



North Tahoe and Meeks Bay Fire Protection Districts



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PRESS RELEASE

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Avalanche Dangers and Snow Immersion Suffocation Hazards

Feb. 5, 2019: TAHOE CITY, CA – Weekend storm totals brought three to six feet of new snow around the Basin, and North Tahoe Fire and Meeks Bay Fire want to warn those who are heading out to the fresh powder about avalanche dangers at all elevations, in addition to hazards of Snow Immersion Suffocation (SIS).

Lake Tahoe is famous for its deep powder, and the fresh snow received with this last storm is both exciting and appealing for alpine sports enthusiasts. The Sierra Avalanche Center forecast considerable avalanche danger at all elevations today due to widespread wind slabs and some storm slabs. Large human-triggered avalanches are possible, and the Center warns that more avalanche fatalities occur at the considerable danger rating than at higher danger ratings. Careful snowpack evaluation, cautious route-finding and conservative decision-making are essential.

That new snow also comes with risks that recreationists need to understand, and those choosing to leave groomed trails are faced with the hazard of a deep snow immersion accident. Deep snow or tree well immersion accidents occur as a result of a fall into an area of deep unconsolidated snow, where it is very easy to become immobilized and suffocate. It's important for recreationists to be educated on how to reduce the risk of Ski Immersion Suffocation Hazards through action and awareness.

Skiers and riders are urged to be aware of and avoid deep loose snow and tree wells. Remain on groomed areas, and if venturing into ungroomed terrain give tree wells a wide berth. Always ride or ski with a partner, and keep each other in sight at all times. Skiers should remove pole straps before heading into powder as attempts at removing pole straps may hamper efforts to clear air space if you become trapped. If you are sliding toward a tree well or area of deep snow, grab ahold of the tree or branches in order to stay above the surface of the snow. If you do fall, **DO NOT STRUGGLE** as this will cause the snow to compact around you. Make a breathing space around your face and carefully rock your body back and forth to create hollow a space around you allowing for air space.

What should you do if you experience an incident requiring assistance? "Summon help from bystanders and call 911 directly at the time of the incident," said NTFPD Fire Chief Michael Schwartz. "Historically, many Truckee-Tahoe locals attempt to mitigate an incident by calling friends or rescuers instead of using the 911 system. Backcountry incidents require greater response time due to location, weather and specialty resource needs from multiple agencies such as the Truckee Tahoe Regional Rescue Team (TTRRT). This applies to all incidents, but with a backcountry incident every minute of daylight and cooperating weather is precious, and a delay in calling 911 may be the difference in life and death."



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Below is a list of safety equipment that skiers and riders should consider when in the back country:

- Fully charged cell phone
- Transceiver/Beacon
- Whistle
- Shovel
- Probe

For additional information on reducing SIS Hazards and staying safe in the powder, visit www.deepsnowsafety.org. For the latest avalanche forecast, visit <https://www.sierraavalanchecenter.org/advisory>.

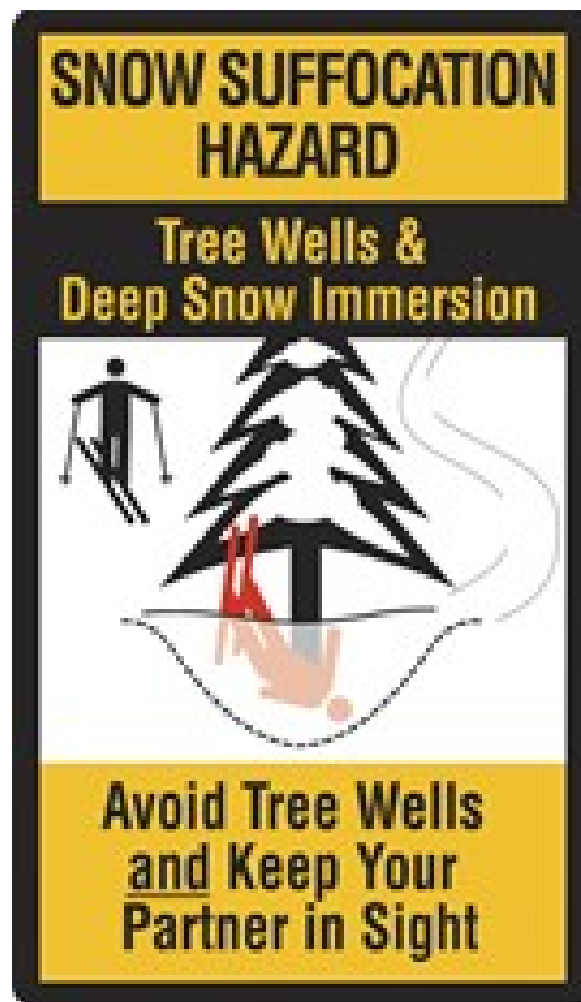


Image courtesy of National Ski Areas Association.

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