

# Heavenly ski patrollers learn ice rescue techniques

Ice rescues aren't common at Heavenly Mountain Resort, but the potential is there with the two reservoirs.

Tahoe Douglas firefighters and Heavenly ski patrollers practiced ice rescue techniques at the reservoir by East Peak Lodge on Jan. 17.

"It is very common for untrained would-be rescuers to become victims themselves as they take desperate action and are drawn into a bad situation," Chris Lucas, Tahoe Douglas engineer, said in a statement. He instructs the Dive Rescue International Ice Rescue Program to new firefighters.



Ice rescue practice at Heavenly on Jan. 17.  
Photo/Provided

"You can't judge the strength of ice by its appearance even its thickness can be deceiving. The only way to be totally safe is to stay off the ice. Any frozen body of water is a hazard," Lucas said.

The first responders learned about appropriate gear and equipment to use in an ice rescue. This included a specialized dry suit that insulates and provides buoyancy. Another tool is the ice awls, small ice picks that help grip into the ice.

"This is some of the best training we've done in a real long

time," Dave Hellod, Heavenly's assistant ski patrol director, said in a press release.

## **The falling are tips from Tahoe Douglas fire:**

### **What if you fall in?**

First, try not to panic. This may be easier said than done, unless you have worked out a survival plan in advance. Read through these steps so that you can be prepared.

1. Don't remove your winter clothing. Heavy clothes won't drag you down, but instead can trap air to provide warmth and flotation. This is especially true with a snowmobile suit.
2. Turn toward the direction you came. That's probably the strongest ice.
3. Place your hands and arms on the unbroken surface. This is where a pair of nails, sharpened screwdrivers or ice picks come in handy in providing the extra traction you need to pull yourself up onto the ice.
4. Kick your feet and dig in your ice picks to work your way back onto the solid ice. If your clothes have trapped a lot of water, you may have to lift yourself partially out of the water on your elbows to let the water drain before starting forward.
5. Lie flat on the ice once you are out and roll away from the hole to keep your weight spread out. This may help prevent you from breaking through again.
6. Get to a warm, dry, sheltered area and warm yourself immediately. In moderate to severe cases of cold water hypothermia, you must seek medical attention. Cold blood trapped in your extremities can come rushing back to your heart after you begin to re-warm. The shock of the chilled blood may cause ventricular fibrillation leading to a heart attack and death.

## **What if someone else falls in?**

What if someone else falls through and you are the only one around to help? First, call 911 for help. There is a good chance someone near you may be carrying a cell phone.

Resist the urge to run up to the edge of the hole. This would most likely result in two victims in the water. Also, do not risk your life to attempt to save a pet or other animal.

### **Preach, Reach, Throw, Row, Go**

**PREACH:** Shout to the victim to encourage them to fight to survive and reassure them that help is on the way.

**REACH:** If you can safely reach the victim from shore, extend an object such as a rope, ladder, or jumper cables to the victim. If the person starts to pull you in, release your grip on the object and start over.

**THROW:** Toss one end of a rope or something that will float to the victim. Have them tie the rope around themselves before they are too weakened by the cold to grasp it.

**ROW:** Find a light boat to push across the ice ahead of you. Push it to the edge of the hole, get into the boat and pull the victim in over the bow. It's not a bad idea to attach some rope to the boat, so others can help pull you and the victim to safety.

**GO:** Non-professionals shouldn't go out on the ice to perform a rescue unless all other basic rescue techniques have been ruled out.

If the situation is too dangerous for you to perform the rescue, call 911 for help and keep reassuring the victim that help is on the way and urge them to fight to survive. Heroics by well meaning, but untrained rescuers, sometimes result in two deaths.

