



The Role of a Ski Patroller

Context

A ski patrol is an organisation that provides first aid and rescue services to participants of snow sports, either at a ski area or in a back country setting. Patrollers are trained with the first aid necessary to stabilise and transport casualties to advanced care, often with specialised first-aid courses. Patrollers can also increase their skill level to provide a higher level of casualty treatment by completing training such as Emergency Medical Technician or paramedic training. Due to the remote location and terrain, transportation is often limited to manual handling, sled/toboggan, snowmobile, snowcat, and helicopter. Patrollers are often well versed in avalanche search and rescue and other specialised techniques (e.g. chairlift evacuation, helicopter rappelling, or vertical rope techniques).

Ski Patrollers work to promote ski safety, enforce area policies (in some instances), and help injured skiers, when necessary. They are specially trained ski experts responsible for preventing accidents and maintaining the safety standards of a resort or snow area. They mark off trails and courses that are not safe for the public.

Ski patrollers also work to set up a mountain resort before it opens by conducting trail checks, providing avalanche control work, identifying and mitigating risks, and setting up rescue and other equipment in preparation for the day. At the end of the day, they also conduct a sweep of the mountain clearing the mountain for the hours of closure.

Contrary to the name's implications, ski patrollers can be snowboarders in addition to alpine, telemark, or Nordic skiers. Many patrols also have non-skiing positions whereby patrollers no longer able to ski or lacking the skiing skills to handle sleds/toboggans can still provide emergency care in a first aid room. Some ski areas also have a junior ski patrol program in which teenagers between the ages of 16 and 18 years old can participate. Most junior ski patrol programs limit the responsibilities of their members, such as preventing them from running sleds/toboggans or administering first aid without supervision.

Ski patrollers are further divided into two groups - paid staff and volunteer emergency workers. Both groups undergo the same rigorous training needed to become a ski patroller.

Patrollers operate in an environment of physical and medical risk. They work outdoors, in wet or damp conditions, and at heights. There are inherent risks involved in patrolling. These include, but are not limited to: traumatic injury, contraction of serious diseases, exposure to litigation, injury due to weather, high altitude and other natural conditions and occurrences. Patrollers who maintain a healthy life-style and stay in good physical condition can significantly reduce these risks.

Patroller Job Description

The primary duty of a Ski Patroller is to provide safety risk management, first aid and rescue services for snowsport participants.

Skill Areas

Not all patrollers have all of the skill areas listed below and in some countries or states different legislation controls the specific procedures, techniques or practices.

Core: (all patrollers)

- Emergency Care
- Vocational Skiing / Boarding
- Casualty evacuation and transportation (sled/toboggan usage)
- Area operations and risk management
 - Health/incident record keeping
 - Communication (radio)
 - Supervision and team management
 - Local geography and orientation
 - Incident prevention and safety management

Elective: (some patrollers)

- Analgesic pain relief
- Avalanche management
- Aerial tramway and/or railway evacuations (lift evacuations)
- Ropes, climbing and abseiling
- Snow mobile operations
- Search and rescue
- Accident investigation
 - Scene preservation
- Instructor and assessor training
- Slope management and grooming

Primary Job Function

Administer highly specialised first aid and assess, stabilise and evacuate sick and injured skiers in the area of operation.

Responsibilities and Duties of a Ski Patroller

- opening and closing of lifts
- organising systematic closures of the resort or trails
- attend and deal with severe trauma situations
- complete documentation by systematically recording personal and vital information
- maintain accurate records
- conduct incident investigations, taking photos and interviewing witnesses. These investigations regularly involve other departments or groups
- assist mountain operations, when needed
- attend all Ski Patrol briefings/training sessions and staff meetings
- assist in the training and education of all new patrollers
- manage disposable medical supplies and gasses effectively
- communicate and liaise with mountain management
- caution reckless and unsafe skiers
- enforce skier safety
- provide general resort and area information
- relate professionally and positively to guests and staff
- ensure hygiene precautions are maintained

- patrol pro-actively to minimise risks at all times in all snow and weather conditions
- work as a team member
- ski all areas to identify potential hazards with a view to remove or minimise hazards for guests
- deter unruly behaviour
- communicate professionally with ambulance officers and medical staff
- attend refresher advanced emergency care training at least every three years
- conduct lift evacuations and training
- monitoring and controlling day to day dangerous snow conditions i.e snow overhangs, cornices, wind scours, rocks, icy and steep drop offs, avalanche areas
- provide professional advice to management and guests
- erect and dismantle nets and rope lines
- position danger poles throughout the resort
- erect and maintain tower pads
- mark and place signage on ski runs
- maintain and care for patrol equipment
- monitoring lifts i.e pulleys, loads, unloads etc
- erect and dismantle snow fences
- provide a professional and informative Ski Patrol
- clean up and shovel snow
- perform boundary maintenance, hazard marking and risk mitigation
- operate snowmobiles and trailers

Qualifications Required

First-aid (Emergency Care) certification
 Locally recognised driver's licence

Essential Skills (Selection Criteria)

- High level of physical fitness, stamina and strength
- Superior skiing ability by being able to ski safely in all types of snow and terrain in the area of operation
- Comprehensive written and spoken English (numerate, literate) sufficient to complete forms and interact with injured guests
- Lift heavy items and equipment that needs to be carried to perform standard duties
- Ability to work as part of an efficient team
- Confidently display the application of first aid, often in pressure situations without supervision
- Certified and able to regularly re-certify qualifications in advanced first aid
- Ability to deal compassionately with distraught and injured guests and be attentive to their needs
- Sound understanding of radio procedures and practices
- Competence in handling and operating with skidoos
- High standard of personal hygiene and general tidiness in personal presentation
- Ability to control weighted sleds/toboggans in extremely arduous conditions
- Be at least 18 years of age
- Ability to supervise 5 to 10 people