

# Avalanche fatalities most common in Jan., Feb.

By Megan Michelson, *Outside*

January and February are typically peak months for avalanches—more skiers, snowmobilers, and other winter enthusiasts die in slides during those months than any other time of the season. This year, we're already off to a chart-topping high with one of the most deadly Januaries on record.

Thirteen people died in avalanches in January across the western United States, the highest number for that month since 2008, when 19 people were killed during what was one of the deadliest winters in the past 65 years, according to a report issued by the Colorado Avalanche Information Center, which records avalanches across the country. There have been two fatal avalanches in February so far, including one that buried someone on a snowbike, or a dirt bike that's been outfitted with a ski up front and a snowmobile-like track in the back.

A big part of the problem has to do with lots of new El Niño snow sitting on top of what's called a "weak layer," or a type of buried snow that can collapse and trigger an avalanche. "A lot of our areas have two persistent weak layers that we're really concerned about," says Spencer Logan, a forecaster with the Colorado Avalanche Information Center.

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