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SnowSport Safety Foundation Releases Safety Report Card *California resorts get a “C” grade for safety*

(San Francisco – Nov. 7, 2017) Parents carefully review the readily available safety information and statistics on automobiles before buying a family car. The fatality risk during one hour on a ski slope in California is at least as great as one hour behind the wheel of an automobile and the risk of injury significantly greater. But where can they look to find information on ski resort safety before taking their family to hit the slopes?

The SnowSport Safety Foundation has responded to that need by issuing the 2017 *Family Safety Report Card* for California mountain resorts to help families make an informed choice of ski resorts.

“We think it only makes sense that parents and adult snow sport enthusiasts be able to make informed choices about the safety of the resorts they choose to patronize,” said Dan Gregorie, M.D. Founder and President of the SnowSport Safety Foundation. “Safety on the slopes is a shared responsibility between skier and resort, but so far, only the skier is put on notice regarding their responsibility. The resorts rightly promote a *Skier Safety Responsibility Code*. But no *Ski Area Safety Responsibility Code* is made available to patrons.

The report card gives California mountain resorts only a “C” grade for their overall consistent use of 17 of the most effective available accident prevention and injury reduction practices. A “C” represents only 50% to 60% compliance. The report breaks down the grading between large (4 lifts or more) and small (less than 4 lifts) resorts, and lists grades by individual resorts. Resort grades range from an “F” for Mt Baldy to an “A-” for Granlibakken. The report card also gives overall resort grades for categories of safety management such as impact prevention devices and systems, trail design and maintenance, terrain park design and engineering, and safety policies and procedures.

Dr. Gregorie, founded the California Ski and Snowboard Safety Organization (CSSSO), the predecessor to the SSF in 2007 following the tragic death of his daughter in a preventable snowboard accident at a northern California resort. He and a dedicated team of mountain safety experts, physicians, and hospitals have since teamed up to research mountain resort safety practices, analyze snow sport injury and death statistics, and educate the public about both.

The most recent *Family Safety Report Card* gives Granlibakken Tahoe, Kirkwood Mountain Resort, and Dodge Ridge the highest safety grades in the state based on the 2016 *California Mountain Resort Safety Survey* by the SnowSport Safety Foundation.

“Granlibakken Tahoe achieved the highest small resort scores in both the 2010 and the 2016 Foundation surveys,” noted Gregorie.

Kirkwood Resort received the top score for large resort category with Dodge Ridge coming in second and Mt Rose third on the 2016 / 2017 survey.

“The most troubling issue is the lack of consistency between resort safety practices,” said Gregorie.

“There are no industry standards for safety practices or reporting. The American consumer has demanded transparency in safety practices and statistics in the automobile, airline, and children’s toy industries; why not require similar scrutiny in a recreational industry in which so many children and adults are vulnerable to injury and death?”

More than 12,000 skiers and snowboarders end up in California emergency rooms and hospitals each year. Between 12 and 18 skiers and snowboarders annually lose their lives in accidents on the slopes and trails of California’s ski resorts.

Richard Penniman, SnowSport Safety Foundation board member, ski safety expert, and leader of the team that surveyed the mountain resorts explained the process they used to create the report and report card:

“We created survey teams to anonymously visit California mountain resorts and evaluate them based on 17 impact protection, trail design and maintenance, and terrain park design and engineering practices.”

Echoing Gregorie’s concerns, Penniman continued, “Utilizing standardized criteria, we found significant variation in the safety practices between and even within the same resorts.”

To create the full survey, in 2016 the SnowSport Safety Foundation’s survey teams visited 19 mountain resorts and scored them according to 17 safety metrics. Several major resorts in the Tahoe Region received average scores of less than 6 out of 10 on two consecutive surveys (2010 and 2016), including Squaw Valley and Homewood. Three resorts consistently scored less than 5 out of 10 year over year-- Boreal Ridge, Donner Ski Ranch and China (formerly Sierra Summit). Northstar and Sierra-at-Tahoe both scored below 6 on the 2016 survey.

Areas of scoring included: padding and/or shielding of lift-related structures and outbuildings; marking and impact protection of snowmaking hydrants, guns, and pipes; identification and shielding of parked vehicles; elimination or impact shielding of trees on beginner runs; impact protection of obstacles below side-sloping trails; chairlift restraint bars; safeguards (e.g. advance warning signs, separation of merging traffic, speed controls) at blind intersections and intersections of advanced into lower ability runs; safeguards (e.g. warning signs, speed controls) at trail congestion areas; preventing inappropriate traffic through designated learning areas; controlling speeds through slow and family areas; marking and shielding surface hazards: preventing inadvertent entrance into extreme terrain and terrain parks; safeguards for moving hazards such as vehicles and low hanging chairs; and signage and fencing to prevent inadvertent entry into natural or unmanged areas.

The Snowsport Safety Foundation’s vision for the future is a snow sport environment in which ski areas disclose and promote their safety practices and performance to well informed patrons who consider safety as well as snowfall and terrain in their choice of ski areas.

Gregorie said, “We want to work collaboratively with the the resorts to help them identify opportunities for safety improvement, develop improved and more complete and standardized measures of safety and to provide them independent recognition for their safety performance that they can promote to their patrons. As evidenced by the two surveys, all the resorts have substantial opportunities for safety improvements that will save lives and reduce the number and severity of injuries.”

“It is very troubling that we have seen very little improvement in California mountain resort safety practices since 2011,” Gregorie lamented. “What is needed is a disciplined safety management program at each resort.”

Gregorie emphasized the foundation's survey results and report card should not be considered a complete evaluation of safety at any resort. However, the results provide patrons some indications in terms of potential resort specific areas of concern and some guidance in seeking additional information from resorts to complete their own safety evaluation of the resorts they are considering for themselves and their families.

Organizations endorsing the work of the SnowSport Safety Foundation include Sutter Roseville Medical Center noting a shared mission of reducing the number and severity of injuries from snow sports. The 2017 *Family Safety Report Card* and the 2016 *California Mountain Resort Safety Survey* full report are available at www.snowsportsafety.org. That Safety Survey will shortly be expanded to include the details for nine additional resorts surveyed in early 2017.

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The SnowSport Safety Foundation is a not-for-profit charitable education, research and public information organization incorporated in California in 2008. Its mission is to encourage and enable ski area safety improvement through research, education and public access to reliable safety information. The SnowSport Safety Foundation envisions an environment where the ski resorts disclose and promote their safety practices and performance to well-informed patrons who consider safety in their choice of ski areas. More information may be obtained at www.snowsportsafety.org.