Beat: Miscellaneous

Avalanche in Scottish Highlands kills 4, injures 1

-, 20.01.2013, 22:23 Time

USPA News - Four people were killed Saturday when a group of climbers was swept away by a powerful avalanche in the Scottish Highlands, local authorities said on Sunday. A young woman remains in a critical condition with serious head injuries.

The incident happened at around 2 p.m. local time on Saturday when a group of six climbers were on the Bidean Nam Bian near Glencoe, one of the main settlements in the Scottish Highlands. The region is a popular destination for hikers and climbers as Scotland is home to Britain`s highest mountains. Northern Constabulary officials said emergency services were alerted by one of the men in the group, which was made up of three men and three women. The Glencoe Mountain Rescue Team later found one critically injured female survivor and the bodies of two men and two women. The male survivor, who asked his name to be withheld, said he and his friends were descending a mountain when they were swept away by a snow avalanche. "It is with much sadness and deep regret that some of my friends have died as a result," he said. "All in the group loved the mountains and are experienced winter walkers." The female survivor, identified only as a 24-year-old woman from the Durham area in England, was initially airlifted to Belford Hospital but later transferred to Southern General Hospital in Glasgow. Surrounded by family members, the woman remained in a critical condition on Sunday with serious head injuries. Scotland`s First Minister Alex Salmond called the loss of four people from a party of six "truly devastating," and said the Scottish government will provide any support that it can. "This is an appalling tragedy and our immediate thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who have been lost," he said. Jonathan Hart, Chairman of the Mountain Rescue Committee of Scotland, described the deadly avalanche as a tragic event. "Everything possible was done ... to increase the opportunities for survival of the casualties and take them off the mountain before the hours of darkness," he said. "It is very sad that there has been such a tragic outcome." Authorities identified the victims as 24-year-old Christopher William Bell of Blackpool, England, 25-year-old Una Rachel Finnegan of County Antrim, Northern Ireland, and 28-year-old Tom Chesters who lived in Leeds, England. The identity of the fourth victim had not been released as of Sunday evening. Large parts of Britain have been affected by heavy snow and strong winds in recent days. Accidents on the scale of Saturday`s incident are extremely rare in the United Kingdom, but Mark Diggins of the Scottish Avalanche Information Service said there had been a `considerable` risk of an avalanche.

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-442/avalanche-in-scottish-highlands-kills-4-injures-1.html

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619