

Snow Sport Helmet Act

- The Snow Sport Helmet Act, effective November 1, 2012 requires all skiers and snowboarders to wear an appropriate helmet on Nova Scotia's three commercially operated ski hills.
- Public Health inspectors will enforce this legislation and a fine of not less than \$250 will be levied for an offence. Parents will be issued the fine if they knowingly permit a child under 16 to violate the legislation.
- Ski hill operators are required to post signage to advertise the law and make their patrons aware through posted codes of conduct. There is no onus on the ski hills to enforce the law.
- The Department of Health and Wellness will work with the ski hills to promote the legislation and continue to encourage voluntary helmet usage during the 2012 ski season.

Background

- Injury is the leading cause of death and disability in the first 45 years of life, and costs Nova Scotians \$518 million annually. Brain injuries cost \$6-\$8 million over a lifetime and are a leading cause of injury related death and disability.
- Nova Scotia has the most progressive bike (and other wheeled activities) helmet legislation in the world. Established in 1997 and amended several times since with all-party support, this legislation has contributed to Nova Scotia having the lowest rate of cycling-related brain injuries in the country. Provinces with all-ages legislation have seen a significant reduction in brain injuries across the entire lifespan. Canadian research has established that bike helmet legislation does not reduce participation in cycling in Canada.
- In the spring of 2009, the Department of Health and Wellness was asked to examine the issue of ski helmets, following the tragic ski-related brain injury death of actress Natasha Richardson.
- In the fall 2009, the Department of Health and Wellness met with Nova Scotia's three ski hill operators (Martock, Wentworth, and Ben Eoin) to discuss ski helmets. It was agreed that industry, government, and the prevention community would work together to explore ways to increase the use of ski helmets in Nova Scotia. Research was conducted in the 2010 ski season to establish a baseline rate of helmet usage and interviews with non-helmet wearing skiers/snowboarders were conducted on the ski hills.
- This research concluded that 70%-80% of skiers and snowboarders wore helmets (with the highest rate of usage among children and youth 98% and the lowest among adults 66%). The interviews with non-helmet wearers suggested they were aware of the risks of brain injuries and that helmets could prevent them. However, they consciously chose not to wear helmets. Additionally, focus groups with non-helmet wearing customers of Nova Scotia's three ski hills demonstrated there was little resistance to legislation among this population and that all would continue to ski if required by policy or legislation to wear a helmet.

- This research led the Department of Health and Wellness to conclude that mandatory helmet rules for all-ages were the most appropriate option to ensure 100% of skiers and snowboarders wear helmets. While exploring the possibility of voluntary policies among the three ski hills or government legislation, the Department sponsored the *Wear it Proud* campaign during the 2011 ski season. This campaign has helped smooth the way for helmet legislation by further increasing voluntary helmet usage.
- Since June 2011, the Department of Health and Wellness has consulted with the ski industry to draft legislation that ensures 100% of skiers and snowboarders wear helmets, while minimizing any potential negative impacts on the ski hill operators.