

Safety, Health & Fitness —

California Ski Safety Bill Killed in Committee

The “Ski Safety” bill that was being pushed in the California state legislature and which was seen as a serious threat to the whole snowsports industry, has been successfully turned back in the Appropriations Committee as a result of some skillful lobbying efforts by Bob Roberts and the California Ski Industries Association. In assessing the threat, NSAA had cautioned that “The deck is stacked heavily against the industry on this bill,” so its successful derailing was doubly welcome.

The proposed legislation could have resulted in the creation of a ski safety task force, which ultimately would have been in a position to set de facto standards. The effect of such legislation on the books of a significant ski state like California would almost certainly have migrated to other states.

Ski Helmets: Safety on the Slopes

www.comsumerreprots.org

Who knows whether Michael Kennedy or Sonny Bono would have survived if they'd been wearing helmets when each crashed into a tree while skiing six years ago. But doctors have little doubt about 5-year-old Eliot Levmore of Chicago.

During a skiing lesson in Colorado last March, Eliot veered off course and plowed into a tree. He suffered cuts and bruises but was spared serious head injury by his helmet. “He came away almost uninjured,” said Dr. Lori McBride, a pediatric neurosurgeon at the Denver hospital where Eliot was treated. He managed to dent his helmet, she added, and not his head.

A week later, Eliot's ski school made helmets mandatory for all students age 12 and younger.

In 2002, about 23,000 skiers and snowboarders suffered head injuries, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The CPSC estimates that a helmet could have prevented or lessened the severity of about 40 percent of those injuries.

Indeed, although head injuries are only a small subset of skiing and snowboarding injuries--of which there were about 400,000 in 2002, according to the CPSC--they were considered a major cause of death in such accidents.

Helmets are showing up on ski slopes more frequently. Still, only about one-fourth of skiers and snowboarders wear them, according to the National Ski Area Association, a ski-industry group. Some ski schools require that young children wear helmets. But most ski areas don't oblige adults to do so. The National Ski Patrol's Web site says wearing a helmet is “a matter of personal choice.”

EFFECTIVE PROTECTION?

While ski helmets can protect against injuries to the head, they obviously don't prevent injuries to the neck, wrists, knees, or other parts of the body. There is also a limit to how much impact they can absorb: Even the most-protective helmet won't prevent a brain injury from a hard, straight-on hit.

However, accidents happen in all sorts of ways, and the relationship is not direct between how fast you're skiing or riding at the time of an accident and how hard you hit your head. You may hit your head harder if you trip while walking to the lift than if you slide at 40 mph down an icy double-black-diamond slope. In either case, wearing a helmet could mean the difference between a serious injury and a good tale to tell back at the lodge.

If you do knock your head severely while wearing a helmet, you'll probably need to replace it. Some manufacturers offer a free or discounted replacement if a helmet is damaged in a crash.

To be effective, a helmet must both absorb impact and stay on the head. There are no federal safety standards for ski helmets, but all the helmets we tested claim compliance (via a label or sticker) with at least one of three industry helmet standards for recreational skiing and snowboarding. Those standards are from the European Committee for Standardization, ASTM International, and the Snell Memorial Foundation. All mandate tests for impact absorption, retention-system (strap-and-buckle) strength, and stability on the head, and also specify a minimum head area the helmet must protect.

Our tests incorporate elements of the standards, but we go beyond them to see just how much impact protection each helmet provides. We do this by dropping helmets from varying heights onto anvils of different shapes. When we did that for this report, some of the Boeri Rage helmets had a problem.

HELMETS TO AVOID

Although our own tests suggest that the Boeri Axis Rage would have passed the impact tests of the ASTM and European

Committee for Standardization, shells of 7 of the 10 high-gloss Boeri Axis Rage helmets we tested shattered when we dropped them from about 6 3/4 feet onto a flat anvil. (This did not occur with the Rage's Iron shell, which is made of a different material.) The high-gloss shell broke into large, sharp fragments that could cut the wearer's face. And the chin-strap system was compromised, which could cause the helmet to come off (see Problem helmets). We've judged the Boeri Axis Rage helmet with high-gloss shell Not Acceptable.

Some samples of two helmets failed our test for chin-strap retention. A plastic ring connecting parts of the straps broke. If that happened during an accident, the helmet could shift or come off. Their names: the W Helmets W Ski w/Slider (see Problem helmets) and the Boeri Axis Rage (high-gloss and Iron versions have the same retention system). We recommend that you not buy those helmets. If you own one, consider replacing it.

We also checked all the helmets for warmth, ventilation, and resistance to being pushed out of position. As the Ratings show, some helmets will keep your head warmer or cooler than others, and some were more adept at staying in place on our panelists' heads.

HOW TO CHOOSE

Judging by our tests, all helmets bearing a label or sticker certifying compliance with industry standards don't necessarily protect your head equally. That's a reason to choose from among the first 10 models in the Ratings.

Whether you choose a short-shell or full-shell helmet (see Types), make sure it fits properly. Some helmets come in kids' sizes only; the ones we tested come in a range of sizes that fit both adults and kids. On some helmets, sliding or removable vent covers and removable earflaps let you emphasize warmth or ventilation.

To find the helmet that's best for you:

Have someone view your head from above.

From that perspective, you can see if a head is fairly round or more oval. Helmets tend to fit one or the other type better. The Best Fit column in the Ratings indicates which helmets may be better for which head shape.

Put the helmet on.

It should be snug, but not tight, all the way around your head. Bring your goggles with you when shopping. Make sure there are no big gaps between goggles and helmet that leave your forehead and temples exposed. If you're buying a helmet for a child, get one that fits now, not one to "grow into." If you must buy a helmet without trying it on, make sure you can return or exchange it.

Fine-tune it.

Adjust the straps so that the helmet's front edge is no more than an inch or so above your eyebrows. Then push on its front, back, and sides. If it shifts around and you can push the front or back up by more than about an inch, further tighten the straps. Adjusting the straps can take time, but you shouldn't have to do it more than once. You can also check if the helmet comes with extra pads that you can insert to improve the fit. If the helmet is still loose, find another.

Don't buy by price.

You'll spend \$90 to \$150 for one of the top 10 helmets we rated. Price bore little relationship to performance. The highest-rated of those helmets cost \$110, the lowest-rated, \$100.

Don't substitute.

Don't try saving money by wearing a bike helmet on the slopes. A bike helmet is better than nothing, but a ski helmet covers more of your head, is typically warmer, and has a shell designed to protect against penetration by sharp edges like those on skis and snowboards. A run-in between head and ski or board happens rarely, but if it does, you'll want a ski helmet as protection.

BEST HELMETS

See a summary of test findings and Quick Picks--the choices that merit first consideration, including any CR Best Buys.

The top 10 helmets in the Ratings should all help reduce the risk of injury in the event of a blow to the head while skiing or snowboarding. Those helmets toward the top of the offered better impact protection in our tough tests.

The Ratings list models by overall performance based on impact protection, stability, warmth, and ventilation. The Quick Picks (below) consider best choices of the two types and a model most likely to fit small children properly.

Best short-shell helmets:

- 1 Giro \$110
- 2 Giro \$150

Both have thin yet protective shells that help make them especially lightweight. They have removable earflaps if you get too warm and removable liners for easy cleaning. Vents can be closed to keep your head warm or opened to keep it cool. An advantage of Giro (2): Some vents can be opened without taking off the helmet. Both of the models are covered for crash replacement within three years of purchase.

Best full-shell helmets:

- 3 Leedom \$130
- 7 Briko \$100

Full-shell helmets extend the hard-shell covering over the ears. Both the Leedom (3) and the Briko (7) have vents that can be opened or closed without taking off the helmet. The Briko is not covered for crash replacement. Cost to replace the Leedom after a crash is \$45.

Likely to fit kids as young as age 4:

- 4 Leedom \$95

All helmets come in a range of sizes. This one's smallest size is slightly smaller than the rest. If the helmet is damaged in a crash, replacement costs \$45.

Ski Associations 2003-2004 Club Insurance Program Highlights

Fred Liebel, Michael Ehrenfeld Company

Far West Ski Association has once again contracted with our agency to secure the renewal of the Master Liability insurance Program for all of the Far West Ski Association Clubs and Councils and once again your club qualifies for reduced rates for your general liability insurance. As you may already know we write insurance coverage for the Far West Ski Associations master policy and many of the clubs and councils have been with our programs for almost 15 years. Some highlights of the program include:

1. Liability coverage limits of \$1,000,000. per occurrence with A PER EVENT Aggregate limit. Underwritten by an A+ IX RATED CARRIER First Dollar Coverage - NO DEDUCTIBLE
2. Club members are included as named insured thus extending the policy coverage to protect the members while on Club business or while participating in Club events.
3. Participant Legal Liability including coverage for off-season club activities. (this extends the general liability coverage to provide the club/council coverage for bodily injury claims brought by participants in your events, including members. Most policies do not have this very important coverage)
4. Each club is endorsed onto the Master policy and as such has it's own limits and coverages with Aggregate limits of \$2,000,000 per event
5. Hired and Non-Owned auto coverage is included with limits at \$1,000,000.
6. Host Liquor Liability and Incidental Medical Malpractice coverage is included. Legal liability coverage for slander, defamation or wrongful eviction.
7. \$25,000 Accident Medical Coverage (no general aggregate) with American National Life Ins Company of Texas.

This policy is especially designed to meet the needs of the typical ski club and ski council and we feel it offers quite comprehensive coverage at a very reasonable rate.

The typical rate for most clubs is \$10.00 per member (down from \$13.47 a member 2 years ago) and an additional flat \$25 per Club charge for the Non-Owned & Hired Auto Coverage and there is a flat \$75 processing fee for all policies. We can also extend liability coverage for owned and rented lodges for a flat \$200 per year. In order to secure firm quotes we will need the attached application completed, signed and returned to our offices and we will promptly turn around and provide you with a firm

insurance quote for your club.

Feel free to call me at (619) 683-9990 extension #103 if you have any questions regarding the attached or if you need clarification on any of the coverage's and limits offered by this program.