

Recent Trends and Prevention Strategies For Avalanche and Snow Immersion Risk at U.S. and B.C. Ski Areas

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Many ISSW participants are involved in snow safety operations at ski areas. Understanding recent changes in trends in avalanche and snow immersion risk at ski areas will help us better educate and protect ski area users.

Analysis of the last 18 years found 6 ski area avalanche fatalities in bounds reflecting a trend in reduction. 60 fatalities (12% of the total U.S. and 9% of Canadian total) associated with leaving the ski area boundary indicate a flat trend in this risky behavior.

Not well documented during the same 18 years, is an increasing trend in the risk of asphyxiation in deep snow in bounds at ski areas. 57 Non-Avalanche Related Snow Immersion Deaths (NARSID) occurred during the study period.

NARSID currently accounts for 15% of all ski area fatalities in the United States. In B.C., during the period from 1993 to 1998, it accounted for 25% of all ski area in bounds fatalities. The NARSID risk in the U.S. is currently 15 times greater than the avalanche risk in bounds at a ski area. In 2005-06 alone, 40% of the total snowboard fatalities at U.S. ski areas were NARSIDs. The greatest risk continues to be lack of awareness.