

TREE WELL SAFETY

WHAT IS A TREE WELL:

Tree wells are generally found in ungroomed areas of deep snow, where low-hanging boughs can create a canopy preventing snow from filling in around the base of a tree, forming a pit of loose snow with air pockets. As the snowpack builds up around the branches, a deeper hole develops.

PREVENT FALLING INTO A TREE WELL:

You can avoid falling into a tree well by not skiing or snowboarding near trees in areas holding deep powder snow. If you choose to ski or snowboard in ungroomed areas of deep snow and trees, remember:

HAVE A PARTNER:

It is critical to ski or ride with a partner who remains in eyesight and earshot at all times. You should stop and watch your partner descend, then proceed downhill while your partner watches.

RESCUE GEAR:

Carry the same personal rescue gear as backcountry skiers or snowboarders. A transceiver, shovel, probe and whistle should all be staples in your pack.

REMOVE POLE STRAPS:

If you are a skier, remove your pole straps before heading down a powder slope. Trapped skiers have difficulty removing pole straps, which can hinder efforts to escape or clear air space to breathe.

WHAT IF YOU FALL INTO A TREE WELL?

If you are sliding toward a tree well, do everything possible to avoid going down into the well, particularly in an inverted position. Grab branches or hug the tree to stay above the surface, or flop down flat on the ground before hitting the tree.

IF YOU GO DOWN, RESIST THE URGE TO STRUGGLE VIOLENTLY:

The more struggling, the more snow will fall into the well from the branches and area around the well and compact around you. Don't panic. First make a breathing space around your face. Then move your body carefully in a rocking manner to hollow out the snow and give you space and air.

Hopefully your partner sees what happened and will come to your rescue within minutes. If not, experts recommend staying calm while waiting for assistance.

SNOW SUFFOCATION HAZARD

Tree Wells & Deep Snow Immersion



Avoid Tree Wells and Keep Your Partner in Sight

Survival chances are improved if you maintain air space. Over time, heat generated by your body, combined with your rocking motions, will compact the snow and you may be able to work your way out.

SOURCE: deepsnowsafety.org