



Avoiding Danger in the Backcountry

Mountain Safety Division
Nagano Prefectural Police Headquarters

Cases of accidents in the mountains, such as avalanches and disorientation, caused by people without proper backcountry preparation and/or experience are on the rise.

While people venture into the backcountry at their own risk, they are not the only ones affected in the case of an accident. Rescuers also face the risks of avalanche and inclement weather, and families carry a heavy burden when their loved ones become lost.

Work with us to prevent further backcountry accidents by observing the following rules and understanding the main dangers associated with the backcountry in Nagano and their causes.

1. Rules to Follow

i. Make thorough preparations ahead of time

Please check your course and the surrounding terrain in advance so that you are able to return to a ski resort or road at the end of your run. Videos alone are not a sufficient source of information.

ii. Create an itinerary (communicate your destination)

Submit an itinerary or inform your accommodation or an acquaintance of your destination before your backcountry trip.

iii. Carry the right equipment

a. Avalanche gear: beacon, probe, shovel, airbag, etc.

b. Climbing gear: climbing skins, snowshoes, etc.

c. Navigational tools: GPS, mobile phone, map, compass, etc.

d. Emergency gear: spare phone battery, headlamp, warm clothing, emergency blanket, rations, etc.

iv. Check snow conditions

The Hakuba-Iiyama region is known as an area of heavy snowfall where up to one meter of snow can accumulate in one night. Directly after snowfall, climbing skins are particularly ineffective and ejected skis are very difficult to find. Do not take the snow lightly; pick an appropriate course for the day's conditions.

v. Check avalanche risks before skiing

Check avalanche information provided at the ski resort and/or perform a snow pit test for weak layers in the snowpack.

vi. Closely follow the rules of the resort

The reason that certain areas are roped off or accompanied by warning signs is to prevent avalanches and steer away the average skier/snowboarder.

Think about not just yourself, but others that may be affected by your actions when crossing these boundaries—will other people be caught in an avalanche if you cause one? Might an unexperienced skier follow your tracks into dangerous territory?

2. Types of Mountain Accidents in Nagano Prefecture and Their Causes

- i. Disorientation, Becoming Stuck
 - a. Unable to return to a road or ski resort due to not confirming the course/terrain in advance
 - b. Not bringing a map or GPS device and becoming unable to confirm their current location
 - c. Following another person's tracks and losing one's way
 - d. Becoming stuck due to inexperience/inability
 - e. Unable to climb due to lack of appropriate climbing gear (climbing skins, snowshoes, etc.)
 - f. Unable to move because a ski ejected or a climbing skin was unusable



Don't rely on others' tracks



Climbing equipment is necessary



Skis may become buried

ii. Tree Collisions, Falls

Injuring oneself by entering a backcountry course outside of your ability and/or fitness level and colliding with a tree or falling.

iii. Asphyxiation

Falling and becoming buried in fresh snow can lead to suffocation and death.

iv. Avalanches

It is possible to become caught in not only avalanches caused by yourself, but those caused by your friends or other skiing parties as well.

If your friends or other nearby skiers are not carrying beacons and probes, the likelihood of you being found and rescued in time are extremely small. Even if they are carrying beacons and probes, the chances of survival are very low if you are not found quickly.

