

Smuggs Doc Says Set Goals, Not Mandates, On Helmets

14 hours, 44 mins ago Roger Leo, Executive Editor [Comments \(1\)](#)

"Helmets are a good thing," said Robert Williams, M.D., doctor to the Smugglers' Notch Ski Patrol and associate professor at the University of Vermont College of Medicine.

"Dr. Rob's" assessment is based on studies of thousands of accidents and the effect of helmets on the outcome, and on years of hauling people off mountains and out of woods, and working on them in emergency rooms.

"There's no instance I can think of when you fall and you wish you didn't have a helmet on. There's no reason not to do it, and no reason for the whole Industry not to get out and promote it," Williams said.

Skiers and riders should want to wear helmets, he says, and ski resorts should get behind the idea with enthusiasm. He's not as enthusiastic about mandates proposed in various states, including California and New Jersey, and would prefer voluntary goals for ski resorts to work toward before mandates kick in.

Williams works with [PHAT - Protect Your Head At All Times/On All Terrain](#) - to educate skiers and riders about the benefits of wearing helmets. He says the efforts pay off incrementally over the years, to the point where about 75 percent of skiers and riders at Smuggs in Northern Vermont habitually wear helmets.

Helmet use across the country also has been going up, to the point where 48 percent of skiers and riders wear helmets, according to figures compiled by the National Ski Areas Association. Some question whether those figures capture all helmet use.

"Instead of legislation that requires people to be in helmets, give ski areas a goal, say 90 percent of skiers in helmets in three years. Easily reached. It's not rocket science, get out and make sure there are posters all through the place, that helmets are easily available, and that people get information about why they should wear them," he said.

Williams said, "Vail Resorts jumped on the helmet bandwagon a year and a half ago. I was impressed, they went out in a proactive way in getting all their employees in helmets. I'm very curious about whether they're getting any blowback, perhaps from older-line employees, who might say, 'I've been skiing 30 years without a helmet, so why do I need that?'"

Vail began requiring on-duty staff to wear helmets for the 2009-2010 season.

Aspen Skiing Co. this spring mandated its salaried employees must wear helmets while on duty starting with the 2010-2011 season.

Intrawest ULC toughened its helmet requirements last season for young people, and for all students in terrain parks. This season Intrawest is requiring employees at all its North American resorts to wear helmets while skiing or snowboarding on-duty in any terrain park. Ski and Snowboard School staff will be required to wear a helmet while working with resort guests in any program that requires the guests to wear a helmet.

Williams said, "If you're an employee, and have a uniform on, it's OK to have to wear a helmet. It's like working at a construction site, where you have to wear a hard hat. What you do on own time is a different thing."

By contrast, Williams is leery of the mandates proposed in California, and percolating in New Jersey and elsewhere, which focus on young people.

"If helmets are good for kids, they're good for everybody. It's hard to escape the logic of that," he said.

"The age group I'm particularly worried about is 15 to 30, composed of very, very aggressive skiers, male and female. Those are the ones that it's important to get in helmets. It's much better to promote helmets for everybody," Williams said.

"The time has come when we shouldn't be fooling around with this issue any more," he said.