

HEADING OUT THE GATES: WHAT 3 YEARS OF SURVEYS TEACHES US ABOUT “SIDECOUNTRY” USE IN JACKSON, WY

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ABSTRACT: In 2015, TCSAR Foundation in partnership with a number of other organizations began a project titled Backcountry Zero with the vision of reducing fatalities and injuries in the backcountry in and around Jackson Hole. With this intention in mind, partnerships were formed to create education, outreach and programs to begin to understand which audiences to reach and how to impact their decision making.

During the winter of 15/16, 3 people died in avalanches skiing/snowboarding outside the gates of Jackson Hole Mountain Resort. All three deaths were by novice to intermediate skiers with no avalanche training or equipment. All three deaths happened during moderate avalanche condition days. These deaths led to a partnership between the Teton County Search and Rescue Foundation and JHMR to attempt to understand who was heading out the gates, what equipment they had with them and messaging to ensure further accidents would hap

JHMR began to include new messaging as skiers/snowboarders exited the Aerial Tram that informed people of the hazards and dangerous situations outside the boundary of JHMR and used the phrase “don’t know, don’t go” to encourage thoughtful behavior when exiting the resort. Simultaneously, TCSAR Foundation recruited interns to start surveying those who were leaving resort. We have spent the last 3 winters interviewing people as they exited the gates and have surveyed 688 people. These numbers do not include the numbers of people who spoke to the interns and as a result did not exit the boundary. Interns over the last three years estimated they turned away about 1/3 of people attempting to ski through the gates.

Data collected included 1) number of people in the group, 2) experience level, 3) gender, 4) equipment carried, 5) avalanche/ weather report checked, 6) visitors vs. residents, 7) avalanche training, and 8) age.

The poster presentation will include an analysis of all three years of data with information that has led us to additional programs, services, and response.

KEYWORDS: TCSAR, Backcountry Zero, avalanche education, Jackson Hole.

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