

Summary of the work meeting of the IKAR Commission for Avalanche Rescue in January 2004 on the Diavolezza, Switzerland

Some 70 participants from 13 different countries followed the presentations and practical work outdoors. Various organisations from the Alpine countries contributed to the proceedings.

The Chairman of the IKAR Commission on Avalanche Rescue and the host organisation (SAC Switzerland) thanked the participants for the great interest shown, the high quality of the contributions made, the comradeship displayed and the efficient cooperation between all parties.

The following topics were covered:

- New probing strategies (France and Italy);
- avalanche markers and rescue equipment in pre-packed bags and backpacks (France and Italy);
- key considerations when digging out buried avalanche victims (Switzerland);
- safety precautions to be taken in avalanche dog training exercise areas (Austria and Switzerland);
- search strategy with the Recco equipment when simultaneous probing is done on the avalanche field (Switzerland)
- search strategies using rescue beacons or electronic transceivers with more than two avalanche victims (manufacturers: Mammut/Barryvox, Ortovox, Tracker);
- helicopter searches using rescue beacons, electronic transceivers and RECCO systems (Switzerland).

The contributions by Italy and France on organised avalanche search and rescue strategies, especially new procedures for probing and for marking the accident site, were extremely clear and helpful, comprising of short presentations followed by practical demonstrations (see the enclosed documentation).

In the key discussion about uniform marking of the avalanche site, all the national representatives reached agreement on the following points:

- Fixing new probe insertion points (avalanche probe supported on the shoulder) before moving or stepping forward was generally considered good practice.
- The uniform choice of basic colours used in avalanche cones in many IKAR countries are as follows: yellow (periphery), red (probed area) and blue (entrance track(s) and markers of located objects and victims' positions). The individual countries concerned select and use their own additional colours to mark areas searched using avalanche dogs, beacons or transceivers, RECCO systems and other search equipment.

Decision: The IKAR Commission on Avalanche Rescue should draft a recommendation based on the jointly reached solutions. That recommendation should be ready to be put to the vote at the next General Meeting.

The avalanche marking and rescue equipment in pre-packed bags and backpacks was presented by representatives from France and Italy on a 1:1 basis (see enclosed

documentation). The bags and equipment can be purchased from other organisations at any time. The President will gladly pass on contact details. (An enquiry regarding contact details as a link to the IKAR website is taken into consideration by the IKAR Board).

In modern avalanche rescue medicine, a top priority is the assessment of the size of available breathing space or air pocket of completely buried victims. The further care offered to the patient(s) will depend largely on a clear answer to that question. Both, the presentation by Dr L. Campell (Switzerland) and the field demonstration, were highly informative (see enclosed documentation).

Accidents and near-accidents when burying people for avalanche dog training exercises prompted the people responsible for training avalanche dogs in Austria and Switzerland to set specific rules. The theory behind these guidelines, which now applies in both countries, were presented, followed by a practical demonstration (see enclosed documentation).

A survey of all the national representatives attending the meeting revealed their unanimous support for the adoption of these guidelines by IKAR's Commission for Avalanche Rescue. These guidelines should be used as the basis for a recommendation. That recommendation should be put to the vote at the next General Meeting.

In the field the search strategy with the Recco equipment was demonstrated when simultaneous probing was done on the avalanche field. The searcher with the Recco equipment places himself in front or behind of probing-group and examines possible signals on his track away from the group. This procedure can also be done with avalanche dog teams and/or with searchers with beacons. The strategy needs a good arrangement and co-operation on the avalanche field - and this should always be the case.

The task set by the organiser to present and explain 'search strategies in cases where there are several buried avalanche victims' (i.e. more than two) resulted in proposals of different procedures depending on the manufacture of the avalanche beacon.

The general wish expressed in the plenary session was that manufacturers should stick to the procedure that is easiest to learn for trainees (see enclosed documentation).

The REGA/SAC (Switzerland) strategy for using beacons and Recco systems from airborne (by helicopter) to search for completely buried avalanche victims was the subject of a short PowerPoint presentation. Unfortunately, gathering fog prevented the helicopter team, which had flown in specially, from proceeding with their practical demonstration (see enclosed documentation).

Diavolezza, January 2004
Chairman of the IKAR Commission on Avalanche Rescue
Hans-Jürg Etter