operations in the region. The Valdez Avalanche Center comprises members of the City of Valdez Fire Rescue, Valdez Snowmachine Club, Mt. Eyak ski patrol, and backcountry guides.

4. SHARING INFORMATION

The second goal of AlaskaSnow is the sharing of snowpack and avalanche observations. While implementation of such a system has been attempted in the past, obstacles included extensive development, setup, and training time needed to create a system internally.

The avalanche industry standard is evolving rapidly. The main reason for sharing avalanche information is seeing the big picture and getting one's own forecast right. The other reason for regular

systematic sharing of information among peers in the avalanche forecasting community is the maintenance and improvement of requisite professional skills. The industry standard is developed through peer review of techniques used to establish conclusions about snowpack stability.

5. DATA QUALITY

The third goal of AlaskaSnow is to improve the quality and range of data collection, the ability to analyze these data for current and historical purposes, and to utilize these data for training purposes.

Data gathered systematically becomes valuable for research. Research outcomes are more reliable with increased data collection points.

6. ACHIEVING THE GOALS

The three goals of AlaskaSnow are improving safety, sharing information and accessing quality data. It was determined that using a commercial system, Avert Snow Science Systems online platform, could achieve these goals and allow AlaskaSnow to function from the outset of the 2007-2008 avalanche season.

The system was implemented and available from the AlaskaSnow site in less than a few hours. Members of the community were impressed with the immediacy, completeness, and clear presentation of data. Practitioners were able to enter and validate their data quickly and efficiently. The ease of use allowed data recorders and observers more time to evaluate their data and to generate reports and charts for internal and public usage.

7. SUMMARY

AlaskaSnow provides avalanche professionals in the Alaska Chugach range a forum to share snowpack information. Useful quality data sharing is made easier and standardized by utilizing the Avert platform.

Future directions include development of a pure SWAG version and enhanced forecasting and advisory tools.