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## Vail Pass: Snow chains making I-70 safer?

Truckers have gotten fewer tickets for not using snow chains

BY STEVE LYNN  
VAIL, CO COLORADO,

EAGLE COUNTY, Colorado — Cpl. Larry Graves has seen more and more truckers pulling over in Eagle County to put chains on their wheels during bad weather.

"I've been here 12 years and I've seen a definite improvement in people pulling over to chain up," said Graves, of the Colorado State Patrol.

The number of tickets given to truckers who failed to use chains on Interstate 70 decreased more than 30 percent last year, and some hope the trend will continue — 40 tickets have been given so far this year.

Eagle County's former state representative Dan Gibbs, now a state senator, drafted legislation in 2006 that increased fines from \$100 to \$500 for truckers that don't use snow chains and from \$500 to \$1,000 if they blocked even one lane of the interstate. Gov. Bill Ritter signed the bill last year.

Gibbs credits the decrease in tickets to that bill, which also assigned more troopers to the interstate for enforcement, created more spaces for truckers to chain up and required truckers to carry chains in the semis during winter.

Gibbs hopes more truckers will follow the law in the next couple years, he said.

"We need to continue to work together to minimize it," Gibbs said.

More troopers, higher fines and the increased number of spaces built in places such as Georgetown contributed to the decrease in 2007, said Greg Fulton, president of the Colorado Motor Carriers Association, a trucking lobby.

Truckers are trying to do better, Fulton said.

"We're frustrated we even had 40 tickets written," Fulton said. "That's 40 too many."

He also hopes that a fabric sock, awaiting approval from the Colorado Department of Transportation, will replace truckers' chains. The sock has been touted as easier and safer to put on than the cumbersome chains.

### Truckers still closing lanes

Authorities have closed Vail Pass 18 times since Nov. 1 — six times more than during the same period in 2006 and 2007. The road closures were mostly due to poor weather and accidents, authorities said.

"I've lived in Dillon for 26 years and this is about the worst winter," said Florine Raitano, executive director for the I-70 Coalition.

Despite an unusually icy interstate, the number of truckers who closed at least one lane of the interstate in Eagle County after failing to use chains has decreased — at least so far. Truckers were given 13 tickets for that in 2007 compared with 9 tickets in 2008. From Jan. 1 to March 31, only five more of those tickets were given in the rest of the state.

Raitano has seen more trucks pull off the road to chain up this winter, but whether that shows a downward trend remains to be seen, she said.

"It's way too early to tell," she said.

### Woman's leg saved

Despite a stricter chain law, what local authorities called the largest crash they had ever seen still occurred —

and two of three people ticketed were truckers.

There were four separate chain reaction crashes in a 58-car pileup around 1 p.m. March 31 on Vail Pass, said Graves, who investigated the pileup. Truck drivers were not ticketed for violating the chain law, because after a quick, hard-hitting snow storm the law wasn't in effect at the time, the State Patrol said.

Thomas Jackson, 55, of Escalante, Utah, was ticketed for careless driving after his semi lost control and started the first chain reaction crash in the west lanes of Interstate 70, the State Patrol said.

Roberto Alvarez, 41, of Tucson, Ariz., driver of another semi truck, also was ticketed for careless driving.

No drivers were ticketed in the crash that killed Lance Melting, 39, of Longmont, the State Patrol said.

Three women, Tina, Alyssa and Adrina Rosati also were hit by several unknown cars when they got out of their car after it crashed into a semi that was stopped in the west lanes of the interstate, Colorado State Trooper Ben Steger said. The women were taken to St. Anthony Summit Medical Center in Frisco and later were taken to a St. Anthony Central hospital in Denver, Steger said.

Tina Rosati broke her leg, Adrina Rosati's legs were bruised and Alyssa Rosati had serious injuries to her leg, but doctors were able to save it, Steger said.

"She had to go through quite a bit of surgeries," he said.

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