

Rethinking the safety behind heli-skiing

By Paddy O'Connell, Skiing

There exists both a sincere desire and an obvious need for the standardization of safety protocols within the heli-skiing industry, especially in the great wilds of Alaska. What is unclear is what those standards should look like and who should set them.

Alaska has been home to helicopter-skiing operations for almost 40 years, and with every heli segment that lights up the screen in a ski film, the public froths to claim an AK spine. But a recent spike in on-mountain deaths has led to both public and governmental pressure for change.

Most observers agree there's a need for standardized protocols—rules by which all operators abide so that clients and guides are safe and the playing field is level for competing operations. But the specter of increased government regulation worries many operators, who think they know best what standards are and aren't needed. Their hope is to guide the process to a conclusion that enhances safety and oversight while still allowing them to operate profitably and show guests a good time.

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