

Safety, Health & Fitness—

Tips for Cleaning Your Helmet

It is recommended that helmet shells be cleaned with mild soap and water only. The helmet may be damaged and rendered ineffective by petroleum products, cleaning agents, paint, adhesives and the like, without the damage being visible to the user.

To clean the padding inside use a very mild soap and a sponge to do a bit of "spot" cleaning. Do not try to remove the liner to clean it. Never put your helmet in the dishwasher, washing machine or any other mass cleaning appliance.

Do not use ANY harsh chemicals!

Avoiding ACL Injuries

The downside of alpine skiing has often meant broken bones. But since quick-release bindings were introduced more than a decade ago, skiers' ankles have been better protected. Knees, however, are now at risk as a result of improvements that allow skis to turn, exerting pressure directly up into the knee, specifically to the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). As skiers fall, often backward, they twist a leg and the ski in the process. If the leg turns too severely, an ominous "pop" results, signaling a serious sprain. Surgery and rehabilitation are often required. Knee injuries have become the most common serious mishap, with ACLs involved in more than 15 percent of injuries on the slopes, and experienced skiers are as susceptible as novices.

Vermont researchers have discerned movements that precede ACL injuries. Typically, a skier traversing right loses balance and instinctively throws the right ski forward and the right arm back, while the hips remain below the knees. All the pressure is exerted on the inside edge of the tail of the left ski, which twists the knee. Last winter the researchers worked with 20 state ski areas, sending videos and other materials to help instructors and patrollers develop techniques to avoid ACL accidents. The result: a 62 percent drop in ACL injuries among the ski personnel, as compared with previous seasons and a control group of 22 nonparticipating ski areas.

Vermont Safety Research is now developing teaching concepts that will be passed on to consumers. No one instructs skiers on how to recover balance, when and how to fall, and how to stop after a fall. The key is to put your arms forward, bring your skis together, and try to get your hands over your skis.

Aid Sought For Program To Cut Injuries On Slopes

A program that lends helmets to ski and snowboard renters at no extra charge has hit a bump.

Founded by a Denver neurologist and dubbed "It Ain't Brain Surgery," the 6-year-old program, which seeks to encourage long-term and widespread use of helmets, has steered thousands of helmets to skiers and boarders who rent from Christy Sports outlets. Ski patrol members, ski instructors and other professionals have also received helmets at no cost as a way to increase helmet use and awareness.

Fundraising efforts, however, have suffered recently because of the downturn in the overall economy, said Dr. Stewart Levy of InterMountain Neurosurgery and St. Anthony Central Hospital.

After three consecutive years of receiving more than \$70,000 in grants, It Ain't Brain Surgery has raised about \$15,000 this year, Levy said.

Medical professionals, including doctors and nurses, help run the helmet program at "zero administrative cost," Levy said. "Every single dollar we raise goes to the price of helmets," he said.

The majority of helmets end up at Christy stores in Colorado and Utah, where employees sell renters on using them as part of a complete and safe package.

"We have really seen it come on," said Jim Peterson, a Christy Sports manager in Winter Park. "We get a lot of people wearing helmets who wouldn't have because it is a free program."

In the 1998-99 ski season the deaths of Michael Kennedy, the son of the late Robert F. Kennedy, and Rep. Sonny Bono, both from head injuries in ski accidents, focused attention on helmet safety.

New Ski & Safety Laws for Italy

A new law for the ski and snowboard industry in Italy will come in to force on 1st January, 2005 following approval by the Italian senate (upper house) last week.

Snowboarders cannot be banned from using the slopes. However early proposals for segregated slopes for skiers and snowboarders, suggested after what is widely seen as the catalyst that began the legislation, a fatal collision between a skier and a snowboarder several years ago, have not made it through to the final draft.

For the ski lift companies there's a legal requirement that they must have insurance liability and that slope signage should be up to common standards.

The most controversial element in the new law will probably be a requirement that helmets are compulsory for all children up to 14 years of age - with fines from 30 to 150 Euros for transgression. These transgressions include a requirement that skiers and boarders should adjust their speed according to terrain and weather conditions.