MOUNT WASHINGTON AVALANCHE CENTER

Avalanche Forecast for Saturday, January 25, 2020

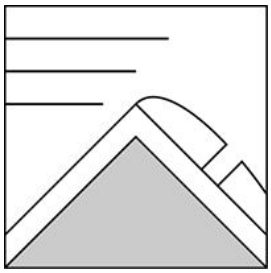
The Bottom Line

Avalanche concerns today lie within the wind slabs that formed between January 16 and 19. It is possible that a human could trigger an avalanche today as warm air continues to weaken the slab that has so far shown good stability despite a poor structure. Identifying features of concern (rollovers, unsupported wind slabs, edges and thin spots of the wind slab) and avoiding these and traveling one-at-a-time should provide safer travel. As the snow moistens, skier-induced sluff may entrain this snow, possibly greatly increasing the load on a wind slab and acting as the trigger for a weak spot. Avalanche danger is **MODERATE** today.

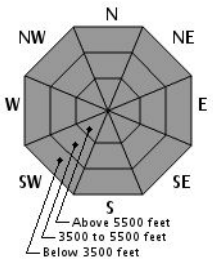
Mountain Weather

Much of the Presidential Range saw temperatures crest the freezing mark yesterday. Mild wind by local standards and partial cloud cover persisted through the day. A band of warm air at our mid-elevations has kept temperatures around 4000' above freezing last night. Lower elevations will likely transition to above freezing today. Precipitation is forecast to start around sunset. A mix of snow, sleet, and freezing rain is forecast, with low confidence about where the rain/snow line will be. Expect heavy precipitation tonight that should taper off tomorrow morning.

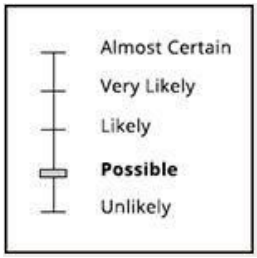
Primary Avalanche Problem



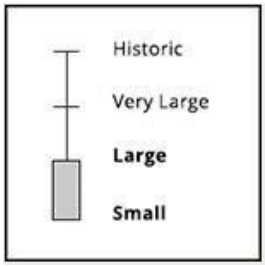
Wind Slab



Aspect/Elevation



Likelihood



Size

Wind slab bridging strength has been weakened by temperatures hovering around the freezing mark. Warming has penetrated some of the slab, but not far enough or long enough to increase stability. Continued warming today will lead to further weakening of this slab. Spatial variability of the depth of the slab makes this assessment much more difficult. Preplanning with your group to recognize the most likely places to trigger these wind slabs should aid in making safe travel easier and smoother.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

How long does a wind slab with an upside down structure have to persist before it changes into a persistent avalanche problem? Can this even happen or does it remain a wind slab that we continue to talk about LPHC (low probability, high consequence) avalanches being unlikely, but not impossible? We're starting to feel this way about the current avalanche problem. While we don't have a Bruce Tremper approved answer, the discussion surrounding the problem itself is the same. The melt/freeze crust that formed January 13 is a widespread bed surface. Wind slabs are sitting on this that exhibit an upside down structure, fair strength, and the potential to propagate. Classic Mount Washington wind created bridging strength in this slab that has left us with no recent avalanche activity. It's a wind slab, but certainly displaying characteristics of a persistent slab though it is neither widespread nor producing any avalanches. Either way, current weather is weakening the slab that is providing bridging strength over a defined bed surface and weak layer. While we debate the name, the problem remains the same.

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