MOUNT WASHINGTON AVALANCHE CENTER

Avalanche Forecast for Thursday, January 31, 2019

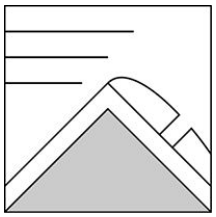
The Bottom Line

Frigid temperatures and wind will make for challenging travel while you sort through deep drifts, wind scoured ice and stubborn but potentially large wind slabs that exist in our forecast area. Wind has had time to build these wind slabs from the 14" of snow which has fallen in the past 36-48 hours. These slabs may be above a weak layer of soft snow and many will be resting on an icy bed surface. It will be possible for a climber or skier to trigger an avalanche today in steep, predominantly east facing, mid-elevation avalanche terrain which has **MODERATE** avalanche danger. While natural avalanches are unlikely today, it is not impossible as wind continues to move some snow and stress the slabs on steep slopes. Lower elevation areas may have some easily avoided areas of wind slab and have **LOW** avalanche danger. The icy snow surface that is exposed or barely covered creates the potential for a long sliding fall were new snow has been scoured away.

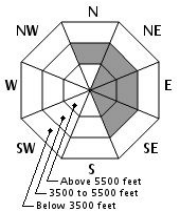
Mountain Weather

Two to three inches more snow fell yesterday and overnight. That brings the 48 hour total at east side snow study plots, as well as Gray Knob to 14", with only about half that amount captured in the precipitation can on the summit. Wind early yesterday shifted from the SE before becoming variable in the 35-45 mph range. It then shifted SW through the NW before settling into a W and WNW direction. West wind overnight increased to the 60-70 mph range. Expect cold temperatures and wind in the 50-70 mph range today. The current low temperature is -27 F and will remain in the -20's through today and overnight. High pressure will build in tonight with west wind approaching 100 mph, driving out snow showers that may deliver another inch of snow this afternoon.

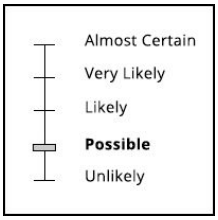
Primary Avalanche Problem



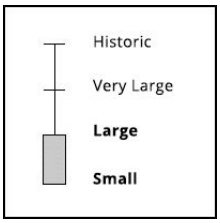
Wind Slab



Aspect/Elevation



Likelihood



Size

Recent snowfall and strong wind has created wind slabs in mostly east facing terrain as well as beneath steep terrain features. Crossloading of slopes and gullies is almost always a factor so be looking for accumulated snow behind natural drift fences like alpine trees and shrubs or behind small terrain features. Piles of sluff debris, such as develops beneath the first pitch of Pinnacle Gully and across the Headwall of Tuckerman, are the type of wind slabs that grow well beyond the amount of snow accumulated on the ground and produce larger than expected avalanches.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

The timing of recent snowfall, wind speed and direction make it likely that we passed through peak instability late yesterday or overnight. Reactive to touchy wind slabs were present during our field time early yesterday afternoon in Huntington Ravine though wind speeds had only reached into the 50 mph range on the summit for a few hours at that time. Wind speeds have ramped up quite a bit since that time and have likely blown most, but not all, available snow from the fetch. The icy crust that you may find in lower elevation or wind protected areas may be breakable with near-crust faceting that does not exist in most of our larger, mid-elevation avalanche terrain where the snow is either a knife hard mass to the ground or has the kind of bridging power that reduces deeper instability concerns to near zero for the time being.

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Please Remember: Safe travel in avalanche terrain requires training and experience. This forecast is just one of many decision making tools. You control your own risk by choosing where, when, and how you travel. Understand that the avalanche danger may change when actual weather differs from the weather forecast. For more information contact the Forest Service Snow Rangers, the AMC at the Pinkham Notch Visitor Center, or the caretakers at Hermit Lake Shelters or at the Harvard Cabin.