

# Avalanche Deaths Sobering Start For Utah's New Ski Season

Winter's snow has just started piling up and two cross country skiers have already been caught in an **avalanche**. Both are dead. It's a sobering reminder of the dangers inherent in mountain sports during the winter.

From all accounts, the latest victims were well prepared for their ski outing near the popular, relatively safe Catherine Pass area between Alta and Brighton. Their mistake was being on steep, high-altitude slopes when snow conditions were unstable.

This accident comes as no surprise to anyone who has witnessed the increased popularity of cross country skiing and the growing boldness of some skiers. Slopes which only five years ago were left untracked for days after a storm are often "skied out" just hours after the skies clear.

Skiers in search of untouched powder have moved further afield into the higher peaks and narrow chutes — areas once avoided until spring's warmth stabilized the snowpack.

This new-found courage has been

bolstered in part by improved ski technique, the widespread use of electronic signal devices by back country skiers, and ready access to the U.S. Forest Service's daily **avalanche** forecasts.

Unfortunately, **avalanches** are notoriously unpredictable. Even the most cautious individual skiing on generally stable snow can fall victim to a **snowslide**. Conversely, stories abound of people blithely and uneventfully skiing across obvious **avalanche** paths during periods of extremely unstable conditions.

But the odds caught up with 12 skiers who were killed in the West during the 1984-85 winter season. One of those fatalities was in Utah.

For many people, cross country skiing is one of the few pleasures associated with northern Utah's otherwise dreary winters. However, greater caution and restraint are required to prevent this exhilarating activity from leading to a cold and suffocating death.