A new snow tracking sensor
23 November 2021

The research team plans to build a low-cost prototype sensor in the next few months. The device will measure snow density based on depth, every day.

Professor Chokmani said that this cheaper type of sensor will make it possible to cover a larger area while keeping travel and labor costs down. The probe only needs to be installed once and connected to a satellite via a cellphone for easy data collection. Data is processed using an algorithm developed via a cloud-based calculation, and the results are sent to users in real time. There are also plans to use solar energy to power the device.

Density and strata

Other sensors are available on the market, but most are heavy and expensive. They usually only measure overall snow density, not density by strata. "Snow settles in layers of varying densities, and these layers change over time. It is very important to have data for all layers of snow, particularly for avalanches," explained Professor Chokmani, a specialist in remote sensing.

Because the spectral behavior of snow is linked to its density, the INRS team has developed sensor technology that uses infrared radiation reflectance. However, according to Professor Chokmani the same index could be linked to various densities, based on the age of the snow.

In previous research, the team showed how to categorize snow by age. That technique will offset any ambiguous link. "Fresh snow has small grains that diffuses infrared radiation. As it ages, snow forms bigger clusters and its spectral behavior changes. By separating snow into categories, we can determine its precise density, because the link becomes unequivocal," explained Professor Chokmani. This research is promising for better management of Quebec winters.

"Estimating Snowpack Density from Near-Infrared
Spectral Reflectance Using a Hybrid Model," by Mohamed Karim El Oufir, Karem Chokmani, Anas El Alem, and Monique Bernier, was published on October 13 in Remote Sensing.


Provided by Institut national de la recherche scientifique - INRS

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