



Common Information Platform for Natural Hazards in Switzerland

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Natural hazards frequently cause fatalities and significant economic loss in Switzerland. Through organizational measures to mitigate the harm (such as mobile flood protection, evacuation and preventive closures), the impacts of these negative events can be substantially reduced, however emergency management and rescue operations present major challenges. In order to determine when best to take the appropriate action, emergency managers need the best information possible. Based on the experiences made during a large flood event in August 2005, an important strategy was initiated in Switzerland to strengthen the collaboration between emergency managers and to standardise information at the national level as well as to accelerate its dissemination. Based on the already existing warning and information systems IFKIS (for avalanches), IFKIS-Hydro (for hydrological hazards) and MAP D-PHASE (for meteorological hazards) the Common Information Platform for Natural Hazards GIN (“Gemeinsame Informationsplattform Naturgefahren”) is currently under development. It is a joint project of the official Swiss warning centres FOEN (Federal Office for the Environment), MeteoSwiss (national weather service) and SLF (WSL-Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research). GIN allows for combined and user-friendly visualisation of the data in real time along with access to all warnings provided by these three centres. In addition, GIN strengthens the collaboration of the Swiss warning centres by initiating cooperation such as integrated assessment and provision of joint bulletins in critical situations such as a combination of snowmelt, heavy rainfall and floods in winter or spring. The access to GIN is limited to the specialists who are responsible for emergency management at all administrative levels in Switzerland, however the transfer of selected summary information to other platforms, including some available to the general public, will guarantee comprehensive and adequate dissemination of information to all people involved. A pilot version of GIN will be tested in 2009 and the system will be operational in 2010 – the development and improvement of GIN will then be ongoing. Additional data from public and private providers as well as information on other natural hazards such as earthquakes will be integrated into the system. Furthermore, the functionality of the platform will continuously be upgraded and additional services (professional support, new products) will be developed. In this way, GIN will become the central information hub for natural hazards events in Switzerland.