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Media Contact:

Adrienne Saia Isaac
Director, Marketing & Communications
National Ski Areas Association
aisaac@nsaa.org

NSAA Slope Safety Fact Sheet

Introduction

Winter sports such as skiing and snowboarding come with inherent risks, but ski areas and the ski industry continually take steps to ensure the safety of the people on the slopes. NSAA has set forth many best practices for mitigating risk on the slopes; these practices are based on data, scientific studies and operational reality. While not every tragic situation can be avoided, we empower our member ski areas and the industry at large to share messages of safety with the public with the goal of reducing the number of incidents on the slopes.

Your Responsibility Code

Introduced in the 1960s, Your Responsibility Code includes seven basic best practices to follow to mitigate risk on the slopes. All skiers, snowboarders and people recreating at our ski areas should understand and follow the points of [Your Responsibility Code](#):

1. Always stay in control, and be able to stop or avoid other people or objects.
2. People ahead of you have the right of way. It is your responsibility to avoid them.
3. You must not stop where you obstruct a trail, or are not visible from above.
4. Whenever starting downhill or merging into a trail, look uphill and yield to others.
5. Always use devices to help prevent runaway equipment.
6. Observe all posted signs and warnings. Keep off closed trails and out of closed areas.
7. Prior to using any lift, you must have the knowledge and ability to load, ride and unload safely.

Be Aware

Outdoor recreation is inherently risky; this includes the sports of skiing and snowboarding. Skiers and snowboarders should be aware of these risks, including but not limited to: adverse weather conditions, changing snow conditions (including ice and avalanches), machinery working on the hill, and other skiers and riders.

Skiers and snowboarders can mitigate most of these risks by following all posted signs and closures, being spatially aware and skiing in control. If a guest has questions about a ski area's terrain or what is open or closed, they should consult the daily snow report or ask Ski Patrol prior to proceeding.

Fatalities and Catastrophic Injuries

Skiing and snowboarding fatalities are tragic events, but they are also exceedingly rare. Over the past 10 years, U.S. ski areas average less than one fatality per 1 MM skier visits (a skier visit is counted every time a skier or snowboarder goes to a ski area). In the 2018-19 season, there were 42 fatalities in 59.3MM skier visits nationally.

Catastrophic injuries, including those with significant neurological trauma, spinal cord injuries resulting in full or partial paralysis, and injuries resulting in the loss of a limb, are also exceedingly rare. Over the past 10 years, U.S. ski areas average less than one catastrophic injury per 1MM skier visits. In the 2018-19 season, there were 31 catastrophic injuries in 59.3MM skier visits nationally.

Helmets

The National Ski Areas Association recommends the use of helmets by skiers and snowboarders. Helmets have gained wide acceptance in the past 15 years, and have also come a long way in technology. Approximately 85% of skiers and snowboarders wore helmets during the 2018-19 season.

Studies have shown that helmets can be effective in preventing some severe head injuries in addition to minor head injuries. However, helmets are not 100% effective in every emergent situation. Helmets are *most* effective when they are worn by someone who is skiing and riding in control, and following the points of Your Responsibility Code.

Collisions

This personal responsibility of skiing in control – including being aware of the people and snow conditions around you – is vital to ensuring a safe ski day and reducing incidents on the slopes. Collisions are the leading cause of ski-related fatalities and catastrophic injuries; this includes collisions both with other skiers and stationary objects. While our data has not demonstrated a quantifiable rise in “reckless skiing,” there are new generations of skiers and snowboarders joining the sport, and it is important to ensure that all skiers and riders understand their responsibility on the slopes.

NSAA launched the [Ride Another Day](#) campaign to help educate the public about the dangers of reckless skiing. Created in conjunction with Kelli and Chauncy Johnson, whose daughter was killed in a collision with another skier, this educational program demonstrates the true cost of reckless behavior on the slopes, and reminds all guests that they are responsible for not just their own safety, but that of those around them. This program and [its accompanying video](#) is presented to ski area employees and to members of the public across the country.

Lift Safety

Having the ability to safely load, ride, and unload a ski lift is an important tenet of Your Responsibility Code. While lift types can vary from ski area to ski area, and even within a ski area, the basics of safe lift usage stay the same:

- Pay attention – don’t be distracted by your phone, music or friends

- Remove pole straps from wrists
- Obey all posted signs, paying special attention to the wait line and the load line
- Ask for assistance prior to entering the loading area if needed

There are many educational resources to assist new skiers and snowboarders in the safe usage of ski lifts. One of these programs is NSAA's [Kids on Lifts](#), a program geared toward educating both kids and parents on lift safety.

Here are a few other resources geared toward lift safety (these are available to the public):

- [How to Ride a Ski Lift](#) (Colorado Ski Country USA)
- [Load and Unload with Care](#) (Pacific Northwest Ski Areas Association)
- [Lift Safety Guide](#) (Ski California)
- [Chairlift Safety](#) (Squaw Valley | Alpine Meadows)

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The National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) is a trade association representing the interests of ski area operators and industry suppliers. Formed in 1962, NSAA designs and supports ski industry initiatives and programs, including growth, safety and sustainability, from its Lakewood, Colo., headquarters. Learn more about NSAA's mission and programs at [NSAA.org](#).