

Fate of stage 1 Amgen ride to be decided Sunday morning

This statement was issued May 14 at 10:15pm:

“The 2011 Amgen Tour of California is scheduled to kick off May 15, in South Lake Tahoe at 10:30am. As everyone is aware, there is a storm front predicted to reach the area. Therefore race organizers, in conjunction with the commissaires, teams and public safety organizations, have developed a number of contingency plans with the safety of the riders and fans being the No. 1 priority. The weather is constantly changing in the Sierras, and our team will be assessing weather conditions throughout the morning. A decision on any changes to the route and timing will be made at 9am Sunday, and will ultimately be based on what is best and most safe for our riders and spectators. Details will be distributed on the official race website and via email.” – *Andrew Messick, president of AEG Sports, presenter of the Amgen Tour de California*

By Elliott Almond, San Jose Mercury News

STATELINE – The Amgen Tour de California braced for a surprise spring snowstorm overnight that could spoil plans for Sunday’s start in Lake Tahoe and increase the dangers of a sport already reeling from the recent death of a Belgian cyclist.

Race officials huddled Saturday night to try to determine whether they can hold the 118.7-mile stage from South Lake Tahoe to Northstar-at-Tahoe Resort as planned. The first foray into the Sierra Nevada is facing a serious test by forecasts of as much as three inches of snow accumulating on the roads Sunday and Monday – the first two days of the mini-Tour de France event that are being contested around Lake Tahoe.

“There’s a lot of different variables,” race director Jim Birrell said. “If we have to reverse it and not hit the whole circuit, those are things we’ll look at.”

No decision on course changes will be made until just before the start at 10:30am Sunday, officials said. But if road conditions are too icy and snowy, tour organizers could scrap the clockwise stage around the picturesque lake and instead hold an abbreviated race such as a short time trial. The current route has two climbs over mountain passes 7,000 feet or higher, making it difficult to clear the roads, if snow does stick.

“If it is that slick, we won’t be racing,” tour favorite Levi Leipheimer said.

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