

NATIONAL  
SKI AREAS  
ASSOCIATION



**CONTACT:** Adrienne Saia Isaac  
Director of Marketing  
& Communications  
[aisaac@nsaa.org](mailto:aisaac@nsaa.org)  
720.963.4217 (office)

**UPDATED:** December 2018

## Skier/Snowboarder Fatality Incidents

- There were 37 reported fatal incidents during the 2017/18 season, a decrease of 19 percent from the 2016/17 season total.
- The majority of fatal incidents resulted from collisions with other skiers, trees or manmade objects.
- In 2017/18, males represented more than 90 percent of all skier/snowboarder fatalities.
- Skiers/snowboarders have less than a one in one million chance of dying from snowsports-related trauma.

### Overview

The National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) reports that during the 2017/18 season, there were 37 skier and snowboarder fatalities occurring at U.S. ski areas, compared to the 44 that occurred during the 2016/17 season. The majority of those fatalities were male skiers under the age of 30 on intermediate terrain. Collisions with other guests and stationary objects continue to be the primary cause of skier/snowboarder fatalities. Approximately 62 percent of skiers/snowboarders fatalities last season were wearing helmets.

### Methodology & Terms

NSAA collects fatality data from all U.S. ski areas annually at the end of the winter operating season. NSAA compiles this data to provide information to the media and the public that accurately reflects the inherent risks to skiing and snowboarding guests at U.S. ski areas. The data reflects all fatalities that occur within a ski area's operating boundary; backcountry fatalities are not included in these statistics because they do not reflect the true risk of fatality at ski areas for the skiing public.

Only fatalities that occur during normal operating hours at ski areas are reported by NSAA; after-hours deaths that occur while the ski area is closed are not included in this data. NSAA also does not include guest fatalities that are related to a pre-existing medical condition (such as a heart attack or stroke on a chairlift, which are rare). This data also does not include fatalities suffered by ski area employees while working, unless the fatality is akin to one that

could occur with a guest. An industrial fatality (e.g. a lift mechanic fall from a chairlift tower) would not be included because that type of incident does not reflect the risk of fatality to the skiing public. An employee who died in a skier-skier collision fatality would be included; one such incident was included in NSAA's fatality report from the 2016/17.

NSAA does not report fatalities by individual state because of the wide variability of the data from season to season. Some states have one or two fatalities per season or less, making this variability even more pronounced. Many individual state ski associations compile and release their statewide fatality data separately from NSAA.

Fatality: Death resulting from ski-related trauma. Eliminated from this statistic are health-related fatalities (e.g. heart attacks) and many employee fatalities. These incidents are reported to NSAA at the end of each season annually.

Skier visit: A skier/snowboarder visit represents one person visiting a ski area for all or any part of a day or night. This includes those visiting on full- and half-day, night, complimentary, adult, or child tickets; season passes; and all other lift access types.

## **Historical context**

The total of 37 fatalities reported during the 2017/18 season was a 19 percent decrease from the previous season and is slightly lower than the 10-year industry average of 38 fatalities per season (see chart). Based on 53.3 million total skier/snowboarder visits during the 2017/18 season, the fatality rate converts to less than one fatality per one million skier visits (or 0.69 fatalities per one million skier visits during the 2017/18 season).

## **Factors**

Gender continues to be a significant factor in ski/snowboard fatalities. Of the 2017/18 fatalities, 34 were male and three female. Equipment data in relation to fatalities is in line with the national breakdown of skiers and snowboarders in the U.S. Of those who visit ski areas, approximately 75 percent are skiers and 25 percent are snowboarders. In the 2017/18 season, skiers accounted for 28 fatalities compared to nine snowboarder fatalities (i.e. skiers accounted for 75 percent of fatalities).

At the time of these incidents, 23 of the 37 people who died were wearing helmets, while nine of the fatalities were not wearing helmets (this information is unknown for five of the reported fatalities). Overall, approximately 84 percent of **all** skiers and snowboarders wore helmets during the 2017/18 ski season, according to a separate annual helmet usage study conducted by NSAA.

## **NSAA's take on ski/snowboard fatalities**

“Guest safety is a primary value for NSAA and its member resorts,” said NSAA President Kelly Pawlak. “The chance of having a fatal accident on the slopes remains relatively low. However, every ski or snowboard-related death is a tragedy. NSAA continues to provide

educational programming to both ski areas and the public to mitigate risk on the slopes and hopefully prevent some of these fatal incidents.”

Pawlak emphasized that safety remains a top priority for ski areas. That, coupled with personal responsibility of those who recreate at ski areas, are major factors in decreasing the number of ski or snowboard-related fatalities.

### **NSAA Safety Programming**

#### Ride Another Day

In the 2017/18 season, NSAA launched a new safety initiative called [\*Ride Another Day\*](#). This initiative is designed to educate skiers and snowboarders about the risks of reckless skiing, speed, and collisions.

Spearheading this program are Kelli and Chauncy Johnson whose daughter, Elise, was killed in a tragic 2010 collision at a ski area. Kelli was severely injured in the incident, and the rider who collided with Elise also died. The Johnson family partnered with NSAA to help tell Elise’s story and to educate others about the dangers of high-speed collisions and reckless skiing. To learn more, visit <http://www.nsa.org/safety-programs/collisions/>.

#### Other safety programming

Ski areas across the country observe [National Safety Month](#) in January, which is dedicated to education for both guest and employee safety. Many ski areas have developed comprehensive guest safety education programs and actively promote the seven points of the [Responsibility Code](#), as well as the tenets of the [Smart Style](#) freestyle terrain safety initiative promoted by NSAA.

Other NSAA safety initiatives include [Lids On Kids](#), a program committed to educating parents and children on the importance and proper use of snowsports helmets. [Kids on Lifts](#) emphasizes safe lift loading, riding and unloading practices.

## 10-Year Fatal Incident Rate Per Million Participants

<u>SEASON</u>	<u>FATALITIES</u>	<u>SKIER DAYS</u> (in millions)	<u>RATE</u> (per million)
2017-18	37	53.3	0.69
2016-17	44	54.8	0.80
2015-16	39	52.8	0.74
2014-15	35	53.6	0.65
2013-14	32	56.5	0.57
2012-13	25	56.9	0.44
2011-12	46	51.0	0.90
2010-11	47	60.5	0.78
2009-10	39	59.8	0.65
2008-09	39	57.4	0.68
<b>10-year Average</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>55.6</b>	<b>0.69</b>

***THE NATIONAL SKI AREAS ASSOCIATION (NSAA) IS A TRADE ASSOCIATION REPRESENTING THE INTERESTS OF 300+ SKI AREAS, THEIR OPERATORS, AND INDUSTRY SUPPLIERS. FORMED IN 1962, THE NSAA SUPPORTS MULTIPLE INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS FOR MEMBER AREAS, INCLUDING GROWTH, SAFETY, AND SUSTAINABILITY, FROM ITS LAKEWOOD, COLO. HEADQUARTERS. LEARN MORE ABOUT THE NSAA'S MISSION AND PROGRAMS AT NSAA.ORG.***

# # #