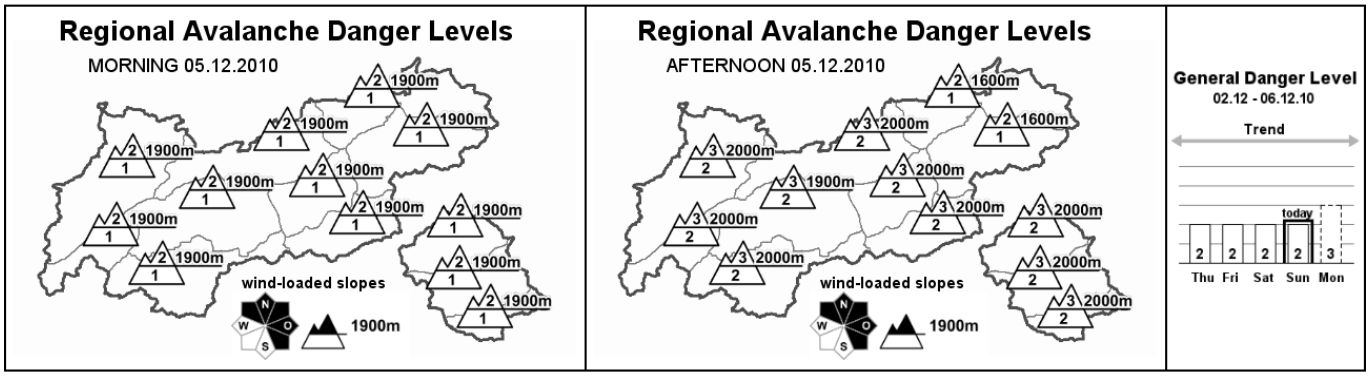
Avalanche Bulletin

of the Avalanche Warning Service Tyrol

Sunday, 05.12.2010, at 07:30



Winds causing new snowdrift masses - Avalanche danger escalating at high altitudes

AVALANCHE DANGER

The avalanche danger is increasing somewhat again; by this afternoon at latest it will reach danger level 3 (considerable) in many high altitude regions. This is due to the ever stronger winds which are transporting the very loosely packed, cold, new fallen snow. Freshly formed snowdrift accumulations, occurring frequently in western to northern to southeastern exposition, are prone to triggering in steep terrain; even minimum additional loading can unleash slab avalanches. If visibility is adequate, however, such snowdrift masses, which occur primarily in areas adjacent to ridge lines as well as in gullies and bowls, can be easily recognized. Older snowdrift, on the other hand, particularly near ridge lines, is harder to make out, since it has now been blanketed over with fresh fallen snow. To trigger such accumulations in very steep terrain, large additional loading is usually necessary. In shady, very steep high alpine regions, the snowpack can be triggered from a layer of depth hoar near the ground, particularly in transitions from shallow to deep snow. Because of the rise in temperatures, full depth snowslides on steep, grass covered slopes will occur more frequently.

SNOW LAYERING

The decisive factor currently is the increasing velocity of the wind. It is transporting great masses of snow. Moreover, the bonding of the very cold new fallen snow to the snowdrift masses being currently deposited atop it is poor, making it ever more possible for a single backcountry ski tourer or freerider to trigger it. In addition, the rise in temperature is causing the uppermost layers of snowdrift to consolidate, thus increasing the tension of the surface snow. Inside the older snowdrift masses, the layer of loosely packed, in some places faceted snow over a rain crust embedded inside the snowpack could serve as a bed surface. In high alpine regions, often on glacial ice, there is also a layer of depth hoar near the ground which formed in autumn.

ALPINE WEATHER FORECAST (ZAMG-WEATHER SERVICE INNSBRUCK)

General weather: following yesterday's intermediate high, moist and mild air masses are moving towards the Alps from the west today. The high altitude air current will shift from westerly to southwesterly by tomorrow, the mild and moist air will continue to move into the Alpine regions. Mountain weather today: rising temperatures in the mountains. Visibility is diffuse, making it difficult to recognize the contours of the snow. Over the course of the day, the higher summits will increasingly become shrouded in clouds. In foehn-exposed areas, a strong westerly to southwesterly wind will be blowing. Temperature at 2000 m: minus 4 degrees; at 3000 m: minus 9 degrees.

SHORT TERM DEVELOPMENT

Snowdrift accumulations are still trigger-sensitive, particularly at high altitudes.

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