

# Technology slow to help predict avalanches

By Ethan Baron, Bay Area News Group

It's a bountiful winter in the snowy Sierra Nevada, with the biggest snowpack in 22 years. That's great news for skiers and snowboarders, but all that snow can transform in an instant from a beautiful blanket to a deadly shroud when an avalanche hits.

In December, Aptos doctor Tom Barker, 64, was swept more than 200 yards in an avalanche that left him buried under 9 feet of snow, after he and a friend skied into a closed area at the Mt. Rose ski resort without their avalanche-safety gear. Barker did not survive.

Slides kill one or two winter-wilderness travelers every couple of years in the Sierra around Lake Tahoe. For every death, avalanche experts say, about 10 people are caught in a cascade of snow and ice and barely escape with their lives.

The popularity, and the risk, are driving companies to develop new avalanche-safety products based on bleeding-edge technology better known in the fast-evolving realms of self-driving cars, the Internet of Things, and big-data computing. The technology holds promise for preventing fatalities, according to experts, but it's in its infancy.

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