

Avalanche Hazard Evaluation Checklist

The interrelationship of four critical variables -- terrain, weather, snowpack, and human -- determines whether or not a potential avalanche hazard exists. Although these important variables are frequently changing, these changes are often detectable. Not only can critical information be observed, it can be measured, tested, evaluated, and acted upon. The bottom line is that our route selection and hazard evaluation decisions are only as good as the data we seek -- the primary causes of avalanche accidents are attitude and ignorance. Our attitude "filters" the data and warps it to our needs or desires. Our ignorance prevents us from seeking the answers before hand.

Warning: Using this checklist may save your life. Follow these simple steps: 1) Seek out critical data; 2) evaluate the potential level of hazard (red, green, yellow); 3) add a level of caution for the "unknown"; and 4) continually re-evaluate your situation without letting your attitude persuade you away from the facts.

CRITICAL DATA	HAZARD LEVEL*			ACTION	
PARAMETERS: KEY INFORMATION	G	Y	R	Go	No Go
TERRAIN: <i>Is the terrain capable of producing an avalanche?</i>					
Slope Angle (how steep, exposed?)	G	Y	R		
Slope Aspect (leeward, shadowed, or extremely sunny?)	G	Y	R		
Slope Configuration (smoothness, anchoring, and shape effect?)	G	Y	R		
Overall Effect	G	Y	R	Go	No Go
WEATHER: <i>Has the weather been contributing to instability?</i>					
Precipitation (added weight, stress?)	G	Y	R		
Wind (significant snow transport and deposition?)	G	Y	R		
Temperature (rapid/prolonged warming, weakening?)	G	Y	R		
Overall Effect	G	Y	R	Go	No Go
SNOWPACK: <i>Could the snow fail?</i>					
Slab Configuration (depth, distribution, and structure?)	G	Y	R		
Bonding Ability (nature and distribution of "tender" spots?)	G	Y	R		
Sensitivity to Force (shears easily, clues to instability evident?)	G	Y	R		
Overall Effect	G	Y	R	Go	No Go
HUMAN: <i>Could you be a trigger or a victim, and are you prepared for the consequences?</i>					
Attitude (toward life, risk, goals, data?)	G	Y	R		
Technical Skill Level (high/low, so what?)	G	Y	R		
Physical and Mental Ability (tired, weak, strong?)	G	Y	R		
Appropriate Equipment (prepared for the worst?)	G	Y	R		
Overall Effect	G	Y	R	Go	No Go
DECISION/ACTION: <i>Do better alternatives exist?</i>					
Go/No go: why? (What assumptions are you making?)	G	Y	R	Go	No Go

*HAZARD LEVEL SYMBOLS: Think of data as being red, green, or yellow lights. G = Green light (go, OK), Y = Yellow light (caution, potentially dangerous), R = Red (Stop/Dangerous).

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