

Advice on heading for the hills this winter

As winter takes hold, people are being urged to take care as they head out into Scotland's hills and mountains.

Minister for Commonwealth Games and Sport Shona Robison has delivered the annual Winter Safety Message, to ensure those planning a trip into Scotland's countryside are well prepared for any situation.

Joined on the slopes by pupils from Bruntsfield Primary School at Midlothian Snowsports Centre, Ms Robison said:

"Scotland has an enviable reputation for having world-class hills and mountains on our doorstep. With some snowsports centres opening with the early arrival of snow, I'm glad that people are enjoying our countryside, getting active at the same time and experiencing some of the most spectacular scenery around.

"However to those climbers and hillwalkers who are not suitably prepared, our countryside can present many hazards.

"Too many lives are lost unnecessarily on Scotland's hills and mountains each year. I urge everyone, whether you are an experienced climber or walker or not, to check local weather forecasts, plan ahead and have the correct safety equipment before heading out."

Councillor Bob Constable, Leader of Midlothian Council, said: "Everyone likes to enjoy the great outdoors, but the Winter Safety Message is especially important at this time of year. What better place to launch this important message than at Scotland's premier snowsports centre.

"If you are trying out some skiing this winter or perhaps

taking part in many of the other activities on offer we would urge people to take extra care and attention on the slopes, but above all have some fun.”

Mark Diggins – sportscotland Avalanche Information Service said: “Winter is most certainly upon us now, and we are faced with the normal challenges that a winter in Scotland’s mountains present.

“The beauty of the highland wilderness and the exploration of the hills, mountains and glens provides a great attraction for walkers, climbers, skiers and freeriders. Many thousands of enthusiasts enjoy the Scottish mountains every winter.

“The fast changing weather, with its snowfall, avalanche hazard, strong winds, and poor visibility requires us to be much more prepared when going into the mountains in the winter, good clothing, navigational ability, appropriate equipment, movement skills on steep terrain and use of ice axe and crampons are a necessary requirement for our enjoyment and safety.

“Getting good information helps any mountain goer decide on where to go and what to do. Good information on the avalanche hazard situation can be obtained from the sportscotland Avalanche Information Service website at [www.sportscotland.gov.uk/avalanche](#) and weather forecasts from the MET OFFICE and Mountain Weather Information Service.”

Anyone heading out this season is being advised to:

Check the weather forecast before setting off and remember that conditions can change quickly. Localised forecasts are available on the Mountain Weather Information Service and the sportscotland Avalanche Information Service via the Mountaineering Council of Scotland website

Make sure you know your limits and don’t tackle anything that is too ambitious – winter in Scotland’s mountains can be challenging and a route that at any other time of the year is

easy, can take longer and be more physically demanding.

Whether going for a relaxing walk or for a challenging climb, be properly equipped and ready to cope with changing ground and weather conditions.

Winter conditions can be serious so carry an ice axe and crampons, know how to use them and practice on less serious terrain.

Tell someone where you are going, what your route is and how long you expect to be on the hill.

Consider joining a hill walking or mountaineering club where advice and access to experience and knowledge is available.