



MEMORANDUM

To: Scout Executives **Date:** February 11, 2008
From: Richard R. Bourlon, P.E., CSP **CC:** H & S File No. 3.5
Director Health and Safety Service, S410 Directors
Subject: Winter Activity Hazard Awareness and Accident Prevention Strategies

Excessive speed, going off the marked trail into a tree, horseplay on a tow line, impact with an ice wall, trees, stumps and rocks, falling from a sled and being struck by another one can all result in broken limbs, fractured skulls, torn livers and kidneys, broken vertebra and other serious and even fatal injuries. These are all examples of winter activities (skiing, sledding, and tubing), that while fun and exciting, also have inherent hazards and risks that must be identified, assessed, and resolved to ensure the physical and mental well-being of our Scouts and Scouters.

What can you do now?

Review key Winter Sports Safety guidelines (*Health and Safety Guide* or the *Guide to Safe Scouting*) at your next staff meeting or with your key council and district event planners. Focus on:

1. Qualified Supervision – Is leadership familiar with winter hazards? Have they reviewed and do they practice the Winter Sports Safety guidelines?
2. Safe Area – What can be done to eliminate or guard against contact with fixed objects in downhill events? Is this a dedicated course or one put together just for the event? Does qualified supervision need to do a walk through regularly to see if conditions have changed?
3. Discipline – Horseplay, exhibitions of speed, or unsupervised activities can lead to tragedy. Is a plan in place for the event supervision to insure discipline on the slopes?

Engage your Health and Safety Committee and/or Risk Management Committee. Communicate the message to your districts and units to be aware of the Winter Sports Safety guidelines and protect the people, property, and environment of the Boy Scouts of America.

Post a reminder on your Web site. The content from the Guide to Safe Scouting is attached for your use.

If there are any questions please feel free to contact me at 972-580-2156.

Winter Sports Safety

Beyond camping, a number of cold-weather activities present challenges to the Scout and leader, such as cross-country skiing, ice skating, sledding, snowmobiling, ice fishing, and snowshoeing. Essential ingredients for fun include skill training and an awareness of the hazards unique to these activities. Snow conditions, hazardous terrain, special clothing needs, and emergency survival are important issues for a safe and successful experience.



Be sure your winter outdoor activity always follows these guidelines:

1. All winter activities must be supervised by mature and conscientious adults (at least one of whom must be age 21 or older) who understand and knowingly accept responsibility for the well-being and safety of the youth in their care, who are experienced and qualified in the particular skills and equipment involved in the activity, and who are committed to compliance with the seven points of BSA Winter Sports Safety. Direct supervision should be maintained at all times by two or more adults when Scouts are "in the field." The appropriate number of supervisors will increase depending on the number of participants, the type of activity, and environmental conditions.
2. Winter sports activities embody intrinsic hazards that vary from sport to sport. Participants should be aware of the potential hazards of any winter sport before engaging in it. Leaders should emphasize preventing accidents through adherence to safety measures and proper technique.
3. Suitable clothing for the activity and environment should be worn at all times, and equipment should include gloves and helmets when appropriate.
4. Winter sports activities often place greater demands on a participant's cardiopulmonary system, and people with underlying medical conditions (especially if the heart or lungs are involved) should not participate without medical consultation and direction. For participants without underlying medical conditions, the annual health history and physical examination by a licensed health-care practitioner every three years are sufficient. The adult leader should be familiar with the physical circumstances of each youth participant and make appropriate adjustments in the activity or protection as warranted by individual health or physical conditions. Adults participating in strenuous outdoor winter activity should have an annual physical examination. It is recommended that the medical assessment be performed by a licensed health-care practitioner knowledgeable of the sport and the particular physical demands the activity will place on the individual.
5. For winter sports such as skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling, etc. that utilize specialized equipment, it is essential that all equipment fit and function properly.
6. When youth are engaging in downhill activities such as sledding or tobogganing, minimize the likelihood of collision with immobile obstacles. Use only designated areas where rocks, tree stumps, and other potential obstacles have been identified and marked, cleared away, shielded, or buffered in some way.
7. All participants should know, understand, and respect the rules and procedures for safe winter activity. The applicable rules should be presented and learned before the outing, and all participants should review them just before the activity begins. When Scouts know and understand the reasons for the rules, they will observe them. When fairly and impartially applied, rules do not interfere with fun. Rules for safety, plus common sense and good judgment, keep the fun from being interrupted by tragedy.

Reference: *Health and Safety Guide*, No. 34415