2026 ICAR Congress – Innsbruck, AT

Avalanche Rescue Commission Final Report

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The Avalanche Rescue Commission met at the 2026 ICAR Congress in Innsbruck, Austria, October 6–10, hosted by Austrian Mountain Rescue (ÖBRD), with about 60 participants in each session. Many thanks to Vice Presidents Claudio Artoni and Mike Koppang for their work in preparing and running this year's program.

Presentations cleared for sharing are available on the ICAR website.

Practical Day – Seegrube, October 7

Held at Seegrube (1,900 m) in clear weather. Members worked within the commission in the morning, then rotated through other commissions' workshops in the afternoon.



The Avalanche Rescue Commission at Seegrube, with the cable car station and rescue helicopters behind.

- **Deep burial search and recovery:** transceiver search for deep burials.
- **RECCO train-the-trainers:** how to focus your team's RECCO training.
- **Teaching avalanche response:** new ways to think about training avalanche response.
- **ÖBRD case walkthrough:** a real avalanche case presented on site.

A helicopter demonstration was held at midday, and the Welcome Ceremony followed that evening.



Instructors explaining a station setup on the Seegrube meadow.



Transceiver search practice on the training field.


GORSKI
REŠEVALEC
MOUNTAIN RESCUE

Delegates from several countries comparing a transceiver reading.

Recommendations

Both revised recommendations were adopted at the Delegates' Assembly on October 10:

- **AVA-REC0003** Marking of locations on an avalanche site
- **AVA-REC00012** Incident Command/Operations Section for avalanche response

Country Reports 2025/26

Nine countries reported 172 avalanche fatalities in total.

- **Austria** (Chris Riepl, ÖBRD): 33 fatalities against a 10-year average of 16; case: Die Mute, Kühtai.
- **Canada** (Avalanche Canada): 13 fatalities (average 10.4), mostly persistent slabs; snowmobiling prominent.
- **France** (Fred Jarry, ANENA): 35 fatalities (average 21.7); case: La Rivine road avalanche, Valloire.
- **Italy** (Davide Rossi, Meteomont; Stefano Pivot, AINEVA): 40 fatalities; rising trend linked to poor practice, overtourism and climate change.
- **Japan** (Tomoaki Fujimura): 4 fatalities; case: inbound wet slab at Madarao Ski Resort, 4 injured.
- **Norway** (Jan Peder Hoggen, Norwegian Red Cross): 3 deaths, 79 caught; cases from Hemsedal and a group of 13 who all survived.
- **Slovenia** (Petr Novotny, GRS): 3 fatalities in one pre-season avalanche on Tosc, October 2025.
- **Switzerland** (Benjamin Zweifel, Matthias Gerber, SLF): danger levels and avalanche problems; 266 destructive avalanches.
- **United States** (Heiko Stopsack, Stephanie Jones, MRA): 23 fatalities; case: Perry Peak, California, 9 killed in a guided group.



A commission session in Saal Grenoble during the Congress.

Case Studies and Topic Presentations

- **Multi-modal search in Kozia Dolina** (TOPR: Marcin Józefowicz, Andrzej Górka, Jakub Hornowski): NeoSoft phone search plus probing found a subject under 4 m of snow when transceiver, dog and RECCO searches failed.
- **Rendl avalanche, St. Anton** (ÖBRD): incident command of the response.
- **Live recovery after 1.5 hours** (ARS): a subject recovered alive after a long burial.
- **AVA accident reporting** (Andrea Dotta, Swiss Alpine Rescue): the Swiss approach to reporting avalanche accidents.
- **Norwegian Red Cross avalanche cards** (Jan Peder Hoggen, Kjetil Åsland Nevøy): 40 years of the cards; new 2026 version now in English.

- **GIS-based multiscale avalanche risk assessment** (Davide Rossi, Meteomont): combining satellite, field, drone and model data to reconstruct the Valgussera avalanche.
- **Digital snow and avalanche tools** (Jan-Thomas Fischer, ÖGSL): snow profiling, snow cover and avalanche modeling, and ATES maps.
- **ISSW 2026 debrief** (Stephanie Thomas, Mike Koppang, Jakub Hornowski): highlights for rescue practice.
- **A3 Pro Rescue and Pro AvSAR courses** (Jen Reddy, A3): professional rescue training pathways.
- **Joint sessions** with DOG, MED, TER and AIR: drones and the RECCO drone detector, hypothermic cardiac arrest, transceiver interference, rescuer and dog-handler cooperation.

Panel Discussion

The panel on rescuer safety, stress and decisions agreed that rescuer safety comes before mission success. Panelists shared cases where teams could not respond or could do nothing for the subject, including a no-go call made while the subject was believed to be alive. Peer support systems and structured tools, such as a green-red stress chart, have improved debriefing and help team members ask for help. Teams also described checking members′ readiness before winter and limiting who goes on early-season callouts.

Discussion covered bias traps and underestimating runout. Go/no-go decisions are among the most stressful a rescuer faces, and saying "I′m not coming" is especially hard. Two themes emerged: boundaries, meaning when to call a no-go, and culture, making it normal to talk about the emotions those calls leave behind. Teams have tools to guide a debrief but none for go/no-go decisions, and the panel called for training incident commanders to run debriefs.

Working Groups

- **Group 1:** finalized this year′s two recommendations, AVA-REC0003 and AVA-REC00012, for adoption.
- **Group 2:** reviewed existing recommendations, with four to revise and two proposed for cancellation, and started a best practice database.

- **Group 3:** looked ahead to a fatality database partner, a statement on risk-assessment tools, recurring competencies and cross-commission work.

Closing

The 2027 general topic is "Decision Certainty Under Uncertainty: Go, No Go and When to Stop". The commission will continue at its monthly meetings and see everyone in Romania next year.

Special thanks to all the instructors, presenters and participants who made this year's program a success.

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Thank you.