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Peering down a slope covered with snow can be an exhilarating prelude to downhill skiing, sledding, or snowboarding. Snow sports can be both challenging and safe if care is taken to match participant maturity and skill to slope conditions. However, fast speed, obstacles such as trees or other skiers, and uneven terrain can lead to mishaps. A careful review of specific incidents may help prevent future occurrences.

Incident Reviews #1, #2, and #3

In separate incidents:

- A 10-year-old Cub Scout fell while skiing on a unit trip, tearing his spleen and breaking his clavicle, femur, and pelvis.
- A 14-year-old Boy Scout lost control while skiing, hit a tree, and suffered trauma to his spleen.
- A 17-year-old Explorer landed wrongly from a snowboard jump, tearing his lung and lacerating his spleen.

Key Points

- Skiing and snowboarding accidents occur when participants lose control.
- “Always stay in control and be able to stop or avoid other people or objects” is point one of the National Ski Areas Association’s Your Responsibility Code.
- Accidents can result in broken legs, head injuries, and other serious trauma.

Incident Reviews #4 and #5

- A 13-year-old Boy Scout attempted a turn to travel across a hill on an intermediate run. He lost control, hit the root of a downed tree, and died on the mountain from injuries he sustained.
- A Scout was skiing downhill when he caught an edge, which caused him to turn and fall backward, striking his head. The boy, who was wearing a helmet, suffered a minor concussion.

Key Points

- According to a *Denver Post* analysis, the typical death on Colorado ski slopes happens when an experienced skier wearing a helmet loses control on an intermediate, groomed run, and hits a tree.
- Since 2010 the BSA has required helmet use for downhill skiing and snowboarding activities. The website lidsonkids.org outlines why helmet use is important.
- Understand that helmets reduce, rather than eliminate, the risk of injury.

“ In the last 10 years, ski helmet use by youth is up from 54 percent to 90 percent.”
—National Ski Areas Association report, Nov. 2017

“Know the Code” — www.nsaa.org/safety-programs/responsibility-code



Incident Review #6

A 12-year-old Boy Scout on his first ski trip was moving up a beginner slope by holding on to a tow rope. He was dragged and lifted into the air when his scarf became tangled in the rope. The Scout was unresponsive when rescued and given CPR on-site. After some time at a hospital, he regained consciousness from a medically induced coma and began talking. At the start of the tow, there was a warning sign about loose clothing that showed an icon of a scarf.

Key Points

- There are safety hazards getting up the slope as well as down. Lifts of all types can intimidate new users.
- “Prior to using any lift, you must have the knowledge and ability to load, ride and unload safely” is the last point of the NSAA’s Your Responsibility Code.
- Youth excited by a new activity may not notice caution signs or grasp their importance.

Discussion Questions

- How do leaders determine skill levels of those under their supervision?
- How do leaders match equipment and allowable runs to the abilities of skiers and boarders?

- How do leaders encourage and monitor appropriate behavior on the slopes?
- How can participants best improve their skill levels to prepare for more challenging runs?

Resources

- Winter Sports Safety in the *Guide to Safe Scouting*—www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss12/#b
- BSA Safety Moment: Winter Sports Safety—www.scouting.org/filestore/HealthSafety/pdf/680-055_5.pdf
- *Denver Post* article—www.denverpost.com/2013/03/18/colorado-skiers-die-on-groomed-blue-runs-after-hitting-trees/
- *Snow Sports* merit badge pamphlet (No. 35951)
- National Ski Areas Association: Seven Points to Your Responsibility Code—www.nsaa.org/safety-programs/responsibility-code/

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