

Back country safety is the main topic during the annual California Avalanche Workshop, which takes place this Saturday.
COURTESY/DAVID REICHEL, SIERRA AVALANCHE CENTER

“We want people who are a part of the back country culture to get the education and knowledge they need, but we also don’t want to have to compete with a big powder day,” Reichel said. “We want to have that sweet spot really close to winter, but not actually in the middle of it.”

Reichel said that avalanches occur in the thousands each year all around Tahoe. “Whenever we have a storm, it’s a common phenomena,” he said. “It only matters when it affects us in some way, though—when our cars get caught, or our houses get caught, or when people are seriously injured. Last year, no one died in an avalanche in the area, which

is wonderful, but we did have two very serious injury accidents.”

Nationwide, there are about 30 deaths per year caused by avalanches, Reichel said, so it’s paramount to educate those who hit the slopes about avalanche safety.

Among the speakers at this year’s avalanche workshop is Jeremy Jones, a pro snowboarder who will talk about decision-making on the terrain and how that plays into avalanche safety. Other presenters include Brandon Schwartz, lead forecaster for the Sierra Avalanche Center, who will talk about risk management. Reichel said he’s looking forward to a talk from Michael Ferrari, a patrol director at Mount Rose Ski Tahoe, will share his experiences of 30 years working in safety at the resort.

The workshop, though, goes beyond just talking about avalanche safety. There are also plenty of chances to network with other snow enthusiasts and to see presentations that are more about the season itself than about avalanches.

For instance, Megan Collins from the Desert Research Institute will talk about “Stories in the Snow,” an effort by DRI using citizen science to study snow itself.

“They are largely asking kids to take photos of snowflakes when they fall and share those with DRI,” Reichel explained. “As I understand it, they can use that information to learn more about the atmospheric conditions that are in the clouds during a specific snowstorm.” □

The California Avalanche Workshop takes place Nov. 2 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the North Tahoe Event Center, 8318 N. Lake Blvd., Kings Beach, California. Get tickets and more details at sierraavalanchecenter.org.

Snow safety

California Avalanche Workshop

It’s usually around Halloween that a snow enthusiast’s thoughts turn to the Sierras, in the hopes that the white stuff will soon be falling in abundance (and some of it already has, to be honest). It’s also the best time to start thinking about safety first and what to do in case an avalanche takes place while you’re in the great outdoors.

The California Avalanche Workshop has a simple mission that ties into the start of snow season: to share knowledge, analyze past accidents and learn from professionals about how to stay safe in the back country.

Taking place on Nov. 2, the workshop brings together professional skiers and snowboarders, forecasters, researchers, patrollers, scientists and recreation enthusiasts. David Reichel, a professional observer and field staff member at the Sierra Avalanche Center, is its founder and organizer.

“The early part of the season can be dangerous, because a lot of us aren’t fully back in the correct mindset,” Reichel said. “Doing this helps people reconnect with friends, but it’s also continuing education and a chance to share avalanche stories and the lessons learned.”

Having a workshop like this early in the season also helps with attendance, and this is one of the more popular educational events in the area.

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