



Top Jobs: Mountain Safety

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Safety first: Meet the man who plays by the rules at Northstar.

Imagine a perfect day on the mountain. You're cruising, picking up speed, sailing over the rollers as exhilaration courses through you. You're not skiing out of your comfort zone—the terrain is well within your abilities.

The thing is, your abilities aren't the problem. Imagine, now, that you catch some air over a lip. Right below the berm, a child suddenly changes direction, skiing right into your trajectory. But you're already in the air, and in one fleeting moment your exhilaration changes to fear as you realize how fast you were going. There's no way to avoid colliding with the pint-size skier. And just like that, no one's day is perfect anymore.

Northstar Mountain Safety Manager Matt McInnis talks camaraderie, protecting guests, and loving his job.



Enter the [Mountain Safety Team](#).
You've seen them across the trails:



Northstar Mountain Safety Team.

resort staff in bright yellow jackets posted by the “Slow Zone” banners or chatting with guests by the lift. These officials are tasked with making the mountain as safe as possible for all skiers and riders, which entails monitoring slope activities for reckless behavior, setting up and tearing down mountain signage daily, and

keeping guests informed of the rules. “Our job is to catch things before they happen,” says Matt McInnis, mountain safety manager at [Northstar](#). “To be proactive by educating people early, to be out there surveying, having eyes on the hill.” (See more from McInnis in our video above.)





Left to right: Vail Mountain Safety conferring on the slopes; Vail Mountain Safety with guests; Matt McInnis and guests at Northstar.

That means handing out warnings for irresponsible actions, like excessive speeding. The consequence for multiple offenses or particularly egregious offenses like skiing in closed terrain: possible pass restriction for the remainder of the season or until the skier or rider completes a safety class and test. “It definitely sticks in your brain that you don’t want to do that again,” McInnis says.

Northstar’s Mountain Safety Team is about 30 deep, and all are CPR-



and first aid-certified. They are oftentimes the first to arrive at an accident on the mountain. “I consider us to be the front lines of our health and safety employees,” says McInnis, who’s serving his sixth winter at Northstar. “We respond to a lot of injuries first. Our job is to help control the scene and assist guests until a professional patroller arrives to attend to the injury.”



Matt McInnis with a canine helper at Northstar.

McInnis wants guests to know that the yellow jackets are more than just speed enforcers, though. “Mountain Safety gets a bad rep, like we’re kind of just traffic cops,” McInnis says. “But we’re also ambassadors.”



As the face of the mountain, McInnis and his team help guests feel comfortable and learn their way around the trails by greeting folks, providing directions, picking up lunch tabs for guests, and



Vail Mountain Safety at the base of the mountain.

sometimes even offering a complimentary lesson or two if they see a skier struggling. “It’s a good balance between positive interactions and educational interactions,” McInnis says.

“We’re trying to set everyone up for success.”

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