

Sledding – uncontrollable fun in the snow



Scarlett Hart hangs on tight Dec. 25 as she sleds near South Tahoe High School. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Sledding – it's one of those winter activities that transcends generations, has little to do with athletic ability (though hiking uphill can be a workout), and brings out the inner child in those who let themselves careen down a slick surface with no brakes or any steering mechanism.

Laughter fills the woods of Tahoe this time of year with adults and kids finding inclines steep and tame, long and short, straight and with jumps – all in the pursuit of seeing how fast one can go downhill on a piece of plastic.

Stop trying to be in control and remember what it was like to be a carefree kid. That was the overwhelming sentiment of a group of adults (and one 9-year-old) who spent part of

Christmas afternoon sledding behind South Tahoe High School where the old ski lift used to be. (One of the stanchions remains at the bottom of the hill.)



Some safety tips:

- Sled in a snow park or allocated sledding area. Injuries are less common in designated sledding areas. We see more injuries when people sled in the woods near their house or in informal sledding areas where groups of people congregate.
- Sled in an open area, away from trees. The worst injuries I have seen come from collisions with trees resulting in head injuries, lacerations, broken bones, contusions, and abrasions.
- Avoid hard packed snow. Adults who end up going airborne often land harder. In hard packed snow conditions, it's fairly common to see fractures in the vertebrae.
- Sled in an area free from obstacles. If someone else is using the same path, wait for it to clear. Injuries are also sustained when

people are hit by a sled coming from behind and they can't get out of the way in time.

Source: Lance Orr, director of Barton Memorial Hospital's emergency department

So many winter activities – skiing, snowboarding, skating – are all about control. Sledding is the opposite. And once you give in, it's a whole lot more fun – even if it means careening off the main path or an unintended gymnastic maneuver becomes part of the dismount.

One of the problems with people sledding wherever there is an incline is the parking.

“We will tow just as many local cars as we will out of town cars. Locals are just as bad,” California Highway Patrol Officer Ruth Loehr told *Lake Tahoe News*. “If any part of the vehicle is in the road, we are going to tow it.”

It's especially bad near Emerald Bay. Lake Tahoe Airport and Echo Summit areas are also notorious for people either ignoring no parking signs or having part of the vehicle in the highway.

Parking tickets are \$94.

Loehr says officers try to get people to move their vehicles, but after a while tickets and towing are the only way to solve the problem and make it safe for everyone.

And while sledding is fun, it can also result in a trip to the hospital.

“From my perspective in the emergency department, sledding can be one of the more dangerous outdoor activities. It is difficult to have good control of where a sled goes,” Lance Orr, physician and director of the emergency department at

Barton Memorial Hospital, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Locally, the number of injuries related to sledding have been holding steady through the years, though exact numbers were not available.

“Kids are more likely to sled than adults and, as a result, we see more kids injured than adults. Though adults land harder than kids, and can suffer more severe injuries,” Orr said.