

Dear readers. At the invitation of President Alpenverein Villach, Mr. Dr. Karl Pallasmann I prepared a short article. I described Avalanche awareness days in Slovenia, which performed for years in January. My name is Klemen Volontar and I live in Mojstrana. I am a mountaineering and mountain rescue techniques instructor, and nonprofessional mountain guide UIAA. I still actively climbing, guiding interesting excursions in the Julian Alps and twice a year trekking in Nepal. On my website www.volontar.net you can see my other activities.



With respect, Klemen Volontar



Avalanche awareness days in Slovenia

HISTORY

Avalanche awareness days in Slovenia have been introduced in 1975.

The primary intention of this kind of education was, before all, to enable mountain rescuers for secure rescue activities in the mountains in winter conditions and for rescue in case of snow avalanche accidents.

Later on it became evident, that the mountain rescuers are well acquainted with and properly qualified for winter – mountaineering as well as to rescue people buried in snow avalanches.

The findings of the mountain rescuers were, that this topics should be presented to public: mountaineers, back-country skiers and alpinists.

From the beginning the participation was rather modest, but by sustained efforts a greater interest of the public for this activities has been achieved.

Between 1995 and 2005 there have been two performances each year. One by the Avalanche commission Mountain rescue Association of Slovenia and the other one by Mountain Rescue Service Station Prevalje, following the same curriculum.

PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

- to qualify mountaineers, alpinists and back-country skiers for safe exercise in the mountains in winter conditions
- to make mountaineers, alpinists and back-country skiers familiar with winter mountain dangers and, before all with avalanches
- to qualify individuals for due precautions in case of an avalanche accident
- to execute rescue by technical means and rescue by improvised tools as well

EDUCATION THEMES

THEORETICAL THEMES

- weather phenomena and formation of snow
- formation and types of snow avalanches
- rescue by survivors
- first aid to avalanche victims
- avalanche rescue by organized rescue team



Participants are faced with detailed presentations of dangers, prevention, equipment and procedures in case of accident

PRACTICAL THEMES I

- application of rescue beacons (electronic search – transceivers) : Ortovox, Pieps, Barryvox, Tracker ...)
- application of RECCO search – system
- snow profile and hardness test of snow cover
- probing (coarse, fine)



Each topic is first presented theoretically, followed by practical tasks in natural environment

PRACTICAL THEMES II

- moving on an avalanche slope
- use of ice-axe and crampons
- use of avalanche beacon (transceiver search)
- use of avalanche probe
- use of auxilliary (improvised) sounding tools (ski, ski-pole ...)
- demonstration of organised rescue

PRACTICAL THEMES III

- search with avalanche dog
- use of avalanche beacon - methods of search
- use of avalanche probe - methods of search
- digging out the victim from an avalanche
- first aid to the victim of avalanche





Organized rescue presented during guided tour.

A few times, before the year of 95, there was more instructors than participants. But incidents and our persistence brought changes.

STATISTICAL DATA

In the period 1975 - 1995 the number of participants was about 5 – 35 per season

CRUCIAL WAS THE WINTER SEASON 1995/1996, WHEN

some accidents of well known alpinists with big reputation and experience in Himalayas happened, the number of participants increased to about 200 per season.

In Slovenia there are on average 10 avalanche accidents with about 2 victims in snow avalanches par Season. Members of the Mountain Rescue Service of Slovenia perform 2 – 3 avalanche rescue actions times in season, whilst in all other avalanche accidents the action of fellow travellers is essential for survival of the victims.

The real number of these cases is unknown.

It must be ascertained that just in these last cases the presence of mind and ability of mountaineers, alpinists and back-country skiers is most essential and that participation on an Avalanche Awareness Day – performance is the proper source, where one can get the appropriate knowledge.



Years after the tragical accident (Mojstrovka – 1995) of two of our collages, known alpinists people became aware that the only way to be safer and to know how to help in case of accident is to be prepared!

Estimated number of participants in the last years is more than 2000. And that is a pretty good number for Slovenia.

Klemen Volontar, Mojstrana, Slovenia