

Tree falls onto chairlift cable, no serious injuries at Sierra

By Kathryn Reed

A treetop fell onto the cable of the West Bowl chairlift at Sierra-at-Tahoe this morning, bouncing a handful of people out of the chair and onto the slope.



No one was seriously injured. The skiers were treated by ski patrol and the doctor at the resort on Highway 50 on the outskirts of the Lake Tahoe Basin. No one was transported to the hospital. The five injured people left the resort on their own.

The people who tumbled out of the chair fell between 5 and 15 feet.

“There was no real damage to the chair so we ran it until all the people on it were off,” Kirstin Cattell, resort spokeswoman said. “We shuttled the rest of the people out of West Bowl. At 11am we closed the whole resort for the day.”

Cattell doesn't know the last time Sierra was closed because of winds. This resort near the top of Echo Summit is considered one of the better places to ski when it is windy.

However, the National Weather Service is calling for wind gusts this afternoon at the lake being 50mph, with ridgetops hitting 100mph.

About 150 had to be escorted out of the West Bowl area either on snowcats or snowmobiles.

Cattell said everyone evacuated in an orderly manner, with no

one panicking.

Resort officials are spending the afternoon inspecting the towers, cables and chairs to ensure the lift will be functioning on Monday. Ski patrollers are examining the terrain for precarious trees.

The tree that toppled today had been loaded with snow, temperatures warmed up, then the winds picked up which caused it to break from the top.

Cattell said, "We have a robust hazardous tree removal plan in place."

The resort takes out about 100 trees a year that could be a danger to guests.

For people who skied on Sunday, they can bring their ticket with Dec. 19 on it back any day to trade it in for a full day lift ticket at Sierra, Cattell said.