Avalanche accidents in Italy
Season 2014-2015

Livigno 20 January 2015
winter 2014-2015 italian Alps - summary:

• strong wind for long periods
• below 2000 m: low amount of snow
• above 2000 m: snowfalls on average but irregular snowcover (eroded/accumulations)
avalanche danger:

- winter not critical for spontaneous avalanches
- very critical for skiers/mountaineers:
  - extraordinarily long period (between January and February) with **deep persistent slab** along all the Alps
  - low probability to trigger but big consequences;
    hard to communicate effectively to the public
    (risk to cry “wolf”)

Avalanche victims in Italy 1986-2015

In Italy on average (linear media) 19 persons die every year in avalanche fatalities.
Avalanche fatalities in Italy 1986-2015

In Italy on average there are 14 avalanche fatalities each season.
Victims in Italy by Regions
season 2014/2015
Avalanche accidents rate by category in Italy 2014-2015
Avalanche victims by category 2014-2015

30 victims:

18 backcountry skiing (10 ascent, 8 descent)
9 off piste skiing/heliskiing
2 mountaineering
1 snowshoeing
Problems highlighted in this season:

- many accidents in which several people were caught at the same time:
  - 3 accidents with 6 persons caught
  - 1 accident with 5 persons caught
  - 5 accidents with 4 people caught
  - Self rescue inefficient or impossible
  - Hard work for rescue team

- 4 heliski serious accidents in Aosta valley, Piemont and Lombardia
  - with 3 dead and 4 injured
Problems highlighted in this season:

- Several people deployed airbag but totally buried, because:
  - slope too short
  - airbag balloons destroyed or backpack airbag disconnected from the person

2 accidents with people without beacon, shovel and probe:

- 6 local backcountry skiers caught: 1 without beacon
- Suiss family snowshoeing, all without beacon: 1 caught and dead;
Mont Blanc – Aiguilles Marbrées
23 January 2015

Giant’s tooth

ski tracks

45°

40°
about 30 ski tracks (morning and yesterday evening)
deep persistent slab
airbag broken found 100 m further down of the skier buried
8 February 2015

Avalanche length max 2300 m

Thickness of accumulation 4-6 m

Helicopter crashed
1 USA skier caught: deploy airbag, partially buried, uninjured.
1 USA snowboarder caught: airbag not deployed, totally buried, injured
Companion rescue (USA and FR mountain guides)

strong wind during landing

Mont Blanc
deep persistent slab

Helicopter crashed
Rescue:
10 companions + 22 rescuers

Rescue helicopter arrived after 10’.
buried extracted dead after 1h50’

deep persistent slab + terrain trap = depth buried 7 m
Schneespitze accident – 06 January 2015

more than 35 people on the track

before the avalanche…

hard wind accumulation
Schneespitze accident – 06 January 2015

6 local skiers caught, 2 buried and dead (1 without beacon)

Secondary avalanche

3 people sitting in a pass: 2 caught and buried. Successful companions rescue

A lot of people in the area: big rescue operation with some elicopters and more than 100 rescuers.
Schneespitze accident – 06 January 2015

before

after
15 heliskiers start h 10.00
Conditions: t -8°C; wind moderate
25-30 cm of fresh snow in the last 3 days
3 skiers caught: 2 dead and 1 injured
1 skier open airbag but balloons exploded during the slide (600 vertical meters)
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