

Opinion: Terrain parks not the safest place to play

By Dick Penniman

Kid's love to fly. Boys especially, but some girls, too, want to take to the air any chance they can, whether on skis or snowboards. When I was young, I jumped from every little bump and ridge I could find. Nothing much has changed with today's kids.



Terrain parks are the special places at mountain resorts where kids are encouraged to test their wings. Snow is piled up and shaped into a variety of configurations offering airtime to anyone who dares to fulfill the dream of flight. But there's a catch ... few (if any) resorts require prior training before participating in these parks, and there are no age or skill limits. Consequently, the big kids are jumping right next to the rank novices.

Before a competitor is allowed to participate in sanctioned aerial events, the U. S. Ski and Snowboard Association requires athletes to complete dozens of successful jumps into a training pool. This can take years of formal training under the supervision of a certified coach. The jump features that are used in training and competitions are built to rigorous engineering standards. Because they are so critical to safe landings, approach speeds are strictly controlled. Nothing of this sort happens in terrain parks at mountain resorts.

As with almost everything else on the trails at California mountain resorts, no laws or regulations exist to guide the creation of features in terrain parks. Most are "free formed" by the park employees, few (if any) of whom have any formal

engineering background. They depend on trial and error to determine if features are “safe” for public use.

Before there were terrain parks, ski patrollers like me would tear down big jumps that were considered dangerous. Nowadays, they have nicknames for terrain parks such as “vegetable garden” and “bone yard” because they know it’s not a question of “if” but “when” there will be serious, life-threatening injuries.

To help keep your child a little safer:

- Ask if your ski resort has formally engineered terrain park features, and if it does, ask to see the blueprints.
- Tell the resorts to build terrain park features to engineering standards.
- Don’t let your child jump without first getting some training. Ask if the ski school at your resort offers jump lessons. If it doesn’t, find out who does provide this type of training.
- If your child really wants to jump, encourage him/her to take it seriously, and together, learn everything you can about sanctioned USSA jumping.

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