

January - and the huge avalanche cycle

January started out slowly, then quickly turned into a wild month of big storms and big avalanches. The precipitation for Utah statewide ended up being above, to well above, normal thanks to the very wet period between the 9th and the 20th. The Alta Guard Station ended the month with a total of 128.9 inches of snow with 13.05 inches of water; close to 100 inches of that snow came down during the mid-month stormy period. Most mountain locations in the Wasatch received as much as 120 to 160 percent of normal snowfall for the month.

Avalanche danger began to increase during the first week as a couple of small storms rolled in, but the action really picked up on the weekend of January 10 and 11. We issued an avalanche warning on the 11th and because of the continuing storm, it remained in effect for the next ten days. The problem was that a dry early season produced a shallow snowpack, with a layer of very weak faceted snow near the ground. During the months of November and December we repeatedly warned our listening public that as soon as we got snow, the avalanche activity would be immediate, widespread and deadly. As predicted, plenty of avalanches occurred on the 11th, including numerous natural slides several feet deep plus lots of slides from control work at the resorts.