



Seven Springs, Mountain Creek, Mount Bachelor, and The Canyons Win Safety Awards

Eight Other Resorts Repeat

Four resorts were first-time winners of National Ski Area Safety Awards this year, including Pennsylvania's Seven Springs Mountain Resort; New Jersey's Mountain Creek; Mount Bachelor, Ore.; and The Canyons, Utah. The other winners were Arizona Snowbowl; Bridger Bowl, Mont.; Stratton Mountain, Vt.; Heavenly, Calif.; Loon Mountain, N.H.; and Colorado's Aspen Snowmass, Beaver Creek Resort, and Vail Mountain. Here's a closer look at the winning safety programs:

BY JENNY DONELAN

Best Safety Week Programs

Stratton, Vt., and Vail Mountain, Colo.



Stratton and Vail tied for Best Safety Week Programs this year, with both resorts emphasizing helmet use as a major part of their programs, and both announcing a mandatory helmet policy for all skiing and riding employees.

At Stratton, even the Safety Bear mascots donned helmets that had been fashioned especially for them by staff members. A free helmet was awarded each day to a guest who correctly answered a safety trivia question posted on reader boards at the lifts (all correct answers were entered into a drawing). And more than 40 kids participated in Stratton's first-ever helmet fashion show, which included prizes in categories such as best stickered, brightest and most colorful, and best theme.

At Vail, the entire Safety Week program was called "Put a Lid on It" to underscore the importance of helmets. In addition to requiring all its employees to wear helmets, Vail now requires all guests 12 and under participating in ski school to wear helmets. During Safety Awareness Week, the resort offered special helmet fittings for interested guests, along with a 20 percent discount on helmets.

Additional Safety Week activities at Stratton included a torchlight parade and fireworks, a scavenger hunt, and a safety booth in the base lodge with handouts such as granola bars and lip balm. In order to raise general awareness, all staff members wore safety ribbons and arm bands on their uniforms throughout the week. Ongoing safety initiatives at Stratton include its terrain park education program and extra patrolling on EZ Street, a family-friendly run from the summit that is designed for "easygoing" skiing and riding.

At Vail, the Safety Week festivities included an employee poster contest and a contest for the best safety video posted on Vail's Street Team Facebook page. Whoever created the video that scored the most "likes" won a Flip video camera. In addition, Responsibility Code trading cards featuring Vail mascot Pork Chop, the Vail Mountain Safety Pig, and Henry, the Vail Ski Patrol Avalanche Dog, were distributed around the base areas. Ski patrol personnel also recognized guests doing an especially good job following the Responsibility Code by entering them in drawings for lunch and lift tickets on Vail Mountain.

This is Stratton's fifth Safety Award, with previous wins in 2007/08, 2006/07, 2003/04, and 2002/03. It is Vail's 11th Safety Award; the resort has won each year since 1999/00.



At Vail, the entire Safety Week program was called "Put a Lid on It" to underscore the importance of helmets. In addition to requiring all its on-mountain employees to wear helmets, Vail now requires all guests 12 and under participating in ski school to wear helmets. During Safety Awareness Week, the resort offered special helmet fittings for interested guests, along with a 20 percent discount on helmet purchases.

Photo by Jack Affleck/Vail Resorts

Best Helmet Safety Program

Heavenly, Calif.



Seeing is believing, and approximately 500 fifth-graders saw for themselves how effectively a helmet can protect the human head in a novel demonstration conducted by Heavenly Mountain Resort this season. As part of Safety Week, the resort's Health and Safety Team visited four area elementary schools to demonstrate the "coconut crusher," a device consisting of a PVC pipe; a plexiglass box; a 5-pound weight; and, of course, a coconut, with and without helmet. Coconuts were chosen to approximate the size and fragility of the human skull. The length of the pipe, the gravity and acceleration, and the 5-pound weight were all designed to approximate a 12–14 mph "crash." When the weight was dropped on a helmeted coconut, the helmet absorbed the blow and the coconut was unharmed. When the weight fell on an unprotected coconut, it shattered, sending juice and bits of white flesh all over the inside of the plexiglass box.

According to the resort, "How to Protect Your 'Coconut' – A Safety Demonstration on the Importance of Wearing a Helmet," was highly successful and met with great interest by the students. After the presentation, one of the teachers wrote Heavenly: "I thought the helmet presentation was wonderful. The kids really enjoyed it (and I think I'll be buying myself a helmet also!) and learned a lot."

This is Heavenly's third Safety Award, with previous wins in 2004/05 and 2001/02.



As part of its award-winning helmet safety campaign, Heavenly's Health and Safety Team visited four area elementary schools to demonstrate the "coconut crusher," a device consisting of a PVC pipe; a plexiglass box; a 5-pound weight; and, of course, a coconut, with and without helmet.

Best Terrain Park Safety Program

Loon Mountain, N.H.



For the 2009/10 season, New Hampshire's Loon Mountain launched a voluntary, interactive, web-based program designed to educate skiers and riders about freestyle terrain signage, park features, and etiquette. The Park Etiquette and Education Program, or "PEEPs," provides a light-hearted but fact-filled overview of guidelines for making a terrain park visit both safer and more enjoyable. An intentionally goofy narrator guides users through the different sections of the programs, including three quizzes they must complete successfully in order to earn a PEEPs pass.

"We wanted to create a fun and engaging way to educate skiers and riders about proper park use and safety, and get them involved in our park atmosphere even before they get to Loon," says Jay Scambio, terrain park development manager for Loon's parent company, Boyne Resorts. "Right away, we're setting the tone for the attitudes and behavior we want to see in our parks and at our resort."

PEEPs is different from most other terrain park pass programs in that it is voluntary. Users are meant to be compelled by it because it's fun and funny, and also because it offers the possibility of loot. Those who have successfully completed the online program are automatically entered into monthly drawings to win prizes from Loon's sponsors. They are also eligible for the grand prize, a four-night lift and lodging package for four at Loon's sister resort, Big Sky, in Montana. Loon's goal for the first season was to issue 200 PEEPs passes; the resort had met more than 50 percent of that goal well before the season ended.

This is Loon's third Safety Award, with previous wins in 2001/02 and 1999/00.

Best Use of Web/Social Media

Mount Bachelor, Ore.



As a mountain with a diverse clientele that includes local day-trippers with season passes as well as destination guests from all over the Northwest, and those wanting to find out about helmets and ski school to those interested in preparing for the backcountry, Mount Bachelor needed a safety program that would reach as

many of those people as possible. The area therefore decided to use a multimedia approach to spread its safety messages, including newspaper ads and editorial, on-site merchandising, and special events. Perhaps most effective was the way it used social media and the web to get the word out.

First, Mount Bachelor created several videos on topics such as the tenets of Safety Week. Next, it posted the videos not just in one area on its website that people may or may not visit, but in key spots like the snow report (its most highly trafficked page), and on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Other video topics included the ski area boundary, how to use Mount Bachelor's beacon test park, and a documentary of its avalanche dogs at work.

"We also tried to influence people to pick up after their pets," writes Marketing Director Alex Kaufman, "which though not safety related, we can all agree is an education topic worth its weight."

This is Mount Bachelor's first Safety Award.

Best Employee Involvement & Education

Aspen Skiing Co., Colo.

ASPEN SNOWMASS.

Although Safety Week was the ideal time to reinforce safety ideas for both employees and guests at Aspen Snowmass, one of the central ideas – and in fact the theme for this season – was "Safety Has No Expiration Date." With that idea at the forefront, the resort featured many related safety programs, including avalanche awareness, skiing and riding with care, new helmet requirements, and more.

One of Aspen's central efforts this year was employee safety. Among the features of this ambitious program were ski area boundary management education, increased interaction with guests regarding safety, and employee fitness. With regard to the latter, Aspen created a ski/ride exercise DVD produced with a renowned local personal fitness trainer.

Many of its initiatives were created to increase overall employee awareness with regard to safety and reduce workers' compensation claims. Among these initiatives were workplace inspections four times per year by a third-party risk management organization, an equipment allowance so employees could access up-to-date gear, and lift operations education with regard to machine safety and guest flow efficiency. Snowmobile operations also received a going-over, with tighter protocols for speed control, mandatory helmet use for operators, reduced hours of operation, and a goal of zero accidents. So far, the program has met with great success: overall results included worker compensation costs down by 40 percent and workplace accidents down by 50 percent from the same period last year.

This is Aspen Snowmass' seventh Safety Award, with wins in 2007/08, 2006/07, 2005/06, 2004/05, 2003/04, and 2002/03.

Best Chairlift Safety Program

The Canyons, Utah



The Canyons launched its new safety program in conjunction with National Safety Awareness Week this season, using the slogan, "Go Slow. Stay in Control." According to Kathi Ehlers, risk manager for The Canyons, "This year our program focused on the guest safety issues we see here: out-of-control skiing, improper lift loading, and failure to wear helmets."

The resort's practical and novel approach to the lift loading issue came with a slogan of its own: "Sit on the Spot." The Canyons ran lift loading practice sessions for two days at its Red Pine Safety Tent, where a practice chair with a bulls-eye target sticker on the seat tempted kids and adults to "sit on the spot" for free prizes. In addition, target stickers were placed on all the chairs of the resort's High Meadow beginner lift to encourage guests to park themselves in the right area of the chairs.

On those same two days, the Canyons also reinforced skiing in control by handing out Positive Cards to skiers exhibiting speed control, safe behavior, and good etiquette. The cards could be entered in a drawing for prizes such as lift tickets, helmets, and goggles. In order to encourage helmet usage, helmets were 20 percent off at the mountain store, and guests visiting the safety tent in a helmet could choose a prize such as a hot chocolate coupon or pin.

This is The Canyons' first Safety Award.



The Canyons Chairlift Safety Program came with the slogan "Sit on the Spot," with bull's-eye targets placed on chairlift seats.

Best Community Outreach

Seven Springs Mountain Resort, Pa.



This year, Seven Springs in Pennsylvania took its Know Snow safety program directly to its target audience: middle- and high school-age students who are involved or interested in snowsports. Instead of offering the program on-site, Seven Springs tried to make it more accessible and cost-effective for the schools by presenting Know Snow during assemblies. The interactive presentation included high-energy ski and snowboard videos; an introduction to the various types of skiing and riding equipment, including helmets; and a visual tour of the facility. The program also included Smart Style content, and concluded with participants' receiving a pocket-size safety card with the Responsibility Code and safety tips. Student participants who correctly answered questions about the safety presentation received Seven Springs stickers, lanyards, and carabiners, and were also entered in a drawing for free pizza and lift and tubing tickets.

Feedback received by the resort after the program included this message from a teacher: "The Know Snow Program ... gave our club a better sense of how to conduct themselves on the slopes. It allowed many of our kids who have never been on skis before, and some who ski regularly, to hear first-hand how critical safety is while participating in snow sports."

This is Seven Springs' first Safety Award.

Best Avalanche Safety Program

Bridger Bowl Ski Area, Mont.



With new terrain come new challenges. That was the outlook this year at Bridger Bowl, which launched a new open-boundary policy during the 2008/09 ski season. The area attracts a large number of backcountry and sidecountry skiers and riders, but unfortunately, not all of them are avalanche savvy. With these issues in mind, Bridger Bowl launched a new avalanche education program this season.

First, the resort required anyone riding the chair lift in its new, expert, but in-bounds terrain to carry an avalanche transceiver (with partner and shovel highly recommended). This requirement, plus designated out-of-bounds access zones and gates from

the chairlift, help ensure that skiers and riders have a transceiver and know the type of terrain they are entering when crossing ski area boundaries. Bridger Bowl also paid for 5,000 copies of a backcountry awareness educational video, "STAY ALIVE" (filmed, edited, and produced by a local teenager), to be distributed to all season passholders for the 2008/09 and 2009/10 seasons. And the resort worked with a popular avalanche report website to inform skiers and riders about issues related to accessing out-of-bounds terrain. Here's just one sample from Bridger Bowl's content on that website: "Just because someone skis down a slope does not mean it is safe. Avalanches do not work this way. It could take one set of tracks or 100 before a slope avalanches."

Due to the variations in the snow pack from year to year, it can be difficult to determine the effectiveness of these and other avalanche prevention efforts, explains a report from Bridger Bowl. "Although we received a lot of positive feedback about the quantity and quality of our message, we still saw reckless behavior that warranted further expansion of the program and more aggressive efforts to get the message out."

This is Bridger Bowl's second Safety Award, with a previous win in 2006/07.

Best Safety Theme Quote

Mountain Creek, N.J.



"I'm a big fan of the old saying 'stupid hurts,' writes Bill Snyder, head of ski patrol and director of risk management for Mountain Creek Resort in Vernon, N.J. "I truly believe that the best way to minimize risk and cut down on injuries is through education."

With that idea in mind, as well as the recognition that 60 of its acres are dedicated to freestyle terrain, Mountain Creek launched a new education program this season with a special emphasis on safety for anyone skiing or riding in its South All-Mountain Terrain Park areas. Skiers or riders wishing to board lifts into those areas must first obtain a Park Pass by watching Mountain Creek's short educational video on terrain park safety and etiquette, then successfully completing a 10-question quiz on what they have learned. Guests may retake the quiz as many times as it takes to pass.

Another new safety initiative at the resort this year was a mandatory helmet policy for all lesson participants under 14 and all guests taking freestyle lessons through Mountain Creek's Switch Academy.

So are Mountain Creek visitors less "stupid" these days? It appears so. "This year we've seen a noticeable decrease in our amount of on-hill injuries," says Snyder. "I really do feel that those

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— Bill Snyder, Mountain Creek head of ski patrol and director of risk management

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results can be attributed directly to an increase in educational awareness and helmet use.”

This is Mountain Creek's first Safety Award.

Best Overall Safety Program (Under 250,000 visits)

Arizona Snowbowl, Ariz.



Last year, Arizona Snowbowl received its first-ever Safety Award, and repeated its win this season with enhancements to its successful B.A.A.H (“Be Alert, Accidents Hurt”) program. In order to accentuate the message, Snowbowl designated Sammy the Safety Sheep as its mascot, with an acronym of his own: “Stop, Hear, Evaluate, Eliminate, and Proceed with caution.”

According to Safety Coordinator Jon Gauld, “The unexpected award Snowbowl won last season for Best Overall Safety Program created so much enthusiasm within our organization, that Snowbowl committed the resources and personnel to take our safety program to a higher level.” This year’s Safety Camp was even more visible, with a portable shelter sporting the Snowbowl logo and Safety Camp flutter flags strategically placed in designated slow zone locations throughout the mountain to raise general awareness. Safety ambassadors continued to hand out Sammy the Sheep Safety Passes to the first 250 kids who could recite the skier/rider Responsibility Code. The pass entitled them to discounts in

the mountain retail stores and a free midweek lift ticket. To top off Safety Week, a real, live sheep (Sammy) visited the Safety Camp wearing his patrol vest.

Another enhancement to last year’s program involved a helmet sale with 200 (twice as many as last year) helmets sold at cost: \$30 each. The helmets sold out in two days’ time. “We had many families outfitted with helmets that were thankful to the Snowbowl for giving something back to the community,” says Gauld.

This is Arizona Snowbowl's second Safety Award, with a previous win in 2008/09.

Best Overall Safety Program (250,000 or more visits)

Beaver Creek Resort, Colo.



Beaver Creek chose the theme “Employees Lead the Way” for its 2009/10 safety initiative, emphasizing the need for resort employees to lead by example, practicing safe skiing and riding on the slopes and remaining safety conscious off them. Employees are expected to practice “the rules of the road” not only while working but on days off the slopes. Essential components of this program included the development of key safety initiatives by each department and a monthly “Safety Plus One” initiative, in which nominated employees received recognition and a \$250 reward.

This winter, as a result of the increasing popularity of the terrain parks, the resort also focused on terrain park safety and etiquette for all. Members of the ski school, ski patrol, and others actively educated guests about Smart Style. During Beaver Creek’s annual Safety Week Fair, the ski school hosted a kids’ rail jam and presentations on proper terrain park progression. A representative from the ski school was also on hand at each terrain park during the weekend to help educate guests about terrain park safety.

Beaver Creek also initiated a community outreach program designed to educate the public on backcountry awareness. Beaver Creek ski patroller Jim Clancy, for example, lectured on backcountry avalanche precautions at a local library. This year, the resort also debuted a new messaging and signage system that suggested guest behavior for backcountry travel, based on real-time avalanche and weather condition information. As part of its avalanche program, the resort also did a live burial and rescue scenario with its rescue dogs. Beaver Creek Ski Patrol’s avalanche rescue dog program is now in its sixth season.

This is Beaver Creek's eighth Safety Award, with previous wins in 2008/09 2007/08, 2006/07, 2005/06, 2003/04, 2002/03, 2001/02, and 1999/00. ■