

**AVALANCHE DATA**

This avalanche was classified as a HS-ASu-R4-D3. It released on the northeast side of Square Top at an elevation near 9,700 feet, and the slope angle was about 37 degrees. The crown was three to five feet deep and 600 feet wide, and the avalanche fell 1,000 feet vertical. The slide mostly ran on a firm bed surface but gouged into a layer of faceted snow in places.

**Deep  
Persistent Slab  
avalanche**

**COMMENTS**

This sad accident left the couple's 3-year-old son parentless. This couple seemed unaware of the risks they were taking, even after the ski patroller at the backcountry access gate had urged them not to go.

A little avalanche education would have gone a long way here, starting with the attitude that "sidecountry is backcountry." Had the couple abided by the basic rules of safe backcountry skiing, the outcome would have been better, even if the avalanche had still occurred. Specifically, they could have started with 1) having beacons, shovels, and probes and 2) skiing one at a time. If they had followed these two tenets, there would have been one buried victim and one rescuer, instead of two helpless buried victims.

**No rescue  
equipment**

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**EXTERMINATOR, CRYSTAL MOUNTAIN RESORT,**

20000116

**WASHINGTON |** January 16, 2000

One skier caught, buried, and killed

**WEATHER AND SNOWPACK CONDITIONS**

Weather conditions at Crystal Mountain in the southern Cascades on Sunday morning, January 16, 2000, could best be described as horrible on the upper mountain and very stormy and windy on the lower mountain. At 06:00, sensors near the top of the Rainier Express Chair at 6,800 feet measured winds at 20 to 30 mph with gusts to 40; by about mid-day, winds there had increased to 30 to 50 mph with gusts to over 70. Wind gusts over 100 mph were also recorded at the break-over tower on Rainier Express around mid-day.

The gale-force winds, along with snowfall and blowing snow, limited the ski patrol's use of chairlifts to access the upper mountain for avalanche hazard mitigation. They had run the High Campbell lift very early in the morning but after that relied on snowcats to transport mitigation teams to the rest of the upper mountain. Despite the extensive avalanche mitigation work, the ski area did not open any of the upper lifts to the public because of the deteriorating weather conditions.

**ACCIDENT SUMMARY**

At approximately noon, the wind holds for all upper lifts were continuing. Chair 1 (also known as Miner's Basin Lift) ran parallel to the Exterminator run and lifted skiers to a midpoint on the mountain. (Note: Miner's Basin Lift was removed some years later, and the Mount Rainier Gondola now runs on a similar line, but the gondola goes all the way to the summit of the mountain.) A ski patroller stationed near the top of Chair 1 noticed