

'Gigantic' slide claims Oakley man

**Avalanche in Uinta
Mountains was nearly
1,000 feet wide**

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Oakley resident Dave Balls, 53, died on Christmas Day in a human-triggered avalanche.

An Oakley man died while snowmobiling Christmas Day when he was buried by a massive human-triggered avalanche at Thousand Peaks Ranch east of Oakley, authorities said.

"It's a very large avalanche," said Craig Gordon, who provides slide forecasts in the Uinta Mountains for the Utah Avalanche Center.

The avalanche Tuesday measured nearly 1,000 feet wide and four feet deep in the Super Bowl area, Gordon said.

"It failed on weak, sugary snow near the ground," he explained.

Oakley resident Dave Balls, 53, was snowmobiling with about four other people when the snow broke loose around 2:30 p.m.

Balls was snowmobiling with his sons "who are all very experienced snowmobilers and familiar with the area," according to a prepared statement from the family.

"We are grateful for the love and concern shown by the community," the statement reads. "We especially wish to extend our gratitude for the tireless service of all search-and-rescue crews involved."

Balls owned a business in Salt Lake County that employed hundreds of workers.

The "gigantic" slide near Oakley was more than five times as large as an avalanche that killed a 30-year-old man Sunday at The Canyons resort, Gordon said.

Balls and his machine were buried in the avalanche and friends and family members attempted to rescue him, Gordon said, adding, "that's really common."

"After more than two hours of being buried, the victim was found, but was unconscious and not breathing," a press release from the Summit County Sheriff's Office states.

The man was pronounced dead after he was flown to an area hospital.

Tuesday avalanche danger in the Uinta Mountains "was considerable with pockets of high," Gordon said.

"New snow and sunny skies, it's great for marketing, but it's bad for avalanches," he said. "We've got to

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be prepared for our own self rescue."

One in four people killed by avalanches die from trauma, Gordon said.

"You've got a window of about 15 minutes to live under snow," he said.

According to the Sheriff's Office, "the area had received a large amount of fresh snow over the past few days."

"This saddens me deeply," Gordon said Wednesday near the scene of the slide. "Avalanches don't happen by chance, avalanches happen by choice. We're the ones that trigger avalanches that either hurt us or kill us."

Avoid slopes in the backcountry steeper than 30 degrees that face the northerly half of the compass

and be prepared with shovels, probes and avalanche beacons should rescue become necessary, Gordon advised.

"Know how to use all the gear and be well practiced," he said.

Cross avalanche terrain one person at a time and always leave somebody in a safe spot to do the rescue if something goes wrong.

"The best way to avoid all of this right now is to just go and play on low angle slopes," Gordon said.

He stressed that before someone enters the backcountry they should consult the Utah Avalanche Center by calling (888) 999-4019 or visiting www.utahavalanchecenter.com.

"The people who don't realize that our resource exists and don't utilize it are the majority of people who get caught in avalanches," Gordon lamented. "It's either us or somebody in our group that triggers avalanches."