

NSAA FACT SHEET



NSAA Contact:

Troy Hawks
NSAA Communications
thawks@nsaa.org
(720) 963-4215

NSAA Snow Immersion Suffocation Fact Sheet

LAKEWOOD, Colo. – September 1, 2012 – According to a study conducted Paul Baugher, a leading snow safety researcher and director of the Northwest Avalanche Institute, 47 incidents of Snow Immersion Suffocation (SIS) have occurred at ski areas in the western U.S. and British Columbia from the 2000/01 to 2011/12 seasons. (See Graph 1). SIS incidents most often occur with deep snow and tree well immersions, in which a skier or snowboarder falls into an area of deep, unconsolidated snow and becomes immobilized. The more the person struggles, the more entrapped in the snow they become, and the risk suffocation increases. According to Baugher, in many cases the victim can die as quickly as drowning in water.

Despite the best efforts of highly trained ski area professionals, SIS incidents can occur at ski areas, although they remain extremely rare. The likelihood of becoming involved in a fatal incident of any type at a U.S. ski area is 1.06 per million skier and snowboarder visits. (*See Facts About Skiing & Snowboarding Safety online at nsaa.org*). Safety remains the top priority within the ski industry and ski areas focus on in-bound tree well and deep snow mitigation, safety and education measures.

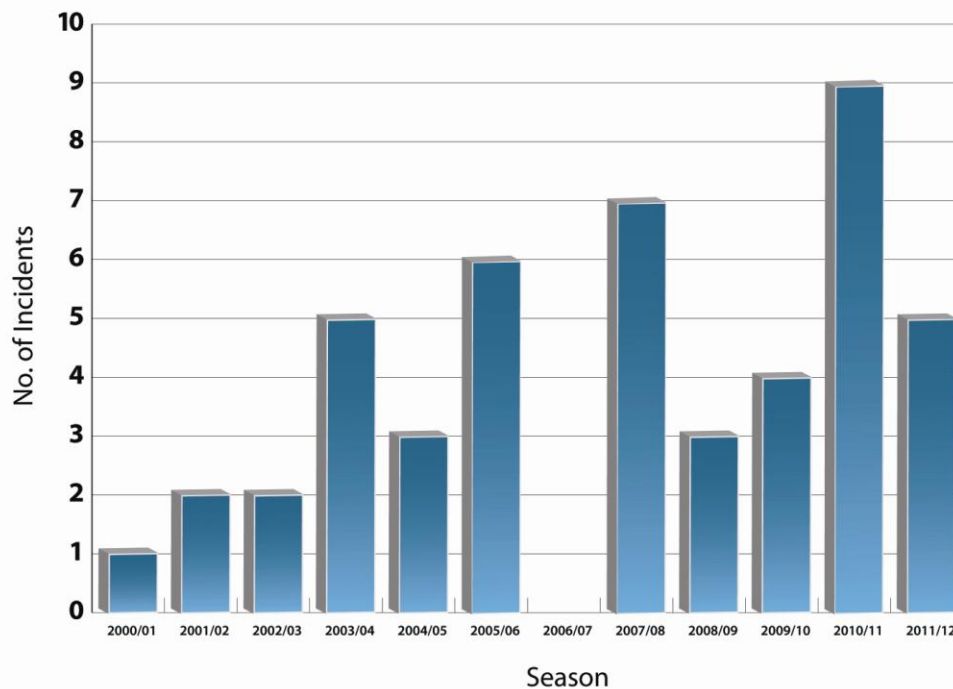
“Ski areas nationwide take proactive measures to remind their skiing and riding guests that the deep powder they so often crave, can also turn deadly if they decide to go it alone,” says NSAA President Michael Berry. “Skiers and riders need to take precautions and educate themselves about the risks involved when skiing in gladed terrain and deep snow conditions, and you always need to heed warnings and obey ski area signage.”

As part of its Skier and Rider Responsibility Code, NSAA encourages guests to always ski or ride with a partner, observe all signs and warnings, and to consider wearing a helmet. Meanwhile Baugher, and colleague Gwyn Howat of Washington's Mt. Baker Ski Area, have developed a SIS safety education website (www.treewelldeepsnowsafety.com) as an educational resource for skiers and riders.

Baugher states: "Skiing and snowboarding off of the groomed runs and in deep powder snow is one of the most exciting and appealing parts of our sport. If you decide to leave the groomed trails, you are voluntarily accepting the specific risks of falling into tree wells or deep snow and suffocating, however, these types of accidents are very preventable."

GRAPH 1

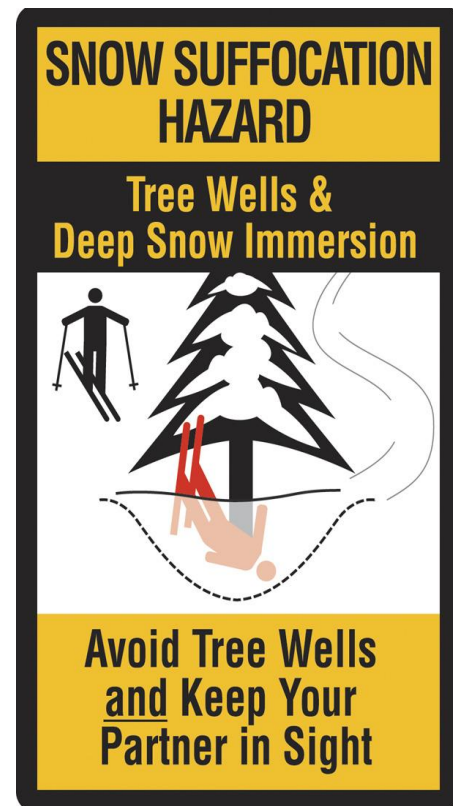
**U.S. Ski Area Snow Immersion Suffocations
2000/01 – 2011/12**



Key Safety Tips for Skiers and Riders

- **Each skier or snowboarder controls his or her own level of risk.** Only you can prevent this type of accident from happening. Always ski and ride with a partner. To minimize your risk, you must know how to travel safely with your partners in these un-groomed deep snow areas;
- **Always stay in visual contact so that your partner(s) can see you if you fall.** Visual contact means stopping and watching your partner descend at all times, then proceeding downhill while he or she watches you at all times. It does no good if your partner is already waiting for you in lift line while you are still descending the slope;
- **Stay close enough to either pull or dig out.** If you have any question about what "close enough" to assist someone in a tree well is, hold your breath while you are reading this. The amount of time before you need air may be how much time your partner has to pull or dig you out of danger. Other factors such as creating an air pocket or the position you fall in, may affect this critical timeframe.
- **Remember, if you lose visual contact with your partner you could lose your friend.** It is important to know that most people who have died in deep snow or tree well accidents had been skiing or riding with "partners" at the time of their accident. Unfortunately, none of these partners were in visual contact so they were not able to be of help in a timely manner.
- **If you still have questions, contact your ski patrol.**

For more information on Snow Immersion Suffocation contact Paul Baugher, Director, Northwest Avalanche Institute at paul@mountainguides.com or call (360) 825-9261 or (206) 310-1494 (mobile).



THE NATIONAL SKI AREAS ASSOCIATION, LOCATED IN LAKEWOOD, COLO., IS A TRADE ASSOCIATION FORMED IN 1962 FOR SKI AREA OWNERS AND OPERATORS NATIONWIDE.

###