

SnowboardSecrets.com

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About Me



Lauren Traub Teton

Lauren's interests are as varied as snowboarding and product naming. She is also the creator of "Twifties," coined to mean "people around their 50's who act like they're in their 20's and is an advocate of the Twifty lifestyle of finding fun whenever

Wednesday, January 6, 2010

[Helmets for Ski Slopes - The Debate Continues](#) Helmets for Snowboarders and Skiers - The Debate Continues

by Lauren Traub Teton
for [SnowboardSecrets.com](#)

A federal report estimates 7,700 head injuries could be prevented every year if skiers and snowboarders wore helmets.

The NY Times ran an article January 2, 2010 about how prevalent helmets have become on the slopes of snow resorts. Vail Resorts, Aspen Skiing Company, and Intrawest all have helmet policies for employees and recommend that their guests wear them. Stewart Levy, a Denver neurosurgeon says that wearing a helmet could reduce reduce the chance of sustaining a brain injury by 50 to 80%.

The flip side of the coin is voiced by Jasper "Jake" Shealy, a professor emeritus at Rochester Institute of Technology who says that in high speed crashes helmet use does not make a difference. Shealy who has studied head injuries among skiers for over 30 years also says regarding the ski slope death of Natasha Richardson "an unhelmeted head actually has more time and distance to decelerate when the snow is soft — as was the case in Ms. Richardson's fall — and the fall is slow, because it will penetrate further into the snow than a helmeted head." He still believes skiers and snowboarders should wear helmets, but believes they should not be oversold on the safety a helmet will provide.

We at [SnowboardSecrets.com](#) spoke to Dr. Robert Williams of Vermont Children's Hospital at Fletcher Allen Health Care who has been studying ski helmet use for years.

He says "I agree with Dr. Levy's impression that a helmet would have been expected to make a crucial difference in the Richardson tragedy. Although Professor Shealy's comments are well meaning, they may muddy the waters concerning the use of helmets. The medical literature is very clear that helmets are an effective method to decrease the chance of sustaining a traumatic brain injury while riding. Helmets are similar to seat belts in that they need to be worn every time a rider is on the slopes. There are no downsides whatsoever to wearing a helmet. I cannot imagine a practical instance in which a rider sustains a fall and would have been better off without a helmet.

It is also important to remember that resorts have changed dramatically in just the past few years. Much riding now takes place in terrain parks and gladed areas where

possible and inspiring others to make their lives more pleasant. Visit www.Twifties.TV for some Twifties fun entertainment videos!

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the high speeds mentioned in the Times article are much less common. We published an article in Wilderness and Environmental Medicine that measured the speed of expert skiers and riders in the glades and on rails. In 85-90% of measurements, the speed of even expert riders was less than 15 mph. This is a speed where helmets can be expected to be highly effective. Since there are numerous hazards (trees, rocks, metal rails, machine packed snow) in these areas, wearing a helmet makes even more sense.

Riding in control is the first message to preventing head injuries, but it is essential to stress that wearing a helmet is always a good idea."

Dr. Williams, an avid skier and snowboarder, has worked with the University of Vermont for the past 6 years to study helmet use, and to develop a non-coercive approach to increasing their use that has proven to be very effective. The program is called PHAT (Protect Head at All Times). See details at www.fletcherallen.org/PHAT.

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Posted by Lauren Traub Teton at 2:33 PM

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