

SAFETY » SKIING

Intrawest pushes helmets for all skiers

Policy comes after March death of Natasha Richardson shone light on industry practices

BY WENDY STUECK

When actress Natasha Richardson died in March after falling on an icy beginner slope at Quebec's Mont Tremblant Ski Resort, many wondered if she would have survived had she been wearing a helmet.

That question remains unanswered, but the company that owns the resort where Ms. Richardson's tragic accident turned a global spotlight on ski industry practices yesterday introduced new helmet guidelines that are expected to have a ripple effect at resorts in Canada and around the world.

Beginning with this year's ski season, Vancouver-based Intrawest - which owns a string of resorts, including British Columbia's Whistler Blackcomb, a host venue for the 2010 Olympics - will recommend that all skiers and snowboarders at its resorts wear helmets.

Protective headgear will be mandatory for children and teens in ski school programs, and for all students in freestyle terrain park programs, regardless of their age. The new guidelines also include requirements for employees that will be phased in over the ski seasons of this year and the next.

For helmet advocates like Richard Kinar, the guidelines



Starting this season, Intrawest resorts will require helmets for children and teens in ski programs. JOHN LEHMANN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

rector of the Brain Injury Association of Canada, said yesterday in an interview.

Mr. Kinar has lobbied for increased helmet use for more than a decade, and has been a key player in a push to develop a Canadian safety standard for ski and snowboard helmets similar to those in place for hockey equipment.

The Canadian Standards Association developed an alpine helmet standard in March. But the standard is not mandatory for manufacturers, and no CSA-certified helmets are currently on the market, although there are some available that have been certified under different systems.

Intrawest's new guidelines

jured skiers or their families, new equipment that allows skiers and boarders to go downhill faster, and increasing public acceptance of helmets make guidelines such as the ones that Intrawest announced yesterday inevitable, several long-time B.C. skiers said yesterday.

The Canada West association, following legal advice, will be asking its members in the next two months to approve a reworded helmet policy that "recommends" helmets for skiing and snowboarding.

Up to now, the group's policy has been that customers "consider" using a helmet, president Jimmie Spencer said

years and has had both his sons, now in their teens, on the mountain since they could walk. They wore helmets, strapping them on as routinely as they do their boots and skis.

"It's just part of their checklist - I can't imagine them skiing without helmets," Mr. Pehota said yesterday.

Both boys race and have taken spectacular tumbles; one son took a fall that cracked his helmet and left him with a concussion, an accident that Mr. Pehota knows would have been more serious, or even fatal, without the head gear.

Mr. Pehota admits he doesn't always wear a helmet himself, saying the equipment makes it hard to hear and is sometimes uncomfortable. But he's going to try again this season, in part because his sons are giving him grief for skiing helmet-free.

If he does become a helmet head, he'll have lots of company. Helmets are common at Whistler Blackcomb, where they're worn by beginners, intermediate skiers and long-time powder hounds like Judy Bishop.

Ms. Bishop, a Vancouver-based consultant, started wearing a helmet 12 years ago, after a friend - an expert skier - died of a head injury resulting from a ski accident. She appreciates her helmet for its warmth, added protection and

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WENDY STUECK

From Friday's Globe and Mail

Last updated on Friday, Oct. 02, 2009 02:48AM EDT

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Protective headgear will be mandatory for children and teens in ski

THE CANADIAN PRESS

ONLINE and BROADCAST

Intrawest sets mandatory helmet rules at ski resorts, including Whistler, B.C.

By: Dene Moore

Date: October 2, 2009

VANCOUVER _ Six months after actress Natasha Richardson died following a fall at the Mont Tremblant ski resort in Quebec, the company that operates the facility has announced helmet requirements at all its North American resorts.

Vancouver-based Intrawest announced Thursday that when the ski season begins in a few weeks, it will recommend all skiers and snowboarders wear helmets.

The headgear will be mandatory for children and teens enrolled in ski and snowboard programs and for any student, regardless of age, taking part in freestyle terrain park programs.

“The objective is to raise the awareness of helmet use and the obligation of everyone to ski and ride in a controlled and responsible manner,” said Ian Galbraith, spokesman for Intrawest.

Galbraith said the move is an important “first step” that will increase awareness of the importance of helmets. But the company decided not to make them mandatory across the board.

“It’s an evolutionary thing. At this point, it’s a personal choice whether resort guests want to wear helmets or not,” he said.

Some may balk at even the limited helmet rules for children and teens, Galbraith said, but “we feel it’s the right way to go and it’s really the way the industry is heading.”

He said the new rules have been in the works for some time and are not a response to any particular incident.

However, the death of Richardson at Mont Tremblant earlier this year focused attention on the issue, although the new rules would not have forced Richardson, an adult, to don a helmet during her private ski lesson.

The 45-year-old actress, wife of actor Liam Neeson, died of a blood clot on the brain two days after the fall.

The **Canadian Standards Association**, which recommends skiers and snowboarders wear helmets, has said they can reduce the risk of head injury by 60 per cent.

“Ski hills making it mandatory is certainly going to help raise awareness,” said Anthony Toderian, spokesman for the association.

But "like any rule or law or any regulation, it can only go so far. It really needs to be the public themselves that recognize and be aware that these things can happen," he said.

According to the Canadian Ski Council, there were about 4.2 million Canadian skiers and snowboarder in the 2007-2008 season.

Statistics from the U.S. show that nearly 50 per cent of skiers and snowboarders voluntarily donned helmets last season, up from 25 per cent six years earlier.

Intrawest said it will also update its advertising images to feature skiers and snowboarders wearing helmets. The company operates nine ski resorts in North America, including Mount Tremblant in Quebec, Panorama Mountain near Invermere, B.C., and Whistler Blackcomb, which will host alpine events for the 2010 Winter Games.

Michael Ballingall, senior vice-president at Big White and Silverstar Resorts in the Okanagan, said they've been providing complimentary helmets for the last 10 years for children involved in their ski schools, but fewer and fewer need them.

"We've noticed a trend in the last five years that 90 per cent of the kids coming to our ski school already have a helmet, so we have helmets for the other 10 per cent."

He said helmets are already mandatory for their ski patrol, slope watch staff, and instructors teaching in the trees. Intrawest's announcement is not a new direction for the industry, he said.

"For us in the Interior, it's just a wake up call that we highly recommend the use of helmets but we don't believe they should be mandatory."

The Big White and Silver Star resorts in the southern B.C. Interior say they will not follow Intrawest's lead this year.

Management said Thursday it believes skiers and snow boarders should still have the personal choice of whether or not to wear helmets.

Big White and sister mountain, Silver Star, have required helmets on all children participating in ski school programs for the last couple of seasons, said senior vice-president Michael Ballingall.

"All kids, three to 12, participating in lessons through the Star Kids/Kids Centre and public school programs at Silver Star and Big White are required to have a helmet or a helmet will be provided," he said.

It has also been mandatory for all students participating in freestyle terrain park programs, regardless of their age.

"For our instructors, it has been left to personal choice unless teaching or guiding in the trees, terrain parks or race courses," Ballingall said. "It is mandatory for the ski patrol."

"While I know there is a push for helmets everywhere, I still feel there needs to be a personal choice here."

"Mandating anything does not help sell the sport. Having everyone wearing helmets on the mountain does not make skiing/boarding any safer. It is how people conduct themselves on the slopes that will make sliding down the mountain safer."

(Kelowna Daily Courier)

<http://www.thestar.com/article/703842>



Helmets to be mandatory for kids at Intrawest resorts

Company that runs Mount Tremblant, Whistler Blackcomb will require kids and teens enrolled in ski and snowboard programs to wear helmets

Oct 01, 2009 02:24 PM

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Helmets will be mandatory at Intrawest resorts for children and teens participating in ski and snowboard programs. (Oct. 1, 2009)





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And the company said it will update its advertising images to feature skiers and snowboarders wearing helmets.

The new rules "underscore Intrawest's commitment to guest safety," the company said in a statement issued Thursday.

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A skier, wearing a helmet, leaves the slopes