

Sledding Down the Slippery Slope

A friend who was just noodling around the *AccuWeather* site found a blog post called “Why Have Midwestern Cities Banned a Beloved Winter Pastime?”

The piece, which seems like it might just sit in a slush pile on *AccuWeather*’s news desk and await recycling every snow season, discusses a few horrible sledding injury lawsuits that drained the coffers of Omaha, Nebraska, and Sioux City, Iowa. Then it adds: “According to a study from The Center for Injury Research and Policy (CIRP) at Nationwide Children’s Hospital, more than 20,000 Americans younger than age 19 receive treatment for sledding-related injuries each year.”

It goes on to offer tips from the National Safety Council: “To ensure safety, the group suggests that parents ensure all sledding equipment is in good condition, with no cracks or sharp edges. “The council also suggests selecting ‘spacious, gently sloping hills with a level run-off at the end so the sled can safely stop’ and to inspect the slopes prior to check for gaps, fences or anything else that could obstruct the ride.” Finally, do not leave kids under age 10 to sled unattended, the article warns. And only buy sleds with brakes and steering mechanisms.

Turning a sickly shade of green with pointy fingers and an evil grin, I must now rant about everything that is wrong about this article, this advice, this country and (go big or go to Whoville) this world. So, what is Grinch-ifying me? There are six things.

- No. 1—That people can sue towns when their kids get hurt sledding. This forces the towns to simply ban it—as it’s not worth the financial risk. But is a town always to

blame when someone gets hurt? The belief that there is a culprit (and potential pot of gold) behind every injury means every person and group has to adopt a cover-your-butt mentality and forbid a bunch of normal activities, for fear of litigation. (See my article “Principal Versus Mom: Who Decides How Kids Get Home?” on a school that won’t let kids walk home without a chaperone.)

- No. 2—The “helpful” advice that makes it sound like parents should spend days hunting for the perfect hill that they then must minutely inspect, as if for landmines. Can’t kids even select their own hill?

- No. 3—The statement that then the parents have to stick around for a decade until their kids are 10.
- No. 4—The idea that the parents also have to check the equipment for sharp edges, etc. This kind of advice is changing how we think of kids (always endangered!) and parents (always on high alert!) and stuff (always untrustworthy unless brand-new!).
- No. 5—The feeling that “experts” are wracking their brains for yet another thing to warn parents about. But they forgot yellow snow?
- No. 6—The source of this advice. Nationwide is a hospital named for the insurance company that gifted it with \$50 million. Now the hospital routinely churns out papers on the dangers of ... everything. A cynic might even wonder if they are busy labeling everything “hazardous” just so they might not have to pay out insurance claims, because, hey, the public was warned! Here is a partial list of studies conducted by Nationwide Hospital’s Dr. Gary Smith:

“Microwave oven-related injuries treated in hospital EDs in the United States, 1990 to 2010”; “Softball injuries treated in US EDs, 1994 to 2010”; “Pediatric volleyball-related injuries ... “; “Pediatric inflatable bouncer-related injuries ...”; “Sledding-related injuries among children ... “; “Safety

Interventions and Liquid Laundry Detergent Packet Exposures ...
“; “Stair-related injuries to young children ...”; and possibly
my favorite, “Children treated in United States emergency
departments for door-related injuries, 1999-2008.”

Scary to think that some kids might not only go sledding on an
improperly sloping hill on a sled with an improperly sanded
plank but then also come inside—passing through a DOOR!

To sum up, the advice seems to be:

*YOUR KIDS ARE IN HORRIBLE DANGER IF YOU LET THEM DO THE FUN
THING YOU USED TO DO. TAKE PRECAUTIONS. SAY YOUR PRAYERS. BUY
INSURANCE. AND HAVE FUN!*

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