

Skier caught in avalanche at Snowbird dies

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SALT LAKE CITY — A skier buried several feet deep for nearly an hour in a rare avalanche inside the boundary of Snowbird resort died at a hospital from her injuries.

The woman, who was in her 20s, died just before 5 p.m. Sunday, University Hospital spokeswoman Chantelle Turner said.

Rescuers initially feared other skiers might have gotten caught up in the same slide, reported around 12:20 p.m.

But Sheriff Jim Winder said a thorough search of the debris

field of hardened snow failed to turn up anybody else, and he was confident the woman was the only victim. The search was called off at nightfall after a search involving dogs, probes and avalanche beacons.

The woman had been buried under several feet of snow for nearly an hour, sheriff's deputy Levi Hughes told The Salt Lake Tribune.

Two doctors were on hand for the rescue, resort spokesman Dave Fields said.

Winder said the avalanche was an aberration inside a resort where ski patrollers routinely fire or drop explosives to loosen snow before slides can

occur naturally.

The avalanche followed hours after Snowbird opened new terrain for the season off 11,068-foot Mount Baldy. In that area, skiers have to hike for about 20 minutes before descending. Fields said ski patrollers had dropped hand explosives earlier in the day as part of avalanche control work around Mount Baldy.

Snowbird, about 15 miles east of Salt Lake City, had received a foot of fresh snow from a weekend storm.

Details about the victim weren't immediately forthcoming. Turner said she didn't know the woman's name, age,

hometown or cause of death and couldn't release the information if she knew it because of medical privacy laws.

The skier's companion reported the avalanche by cell phone and within seconds, the first ski patroller arrived, Winder said.

Another avalanche several miles away buried a backcountry skier on Sunday, Winder said.

A medical helicopter was on hand to pick up that skier, who was dug out by his friends alive, he said.

The backcountry group was skiing in the Wasatch Mountains near Desolation Lake.

Skiers trigger avalanches

Man survives Basin slide; woman dies at Snowbird

Slide danger in Park City Tuesday was considerable

By **PATRICK PARKINSON**
Of the Record staff

A Park City man who was trapped in an avalanche and pinned to a tree in the Snyderville Basin backcountry ducked a boundaries rope illegally at The Canyons Sunday afternoon to access the area near Square Top peak, avalanche forecasters claim.

"It's probably a good example of why you shouldn't be ducking ropes," Utah Avalanche Center forecaster Grant Helgeson said.

The human-triggered avalanche was about two feet deep and seriously injured Matt Roon, 21, when it pushed him into trees near Red Pine lake, Summit County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Steve Stokes said. The slide was triggered at roughly 2:45 p.m.

Ducking ropes at ski resorts is illegal in

Utah and punishable with a misdemeanor charge, Summit County Sheriff Dave Edmunds explained.

"Every single year we have those who duck the ropes, and frankly, I don't understand it," Edmunds said Tuesday. "We take it very seriously when people do duck the ropes because this is how people die. Every year we have a dramatic example of what can happen when you duck the ropes."

Roon suffered damaged vertebrae, a fractured pelvis and knee injuries in the slide, forecaster Helgeson said in a telephone interview.

"When you go for a ride like that you get raked through the trees and he's lucky to be alive," Helgeson said. "A third of the people who die in avalanches die from trauma."

Roon was skiing in the backcountry with four other people, Stokes said. All of the skiers are from the Park City area.

"It was only a matter of probably five minutes, 10 minutes at the most, from when I got the initial call to when they called back and said they had gotten him out," Stokes said.

The man was wearing an avalanche

beacon and ski patrollers from The Canyons were the first emergency responders at the scene.

"The rest of the [skiers] were able to get [Roon] down off the slope to the flat below where rescuers could get to him," said Bruce Tremper, director of the Utah Avalanche Center.

Roon's injuries are not life threatening, said the man's mother, Park Meadows resident Marsha Roon.

"But it's perhaps lifestyle threatening," the woman added when reached Tuesday.

Surgery for her son was Tuesday morning at University of Utah Health Sciences Center, Roon said.

Matt Roon and his twin brother Wesley "are avid skiers," said Parkite Chris Roon, the boys' father.

His passion for skiing took Matt Roon



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Please see Man, A-2

Man survives close call with an avalanche in Basin

last year to the Himalayas in Kashmir for six weeks of big-mountain skiing.

"Both kids have been through [avalanche] training and they absolutely adore the backcountry," Chris Roon said.

The father praised ski patrollers at The Canyons for responding so quickly. Roon did not lose consciousness and his head was not submerged under snow.

"His friends dug him out and carried him out within two hours," Chris Roon said. "He was not without equipment, without training or without friends who knew what they were doing."

The injured man arrived at the hospital in a medical helicopter after he was taken from the backcountry in a snow cat.

Deadly slide at Snowbird

A separate avalanche in the Wasatch Mountains Sunday claimed the life of a woman at Snowbird resort who was in her late 20s.

The afternoon slide happened within Snowbird boundaries near Mount Baldy at

roughly 10,500 feet, Tremper explained.

"It's very rare to have an inbounds fatality, and we've had two in a row, which is very unusual," said Tremper, referring to a fatal inbounds avalanche at The Canyons in December 2007.

Five people in Utah have died in avalanches within boundaries at ski resorts since the 1950s, he explained.

"In that same time period 61 people have been killed by lightning ... Ten times more Utahns are killed by lightning than are killed by inbounds avalanches," Tremper said.

Avalanche danger was considerable Tuesday in western Summit County.

"[Sunday] the backcountry was just flooded with people because they were so hungry for powder," Tremper said. "The main problem is on steep slopes that have wind-drifted snow from the strong winds on Friday that were blowing out of the south ... The people who fell into the pockets of that wind-drifted snow were able to trigger avalanches."

There was not enough new snow last weekend to help stabilize the weak slabs, he said, adding that much of the snow was blown onto slopes facing east.

"It's really common this time of year," Tremper said. "This early season snow pack is always difficult ... When you're adding snow for the first time, it's especially dangerous."

The Utah Avalanche Center forecasts slide advisories daily for the Wasatch and Uinta Mountains, at (888) 999-4019 or www.utahavalanchecenter.org.