

# A better informed public through the Swiss Confederation's joint natural hazards portal

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## BACKGROUND

The Swiss federal OWARNA project was established in the aftermath of the flood events of 2005 which caused damage estimated at approx. 3 billions of Swiss francs. The aim of the project was to improve natural hazard warnings and alerts, and develop measures for providing better information to the authorities and the public. The Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications' (DETEC) Ordinance on Radio and Television was subsequently revised. It includes the obligation to broadcast warnings and stipulates that federal agencies operate a joint website at [www.natural-hazards.ch](http://www.natural-hazards.ch) ([www.naturgefahren.ch](http://www.naturgefahren.ch), [www.dangers-naturels.ch](http://www.dangers-naturels.ch), [www.pericoli-naturali.ch](http://www.pericoli-naturali.ch), [www.privels-natira.ch](http://www.privels-natira.ch)) to provide the public with detailed information about natural hazards and support in the event of active warnings.

platform [www.naturgefahren.ch](http://www.naturgefahren.ch). The disadvantage of such a wide range of sources was that information had to be sought separately from the individual platforms, and some of them were unable to meet the huge demand in the event of mandatory warnings. With this in mind, the Steering Committee Intervention in Natural Hazards, LAINAT (joining Federal Office of Meteorology and Climatology MeteoSwiss), Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), Federal Office for Civil Protection (FOCP) in conjunction with the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC), Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL) together with the Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research (SLF), and the Swiss Seismological Service (SED) at ETH Zurich) mandated its communications task force to produce a joint federal Internet platform.

## GOALS

The aim was to provide the federal authorities with an official centralised platform, which provides reliable and timely information about current hazardous situations, possible measures and prevention to the public. This well-designed joint website would have guaranteed accessibility even in situations of high demand. The platform would be available in German, French and Italian. Static contents would also be available in English and Romansh. In order to facilitate the understanding of specific natural hazard situations, contextual information in form of joint natural hazards bulletins and press releases would also be provided. A mobile version of the site would allow the use on smartphones. To ensure that the information can be distributed as widely as possible, the data would be authorised for use by third parties for apps and websites based on jointly defined principles.

## RESULTS

Following approximately three years of preparation and development, [www.natural-hazards.ch](http://www.natural-hazards.ch) was

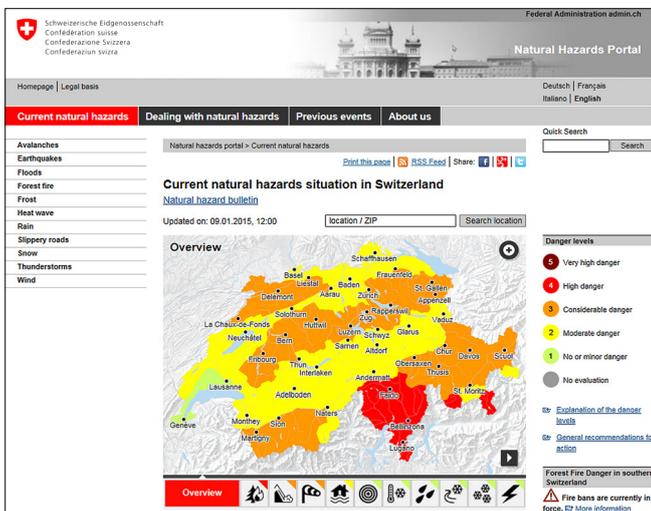


Figure 1: English start page of the natural hazards portal

The OWARNA information information measures are specifically focused on increasing the public's ability to act independently and on preventing physical and material harm and loss of life. A wide variety of natural hazard information was already available to the public on the websites of various federal offices, research institutes, PLANAT, the Federal Chancellery domain [www.ch.ch](http://www.ch.ch), and the already existing

launched on 4 July 2014. The key feature of the portal is the synoptic natural hazards map on the home page, which provides users with an overview of the current hazard situation. This map has two main features: Multiple layers based on different hazard processes with the highest hazard level shown on top for each region, and individual icons in a slider below the map for displaying each hazard process separately. A mouseover on the map provides detailed information about the regions and locations concerned. The portal has a location search function and a chronological index of events. Other key features include detailed background information about hazard levels, behaviour recommendations and links to cantonal and other agencies. Finally, the portal facilitates cooperation between the different agencies by providing specific tools for producing and publishing joint bulletins and press releases.

## CONCLUSIONS

The natural hazards portal improves hazard preparedness. It meets public information demand and has been well received by the public and the media from the outset.

User figures show that the portal is extensively used, especially during events. The more directly people are affected, the more they use the portal and consult the up-to-date information. Material damage caused by recent natural hazard events was lower compared to similar events in the past. While developing the joint portal, the agencies involved were able to improve their operational processes and mutual understanding. Joint products like natural hazard bulletins and press releases are important for the functionality of the portal. The LAINAT committee ensures that the different agencies cooperate effectively and quickly, particularly during natural hazard events. The natural

## KEYWORDS

Swiss Confederation's joint natural hazards portal; public information; website; warnings and alerts; prevention

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**Number of visitors on the natural hazards portal per day (all languages)**

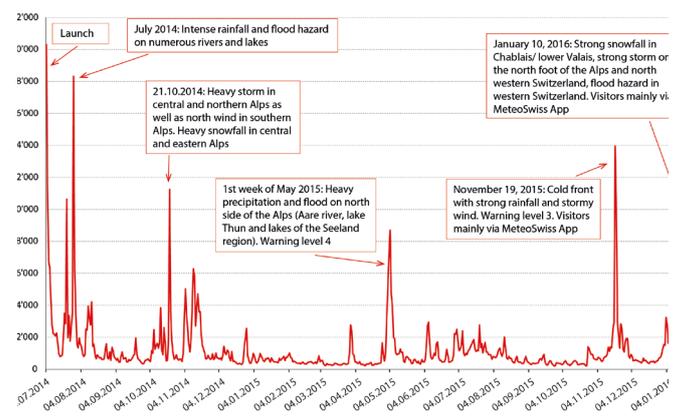


Figure 2: Graphic showing use of the portal from start in July 2014 to August 2015 showing peaks during natural hazard events such as the flood in the midland in July 2014, flood in Ticino in June 2015 or heat period of July 2015.

hazards portal is a key communications component between the Swiss federal government and the public.

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