



Updated October 2020

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NSAA Fatality Fact Sheet

Skier/Snowboarder Fatality Incidents

- There were 42 reported fatal incidents during the 2019/20 season.
- The majority of fatal incidents resulted from collisions.
- In 2019/20, males represented over 83% of all skier/snowboarder fatalities.
- The majority of incidents occurred on more or most difficult terrain.

Overview

The National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) reports that during the 2019/20 season, there were 42 skier and snowboarder fatalities occurring at U.S. ski areas, analogous to the 42 that occurred during the 2018/19 season. The majority of 2019/20 fatalities were male skiers between the ages of 21-30 on either more difficult (“intermediate”) or most difficult (“advanced”) terrain. Collisions continue to be the primary cause of skier/snowboarder fatalities. Approximately 66% of skiers/snowboarders involved in fatal incidents in the 2019/20 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 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 does not include guest fatalities that are related to a pre-existing medical condition (such as a heart attack or stroke). This data also does not include fatalities suffered by ski area employees while working, unless the fatality is akin to one that could occur to 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 season.

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 the majority of employee fatalities. These incidents are reported to NSAA at the end of each season.

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 42 fatalities reported during the 2019/20 season is higher than the 10-year industry average of 39 fatalities per season (see chart). Based on 51.3 million total skier/snowboarder visits during the 2019/20 season, the fatality rate converts to less than one fatality per 1 million skier visits (or 0.81 fatalities per 1 million skier visits during the 2019/20 season).

Factors

Gender continues to be a factor in ski/snowboard fatalities. Of the 2019/20 fatalities, 35 were male and seven were female. This breakdown does not align with the proportion of male and female snowsports participants (in 2019/20, 59% of skiers and snowboarders identified as male and 41% identified as female). Generally, the breakdown of fatalities follow the national percentages of skiers and snowboarders, but skewed toward skiers this season. Of the 42 fatalities last season, 36 individuals were skiing and six were snowboarding.

Helmet usage is also tracked. During these incidents, 28 were wearing a helmet, and nine did not wear a helmet. We do not have helmet data for five of the incidents. Overall, approximately 86% of all skiers and snowboarders wore helmets during the 2019/20 ski season, according to the 2019/20 Demographic Study conducted by NSAA.

NSAA's Take on Ski/Snowboard Fatalities

"Safety continues to be NSAA's top focus, providing resources and education opportunities to our 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 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 <https://nsaa.org/rideanotherday>.

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.

A key education piece for NSAA and its members is [Snow Immersion Safety](#), which alerts skiers and riders to the dangers posed by deep snow immersion and tree wells. NSAA recommends skiing or riding with a buddy, and leaving plenty of space between you and trees, in order to avoid these types of incidents.

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)
2019-20	42	51.3	0.81
2018-19	42	59.3	0.71
2017-18	37	53.3	0.69
2016-17	43	54.8	0.78
2015-16	39	52.8	0.74
2014-15	35	53.6	0.65
2013-14	32	56.5	0.57
2012-13	27	56.9	0.47
2011-12	46	51.0	0.90
2010-11	47	60.5	0.78
10-year Average	39	55	0.71

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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](https://www.nsa.org).