

THE SAFETY SITE ...

by Monica Palmer, Safety Administrator

Recreational Safety takes Responsibility and Control

SNOW IMMERSION SUFFOCATION (SIS)

Snow Immersion Suffocation (SIS) is a serious danger to skiers and snowboarders, especially when there is a large amount of deep snow and you leave the groomed runs. This occurs when a skier or rider falls into an area of deep unconsolidated snow, like a tree well, and becomes immobilized and suffocates.

Tree wells are natural depressions around the base of evergreen trees, formed by hanging branches that are blocking snow from settling close to the trunk. They can be up to 10 feet deep and have branches near the bottom that trap your skis and arms or legs.

If a skier or boarder falls head-first into a tree well it is rare that they can get themselves out and can suffocate in only a few minutes. Even ski patrol trainees getting into a tree well feet first as part of their training can rarely get out without assistance. The process of struggling to get out can even make their situation worse, so it is not recommended.

It is important to ski with a partner, especially if you are skiing in the trees and not on groomed runs. You and your partner need to remain in sight and within hearing distance of each other. Always avoid tree wells.

SIS is often the cause of death when skiers are caught in an avalanche. Never go into the back country alone and without the proper rescue equipment. Check weather conditions and snow conditions before going and let someone know where you will be and when you expect to return.

Some of the above information was courtesy of deepsnowsafety.org.