

The Safety Site

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A High Avalanche Season

Recreational Safety takes Responsibility & Control

At least 21 people in the US have died in avalanches since the start of the season in December 2020, [according to Avalanche.org](https://www.avalanche.org), a site from the Colorado Avalanche Information Center that tracks nationwide avalanche accidents.

Snowfall was relatively minor in November and December, and because there were periods of dryness in the early winter, that early snowfall doesn't bond together. That weak layer of snowfall is making up the base of the snowpack across the West, including Utah, Colorado and Montana. All the new snow is sitting on top of that weak base. This created a very dangerous snowpack.

More people are also skiing, snowboarding, and snowmobiling in the back country of Utah, Colorado, Montana, California and Nevada. If you're set on skiing through the backcountry, bring the appropriate avalanche gear, including a shovel, beacon and probe. Also, avoid going alone. Approximately 150 people are killed each year in avalanches around the world. Let someone know where you will be skiing in advance and touch base with them often.

Wind, rain, warming temperatures, snow and earthquakes can all trigger avalanches, but they can even be triggered by skiers, snowmobiles and even the vibration of machinery. Don't ski with your pole straps wrapped around your wrists. Poles can act as anchors in an avalanche and make it harder to stay on top of the snow. NOAA guidelines also recommend you never try to outrun an avalanche. Try getting to the side as quickly as possible, out of the path of the oncoming snow.

If caught in the snow, try to "swim" with its flow and fight as hard as you can to stay on top.

If buried, constantly push snow out of your face to create an air pocket for you to breathe while you await rescue. And activate the beacon.

This information is courtesy of CNN.