

Protection measures and working with the locals, practical challenges

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ABSTRACT

The challenge Icelanders faced after the deadly avalanches at Súðavík and Flateyri 1995 is still our mission. That is to protect our inhabitants in towns and villages threatened by snow avalanches and landslides. We lost 34 people in the two catastrophic avalanches. And we have lost much more people in earlier decades in the 20th century.

Even after horrible events like these, it is a challenge for local politicians and those that are responsible for the safety of the inhabitants to convince many of them about the need for evacuating their home in an endangered area for a while during an avalanche cycle or even about building protection measures close to their house. And then relocating a part of settlements, or even a whole village like Súðavík, can be a difficult task also. In Hnífsdalur, NW-Iceland, part of the settlement was relocated, and it did hurt that small community at least emotionally for the inhabitants.

After my experience during the years between 1998 and 2010 as Mayor of Ísafjarðarbær in the Westfjords, I believe that we must increase the speed of the construction of avalanche protection measures in Iceland. There are still many projects waiting to be implemented. The Icelandic Avalanche and Landslide Fund has sufficient means to cover the remaining work but the Parliament has not allocated high enough budgets to complete projects according to plans that were made by the Icelandic government after the deadly avalanches 1995.