

Greetings from the Utah Avalanche Center:



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November 2019

What's New

1st Annual Avalanche Awareness Week

It is storming outside and avalanche danger is rising. The time couldn't be better for the First Annual Avalanche Awareness Week. Last winter, the Utah Legislature passed [H.B. 380](#) designating the first week of December each year as Avalanche Awareness Week. Join the Utah Avalanche Center, Utah Office of Outdoor Recreation, Utah State Parks, Utah Department of Transportation, and Ski Utah to celebrate the First Annual State of Utah Avalanche Awareness Week from December 2-7.

During Avalanche Awareness Week, the Utah Avalanche Center and its partners will host events, classes, and other activities to promote avalanche awareness, education, and safety. The goal is to save lives - the week of learning will help Utahns both avoid avalanches and enjoy the Greatest Snow Earth. We want everyone to come home safely each day to their friends and family.

Join the UAC and our partners to kick off Avalanche Awareness Week on Monday, December 2 at 6:30 PM at [T.F. Brewing](#) in Salt Lake City for a free kick-off party.

Check out the [UAC Blog Site](#) for a full schedule of activities.



Meet the Forecaster

Nikki Champion

Nikki is the newly hired UAC forecaster for the Provo, Salt Lake City, Ogden regions and, in the summer, guides for RMI.



What is your personal background?

I grew up alpine ski racing in Michigan. I was born out of Colorado, and our family took every chance to get back out west. Skiing has always been my main way of interacting and experiencing the mountains. Once I got to college, I slowly transitioned from the world of slipping all the powder off the slopes, to actually searching for that fresh snow. During this transition, I began backcountry skiing and was hooked.

How did you get into avalanche forecasting?

I knew I enjoyed backcountry skiing, and I had enjoyed the avalanche courses I had taken but it wasn't until I got to Bozeman did I really make the connection that it was the career path I wanted to pursue. I had transferred to Montana State from a strictly engineering school, and at that time I wasn't sure if I had hated engineering - or just hated what I was doing. The first semester at MSU, I got connected with a graduate student within the Snow Science Program who needed a fieldwork partner, from there on out every Tuesday and Thursday of that semester I would go out, dig pits, and help him with his PST research. It was then I started making the connection on how closely related Civil Engineering and Snow Science were, I had finally found a niche that would allow me to explore my passion for snow and continue pursuing engineering. From there I began teaching avalanche courses for the Friends of the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center, going out as a field partner with their forecasters, working as a research assistant in the Subzero Science and Engineering Lab, and guiding year-round in avalanche terrain and one the most recent big opportunities was landing in Alaska with all the talented ladies of the Chugach National Forest Avalanche Information Center.

How did you start working at the UAC?

This will be my first season forecasting with the UAC. I had wrapped up my season in Alaska and was beginning to consider future opportunities for the upcoming winter. In April, I was first informed that a position might be opening in Utah - reached out to Mark, combatted USA jobs, and ended up being fortunate enough to land the position.

What was your greatest learning moment about avalanches and what was it?

I lost three friends to the mountains in a 2 week period a few Octobers ago. All three were talented, intelligent, and thoughtful folk. Those three instances scared me and made me take a step back. It led me to have the thought, could that have been me? I think having that thought process and being able to reflect on accidents, is a big influence in the way I travel through the backcountry, through avalanche terrain and evaluate every day in the

field I am going to have. I think back on those moments, remember to stay on my toes, be observant and to not be complacent when traveling through the terrain.

What would you tell a 25-year-old version of yourself?

Well that wasn't very long ago, but it is the advice I still have - take every opportunity presented, any chance to learn, grow, spend time in the snow, and make connections. Take it. They might not be glamorous, pay well, or pay at all. But those experiences and opportunities are where you learn the most and are the building blocks to your future. Good things are coming - very soon...apply for the UAC(;

What's one piece of advice you have about avalanches?

You're never done learning.

What do you like doing besides playing in the snow?

While I seem to not be able to escape the snow and spend almost the whole year in a puffy. I really enjoy spending free time on my mountain bike, exploring new trails while running, trying to master the art of baking bread, and recently trying not to drown while learning to surf.



Education

ISSW 2020



The International Snow Science Workshop (ISSW) is a gathering for people who love snow. This week-long conference is held every two years in a location that alternates between the US, Canada, and Europe. The next ISSW will be held in Fernie, BC, October 4 – 9, 2020, which means it's a great opportunity for those of us who work—and play—in the snow to attend.

Participating in an ISSW is always a great experience, both intellectually and socially. Check out issw2020.com and keep an eye on that site over the winter as more events and opportunities are posted. If you've attended an ISSW before, you'll know what a great experience it is. And if you've never attended, Fernie 2020 is going to be a great place to start. Hope to see you there!

Tech Tips

What are the risks of slope cutting?

Last winter Karl Birkeland and Bruce Jamieson and others conducted a survey to evaluate the risks of ski cutting by professional guides and ski patrols at work. If you are unfamiliar with Bruce and Karl, they have been authors of more avalanche research than anyone else. More importantly, they have probably authored some of the most groundbreaking papers on avalanches.

It's important to note that the risks they calculated were for very experienced avalanche workers with intimate knowledge of the terrain and snowpack. We have no idea what the risks are for backcountry travelers.

Regardless, there are some important takeaway points from this study that make it worth reading. They should give us some things to think about if we decide to perform ski cuts (or slope cuts) in the backcountry. According to Karl "We hope this paper and our results are a starting point for us all to better understand the risks associated with ski cutting."

Why would we perform slope cuts or ski cuts in the backcountry? Personally, if I expect to trigger an avalanche, I don't perform a slope cut and don't ride on that slope or any similar to it. However, if we determine a slope is safe, then a slope cut can be a good maneuver to perform just in case our stability assessment is wrong. In that scenario, we might have a better chance of escaping an avalanche while doing a slope cut than simply riding the slope.

One important caveat the authors mention, and one relevant for us is that "A small number of ski cuts that do not trigger avalanches can be misleading, i.e. they do not provide high weight evidence of stability, especially for deeper weak layers." We do not perform enough ski cuts in the backcountry to use them as evidence of stability.

[Read the complete paper.](#)

[Watch a great 12-minute video covering the highlights.](#)

Giving Back to the UAC

Support the UAC when you shop on Amazon

Do you shop on Amazon? Will you be taking advantage of their Black Friday sales? Will you be using Amazon to buy Christmas presents? Amazon supports nonprofit organizations through their Amazon Smile program which donates a percentage of all purchases to the nonprofit organization of your choice. Please consider setting up the UAC to receive your Amazon Smile donations. To set this up,



- Navigate to smile.amazon.com and sign in with your Amazon credentials.
- When asked to choose your charity, search for "Friends of Utah Avalanche Fore Cast Center Inc"
- Select "Friends of Utah Avalanche Fore Cast Center Inc"
- Check "Yes" to accept the understanding to support the UAC
- Start shopping.

Each time you shop at Amazon, simply navigate to smile.amazon.com instead of Amazon.com. You can also make it easy and install the Amazon Smile browser extension which will redirect you from Amazon.com to smile.amazon.com.

If you are interested in learning more about supporting the UAC, please [contact us](#).

The Details

Upcoming Classes

See a full list of upcoming [UAC talks and classes](#) and [classes from other providers](#).

- **Know Before You Go**, December 2, 6:30 PM, REI, SLC
- **Know Before You Go**, December 3, 6:30 PM, REI, Sandy
- **Route Planning & Preparation w/ American Avalanche Institute**, December 3, 7:00 PM, Backcountry, Park City
- **Know Before You Go**, December 4, 6:30 PM, REI, Farmington
- **Know Before You Go**, December 4, 6:00 PM, Church Auditorium, Sharwan Smith Student Center, SUU, Cedar City
- **Avalanche Skills Tune-Up**, December 5, 6:00 PM, Northstar's Ultimate Outdoors, Preston, ID
- **Know Before You Go**, December 5, 7:00 PM, Beaver County Offices, 105 E Center, Beaver
- **Backcountry 101: Introduction to Avalanches**, December 5/7, Salt Lake City
- **Introduction to Companion Rescue Basics**, December 6, Salt Lake City
- **AIARE Level 1**, December 6-8, Salt Lake City
- **Know Before You Go**, December 10, 6:00 PM, Amer Sports, Ogden
- **Know Before You Go**, December 10, 6:30 PM, REI, SLC
- **Know Before You Go**, December 11, 7:30 PM, Scheels, Sandy
- **Backcountry 101: Introduction to Avalanches**, December 12/14, Salt Lake City
- **Avalanche Rescue Course**, December 15, Salt Lake City
- **Introduction to Companion Rescue Basics**, December 17, Park City
- **Backcountry 101: Introduction to Avalanches**, December 19/21, Salt Lake City
- **Know Before You Go**, December 20, 6:30 PM, Skimo Co, Salt Lake City

Upcoming Events

- [1st Annual Avalanche Awareness Week](#), December 2-7, Statewide
- [16th Annual Pray for Snow Party](#), December 4, 6-10 PM, The Cache Venue, Logan, UT

For a full list of events, see the [UAC Event Page](#)

Update Your Information

Have you moved, changed your phone number or email address? [Please use this link to update your UAC profile and communication preferences](#) so we can send you the information you want, where you want it.

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