

News from EAWS, August 2018

EAWS introduce a standard for typical avalanche problems and changes the names of avalanche sizes and the wording of the European avalanche danger scale.

1. Introduction

- EAWS (European Avalanche Warning Services) is a union of public Avalanche Warning Services in Europe. EAWS has 28 members from 16 countries, and liaise with USA and Canada. The members are preventing the loss of lives and damages due to avalanches by providing the society with efficient and effective avalanche forecasting and warning services.
- EAWS is updating their standards prior to the 2018-2019 winter season, based on decisions from the 2017 General Assembly. All information is available on the web site www.avalanches.org. The updates are:
 - A new standard: Typical avalanche problems
 - Change of names for avalanche sizes, which implies:
 - Modification of the wording of the European Avalanche Danger Scale
 - Corresponding adaptation of all avalanche warning and forecasting products

2. New standard: Typical avalanche problems

- Five avalanche problems are used
 - New snow
 - Wind-drifted snow
 - Persistent weak layer
 - Wet snow
 - Gliding snow
- The use of these avalanche problems will increase the effectiveness of avalanche warnings and avalanche education
 - The avalanche problems aim to describe typical hazards as they occur in avalanche terrain and to support avalanche professionals and recreationists in their evaluation of the avalanche hazard
 - The avalanche problems complement the danger level and the danger locations (slope aspect and elevation) in the avalanche warnings

3. Change of names for avalanche sizes

- The avalanches sizes are categorized into five categories. The changes are (new names in red)

- Size 1 is renamed **Small (sluff)** (previously “Harmless/sluff”)
 - Size 2 is renamed **Medium** (previously “Small”)
 - Size 3 is renamed **Large** (previously “Medium”)
 - Size 4 is renamed **Very large** (previously “Large”)
 - Size 5 is renamed **Extremely large** (previously “Very large”)
- The changes are meant to improve the effectiveness of avalanche warnings and avalanche education
 - Today, most fatalities are from backcountry travel and off-piste skiing. Size 2 and 3 avalanches are typically fatal for these groups. In some languages, the names “Small” and “Medium” were considered too harmless and did not communicate the danger well. They were not intuitive to backcountry users and called at least one category larger. Shifting the size names, but not the size numbers, significantly improves the communication with and within the user groups having most fatalities. The definition of the danger levels doesn’t change at all
 - Size 5 avalanches occur very seldom and have exceptional dimensions. “Extremely large” is a better name for this size.
 - The change affects the wording in the description of the *avalanche triggering probability* in the European Avalanche Danger Scale (new names in red), nothing else:
 - 5 Very high
 - Numerous **very large** and often **extremely large** natural avalanches can be expected, even in moderately steep terrain.
 - 4 High
 - Triggering is likely even from low additional loads on many steep slopes. In some cases, numerous **large** and often **very large** natural avalanches can be expected.
 - 3 Considerable
 - Triggering is possible even from low additional loads particularly on the indicated steep slopes. In some cases **large**, in isolated cases **very large** natural avalanches are possible.
 - 2 Moderate
 - Triggering is possible primarily from high additional loads, particularly on the indicated steep slopes. **Very large** natural avalanches are unlikely.
 - 1 Low
 - Triggering is generally possible only from high additional loads in isolated areas of very steep, extreme terrain. Only **small** and **medium** natural avalanches are possible.

4. Implementation guidelines

- EAWS members shall strive to implement the new standards starting from the winter season 2018-2019. In the case of the avalanche size, the change will occur simultaneously for all avalanche services starting from the winter season 2018-2019 included. The adoption of the typical avalanche problems will be as widespread as possible using icons and text

- EAWS calls on all organisations and individuals involved in the management of avalanche risk – professionally, recreationally or educationally – to use the new standards from the winter season 2018-2019
- You find the new standards on the web site www.avalanches.org from autumn 2018
- For further information, please contact one of the EAWS members in your country
- Change is necessary to improve. These changes and new standards came out of the common work of a large number of avalanche professionals in the EAWS and its members.
- By using the new standards in all communications, mountain organizations and practitioners will help the avalanche community to reduce the number of avalanche victims and damages
- EAWS communicate this information to ICAR, IFMGA, UIAA and WMO
- EAWS members communicate this update to all relevant stakeholders in their countries (national, regional and local authorities and organisations, e.g. rescue, military, civil defence, research, education, companies, ski resorts)

5. About the European Avalanche Warning Services (EAWS)

- The primary purpose of EAWS is to support its Members in preventing the loss of lives and damages due to avalanches by providing the society with efficient and effective avalanche forecasting and warning services
- EAWS is an international collaboration
 - EAWS is a union of public Avalanche Warning Services in Europe
 - 28 members from 16 countries, we liaise with USA and Canada
 - Bi-annual General Assemblies (next will be in Oslo in June 2019)
 - Development and standardization by a Technical Advisory Board coordinated by Thomas Stucki, SLF, for the term 2017-2019
 - EAWS is chaired by Rune Engeset, NVE, for the term 2017-2019
 - Members are listed on Avalanches.org
- Read more on www.avalanches.org.