

Press Release

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How Much Residual Risk is to be Considered Acceptable in the Case of Natural Disasters?

The analysis software “RiskPlan”, which was developed by the Federal Office for the Environment (BAFU) and the Federal Office for Civil Protection (BABS) of Switzerland, in order to provide improved assessment of natural disasters, was recently presented as part of the AdaptAlp project.

What is more cost effective: a tunnel to reduce the risk of falling rocks to close to zero, or is an early warning system sufficient? Can the owner of a building make a contribution to reduce potential damage in the event of flooding, and what effect would this have on eventual damage costs? Is it more advisable to invest in advanced security measures, or is it actually more convenient to repair the resultant damages after disaster strikes?

One thing is without doubt: there is no such thing as 100% protection from the eventuality of natural disasters, and some of the possible protection measures are far from affordable. Therefore, the costs and effort required for protection measures against natural disasters always need to be carefully considered against any possible and conceivable damages.

Thanks to the development of the analysis software “RiskPlan” in Switzerland, it is now possible to obtain an overview of the possible danger levels for an entire region, and to assess the necessity of preventive measures as well as any eventual damages.

A committee of experts from the Alpine regions of Vorarlberg, Carinthia, Bavaria, Rhône-Alpes, the Aosta Valley, Piedmont and South Tyrol convened at the end of March in the Swiss village of Stans am Vierwaldstättersee, to gain better insight into the possibilities of “RiskPlan”, so that they could also apply it themselves within their own regions. This software is the main contribution of Switzerland to the EU-subsidized Alpine Space project “AdaptAlp - Adaptation to Climate Change in the Alpine Space”. It is one of the project’s targets to study in form of various possible scenarios the effects that climate change will have on the Alpine area, and to develop strategies that will allow the relevant authorities to take the required action when needed.

The special character of “RiskPlan” consists in the possibility of amalgamating the knowledge and experiences of experts in the field and those of the directly affected persons in the most uncomplicated way. According to Peter Greminger from the Swiss Federal Office (BAFU), the main strength of “RiskPlan” lies exactly with this aspect: “Thanks to “RiskPlan” it is now possible for hydraulic engineers, specialists in the control of natural disasters, politicians, local authorities, insurers and the representatives of emergency services to gather together at one table, and to combine their respective data and experiences within an overall plan. The greater the quantity and the diversity of the usable information gleaned, the more precise the prognosis will become, and all those involved will be able to

discuss immediately the results of the specific applications. This promotes conversation between the various involved parties, and from this also develops a new methodology and style of collaboration.”

The fact that well-achieved collaboration and carefully developed measures are cost effective, especially within this section of operations, can be shown by the exemplary flood protection concept developed for the Engelberger Aa river basin in Central Switzerland. It has been estimated that through this method damage costs were reduced by approximately 130 million Swiss francs by the prior investment of 30 million Swiss francs into preventive flood protection measures. In this way, 100 million Swiss francs (or close to 65 million Euros) were thus saved.

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