

Private Members Bill C-289: *An Act to amend the Hazardous Products Act*

Snow Sport Helmets

INTRODUCTION:

Liberal Member of Parliament Dr. Hedy Fry first introduced private members bill C-289 over 3 years ago (then called bill C-412). This bill seeks to have recreational snow sport helmets added to the Hazardous Products Act. The amendment of this legislation would prevent the advertising, import and sale of snow sport helmets that do not meet Canadian Standards. On March 24, 2009 Health Canada announced that the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) developed a new CSA standard for recreational skiing and snowboarding helmets. Given the protection that the snow sport helmets provide skiers and snowboarders, it is imperative that these helmets are required to adhere to Canadian Standards. This would ensure that all individuals have the same opportunity for protection when a helmet is purchased and worn in Canada.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) Injury Prevention Working Group recommends:

- That the Federal government amends the Hazardous Products Act to include recreational snow sport helmets.

BACKGROUND:

Sports related injuries cost Canadians \$100 million dollars every year (Brain Injury Association, 2009). Skiing and snowboarding are popular sports in Canada and in 2003/2004 were the 2nd leading cause of recreational sports related injuries, accounting for 40% of these types of injuries (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2006).

Head injuries related to skiing and snowboarding are the most common reason for admission to either the emergency department or hospital accounting for 20% to 54% of admissions (Macnab et. al., 2002). Interestingly, head, neck and spinal cord injuries are the most costly of all the injuries sustained (Macnab et. al., 2002). Research has shown a decreased risk of head injury anywhere from 29% to as much as 60% when a helmet is worn while skiing or snowboarding (Macnab et. al., 2002; Hagel et. al., 2005; Sulheim et. al., 2006; Russell, Christie, & Hagel, 2010).

On February 18, 2009 a 13-year old boy visiting from Korea was killed after colliding with a tree during a skiing trip at the Snow Valley Ski Resort with Trillium Woods Public School (Benzie, 2009). It was reported that not only was he an inexperienced skier, he was also not wearing a helmet. A month later on March 16, 2009 actress Natasha Richardson fell during a skiing lesson at Mont Tremblant, and died as a result of an epidural hematoma. She was not wearing a helmet at the time. Tragedies like this can be prevented with the use of an 'approved' helmet.

In an editorial in the British Journal of Sports Medicine (2002) author P. McCrory states that “without valid helmet material and manufacturing standards, there is no guarantee that an off the shelf helmet has any protective capacity whatsoever”. Furthermore, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (1999) safety helmets which meet suitable standards results in the effective protection against head and brain injury. In the absence of legislation to mandate the use of helmets while skiing and snowboarding, the encouragement of skiers and snowboarders to wear helmets is warranted and the very least that can be done to prevent these injuries. However, if the helmets that are available for purchase are not required to meet Canadian Safety Standards, then how can we ensure that these individuals are protected?

CONCLUSION:

It is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure that properly tested helmets are available for purchase and to prohibit the advertising, sale and import of those helmets which fail to meet Canadian Standards. In doing so, we can help to reduce death and disability among snow sport participants as well as reduce the social and economic costs associated with these injuries.

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