

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AVALANCHE EXPERTS AND RECREATIONALISTS

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The differences between avalanche experts and novices have long been cited as a key issue in designing effective avalanche education, yet few investigations have quantitatively explored these differences. In this study, we sought to determine the differences and similarities of avalanche experts and winter recreationalists in terms of training, knowledge, skills, and behaviors. From 2002 to 2004, we surveyed 150 avalanche professionals (North American) and 150 winter recreationalists (western US). Through a self administered questionnaire, we gathered information on demographics, risk taking, experience, training, involvement in avalanches, knowledge of someone killed, seeking feedback about stable and unstable conditions, reviewing of prior experiences, frequency of carrying rescue gear, use and importance of avalanche bulletins, and ranking of signs of instability and stability. The data between experts and recreationalists was compared with a number of statistical analyses. One hundred and sixty-one responses were received (experts, 91; and recreationalists, 70). Differences between avalanche experts and recreationalists were statistically significant in numerous survey points. Surprising was the similarity by experts and recreationalists ranking signs of instability and stability. However, recreationalists seemed more often confused about the importance of the observations signs. Avalanche experts and recreationalists are different in how they experience and learn about avalanches and avalanche dangers. The experts not only "know of" avalanches but "know that" about avalanches because of their personal experience with avalanches. The results presented here may prove helpful in designing avalanche education that bridges the gap between simply teaching avalanche theory and imparting the lessons gained through many seasons of experience in avalanche terrain.

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