



Sledding over fresh snow on a smooth, open hillside can provide exhilarating winter fun, and sledding can be both challenging and safe if care is taken to match the participant's maturity and skill to the slope conditions and equipment. However, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reported more than 52,000 sledding, snow tubing, and tobogganing-related injuries treated in 2014, with the majority of those injuries suffered by youth 14 and younger. A conscientious review of specific incidents may help prevent future occurrences.

Whether Scouts take to sleds, saucers, or tubes, they can make gliding across the snow fun, challenging, and safe if they take the proper safety precautions. This youth carrying his tube through the snow has prepared for safety by wearing a helmet.

Incident Review #1 and #2

A Scout was sledding when her sled flipped and she was flung into a tree. She fractured a wrist and femur. In a separate incident, a 46-year-old leader became airborne when his snow tube slid over a walled lane divider. He fractured his lower back when he fell onto the frozen lane divider.

Key Points

- Fractures are the most common sledding injury.
- The ability to control a sled and avoid obstacles is an important aspect of course design and selection.

This youth, who is not wearing a helmet, is about to take a spill and risk striking his head on a hard object buried beneath the snow.



Incident Review #3

A 12-year-old Scout on a troop outing to a ski area was sledding on a plastic saucer. The sled went out of control and the boy was killed when the back of his head hit a metal ski lift tower. He was not wearing a safety helmet.

Key Points

- Close to 10 percent of victims sustain traumatic brain injuries during sledding incidents.
- Properly designed and fitted helmets are strongly recommended for all sledding activities.
- Some types of sleds are easier to steer than others.

“Plastic sheets or other materials that can be pierced by objects on the ground should not be used.”—American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons



“ The sled should have runners and a steering mechanism, which is safer than toboggans or snow disks.”
—American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

This youth pulling his sled has allowed himself enough distance from the tree line to steer clear of danger.



Incident Review #4 and #5

During a winter camp, Scouts were using a Klondike Derby sled during an unauthorized activity in an area not appropriate for sledding. A 14-year-old Scout broke his arm when the sled went out of control and hit a tree. In a separate incident, a 13-year-old guest walking down a sledding hill was struck by a sled, fell and struck the back of her head, and suffered a concussion.

Key Points

- Proper supervision is needed to ensure that sledding activities are conducted safely and in safe areas.
- Even when an approved sledding activity is conducted in a safe area, supervision of youth both on and off sleds is still needed.

Incident Review #6

A 14-year-old Scout was fatally injured when he was struck by a snowmobile while being pulled on an inner tube behind an all-terrain vehicle (ATV).

Key Points

- Sleds with riders should not be pulled by motorized vehicles, including cars, trucks, snowmobiles, ATVs, and lawnmowers.
- ATVs are not approved for unit use.

The youth on the right is tubing along a path that is dangerously close to the orange safety fencing and the youth who is trekking back uphill. Keep a safe distance to avoid placing yourself or others in potential danger.

Discussion Questions

- Which types of sleds have steering mechanisms, and why do they offer greater potential safety?
- What is the concern with lying headfirst on a tray, saucer, or tube and trying to steer it with legs trailing behind?
- How far should a sledding course be located from obstacles such as trees?
- Why shouldn't a sled course include bumps that allow participants to become airborne?
- Why is an extended end run with a gentle slope preferred over ending at a fence, street, or parking lot?

Resources

- Guide to Safe Scouting—Winter Sports Safety, www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/#b
- Bryan on Scouting—“After Losing Their Son, Family Delivers Plea for Helmet Use While Sledding,” blog.scoutingmagazine.org/2014/01/29/after-losing-their-son-family-delivers-plea-for-helmet-use-while-sledding/

