

MEDIA RELEASE

21 May 2009

Recent significant weather cycles have deposited large amounts of snow in the South Island and Taranaki. This snowfall is atypical for this time of year.

Last Sunday subsequent to a wet and vigorous Nor-West cycle melting much of this snowpack flood conditions were created in many regions.

This weather and specifically gale force wind transport of snow created slab conditions especially at lower elevations. Since Sunday a southerly change has once again loaded the mountains with fresh snow.

This alone would not be an issue, however skiers, snowboarders and climbers are very keen to head up and enjoy the new snow. The issue is that the avalanche danger in general is high and as it is May, MSC and the industry do not have good information to advise the public of the danger that exists at present.

Yesterday at the Remarkables low elevation avalanche activity triggered a road closure. Local enthusiasts ignored this closure and verbal advice and headed into uncontrolled avalanche terrain. This placed the individuals at risk and also created a potential risk for the rescuers.

Traditionally these rescuers come from ski area and heli-ski operations staff. They are backed up by NZ Land SAR and the Police. However at present ski based personnel are not on duty and will not be until June.

MSC sees this particular time (shoulder season) as a period where the risk is very significant to all (recreationalists, rescuers, others)

MSC recommends to all users of the snow environment that they factor this situation into their decision making and err on the side of caution. The mountains should be considered as having HIGH danger rating until further notice.

Travellers should avoid steep terrain and all run outs below that steep terrain and should leave their intentions with someone they know before departure. Travelers should also be skilled at self and companion avalanche rescue techniques as at present response time for SAR could exceed the survival probability window.

For further info contact

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