MOUNT WASHINGTON AVALANCHE CENTER

Avalanche Forecast for Wednesday, February 20, 2019

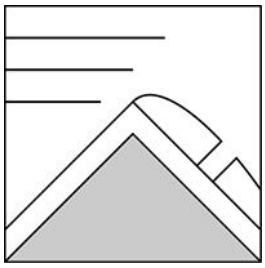
The Bottom Line

Wind slabs exist in many areas of our terrain. You'll likely find the largest of these wind slabs behind and below steep terrain features in east facing bowls and smaller slabs in sheltered areas of gullies on most aspects. A human-triggered avalanche yesterday in the Lower Snowfields is a reminder that these wind slabs are recently formed and may still be reactive. **MODERATE** avalanche danger exists throughout the range where wind loading has occurred due to the potential for a skier or climber to trigger a small to medium sized avalanche. There is the possibility that the weight of moving avalanche debris or a person loading just the right spot could trigger a larger avalanche in an older and more stubborn wind slab above the Feb. 8 crust. Wind scouring has removed surface snow and exposed the ice crust and old, stubborn wind slabs in many higher elevation areas and reduced avalanche hazard to **LOW** in places like the northern gullies in Huntington Ravine.

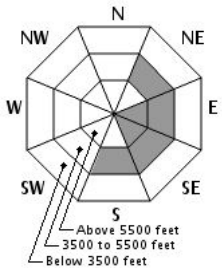
Mountain Weather

The 3" of light density new snow that fell Monday continued to be blown by strong WNW winds yesterday while temperatures remained in in the negative teens. Wind will diminish significantly through today to the 20-35 mph range with the temperature warming to 14F on the summit. Cloud cover will increase this afternoon ahead of another storm which should drop 3-6" of new snow by tomorrow with cold air and more upslope enhanced snow arriving afterwards.

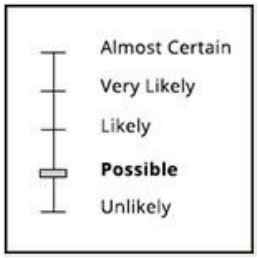
Primary Avalanche Problem



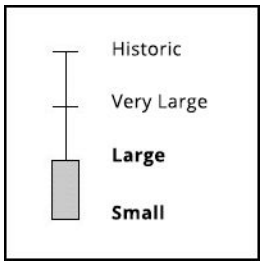
Wind Slab



Aspect/Elevation



Likelihood



Size

Wind slabs formed in the past 24-48 hours are the primary avalanche concern. These slabs have demonstrated a tendency to crack and fail in stability tests as well as in a recently reported human-triggered avalanche. Poor snowpack structure exists in many places with firmer wind slab over softer snow along with cold temperatures that slowed the bonding process. The reactive wind slabs that formed most recently will be difficult to distinguish from older, more stubborn wind slabs so evaluate terrain and snowpack carefully before committing to a slope.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

A useful rule of thumb for evaluating wind slab size holds that 1" of new snow can grow into a 3-5" slab. The 3" of new snow that fell Monday confirmed the accuracy of this rule of thumb. Tonight's 3-6" snowfall and the upslope snow to follow will likely confirm its accuracy as well. The higher wind speeds and large flat expanse above our large ravines creates excellent storage for new snow and, combined with the legendary Mount Washington winds, often allows us to exceed the 1:3-5 ratio of new snow to wind slab, especially in Tucks and Gulf of Slides. Unfortunately, our best skiing opportunities at mid and higher elevations frequently exist in this wind driven snow. Copious snowfall seems to be the norm this season and our alpine areas and avalanche paths are well filled in and smoothed out. Wind slabs are likely to continue to be a problem and the only reliable solution is to give this avalanche problem type a couple of days to heal and bond to layers beneath.

Join us for an avalanche awareness talk and season update in North Conway on Thursday! Details on our website events page.

Frank Carus, Snow Ranger; USDA Forest Service, White Mountain National Forest; (603)466-2713 TTY (603)466-2858

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.