

8 dead, 1 missing in Tahoe avalanche



William Hale Irwin/For the S.F. Chronicle

Severe snowstorms hit much of the Tahoe-Truckee area on Wednesday. Pictured is the Boreal Mountain California ski area in Soda Springs (Nevada County), from where search and rescue efforts departed on Tuesday.

6 skiers rescued after disaster strikes guided trip

By Aidin Vaziri  
STAFF WRITER

Eight of the nine people reported missing after a massive avalanche struck a guided backcountry ski group near Lake Tahoe were confirmed dead Wednesday, Nevada County authorities said, making the incident one of the deadliest U.S. avalanches in decades.

One member of the ski group remained missing Wednesday afternoon and was presumed dead, officials said. Six members of the group survived and were rescued after a major operation Tuesday afternoon and into the night. Identities of the deceased skiers were not released Wednesday as their bodies remained in the slide area and next of kin had not been notified, officials said.

Sheriff Shannan Moon said the Nevada County dispatch center received a 911 call reporting the avalanche at 11:30 a.m. Tuesday in the Castle Peak area north of Interstate 80 near Donner Summit, “a very remote rugged area” that is “not a



Andri Tambunan/For the S.F. Chronicle

Nevada County Sheriff Shannan Moon updates media on rescue efforts following the avalanche near Lake Tahoe.

**INSIDE**  
Avalanche puts spotlight on risks of “storm skiing.” **A9**

groomed area or a ski resort area,” but backcountry terrain in Tahoe National Forest near the Pacific Crest Trail, she said.

Moon said the 15-person group was on a guided three-day trip run by Blackbird Mountain Guides of Truckee.

The party included four guides and 11 clients; one client backed out at the last minute, she said.

The party spent two nights at the Frog Lake ski huts and was returning to the trailhead on its third day when the avalanche hit, Moon said.

Six people survived and were located Tuesday evening after sheltering under a tarp during intense snowfall, Moon

**Avalanche continues on A9**

Blizzard, weak snow layer primed Sierra for danger

By Anthony Edwards and Greg Porter  
NEWSROOM METEOROLOGISTS

An avalanche near Truckee on Tuesday that trapped 15 backcountry skiers, killing eight and leaving one missing, occurred as a massive storm dumped feet of snow on top of an unstable snowpack, according to the U.S. Forest Service Sierra Avalanche Center.

Search teams rescued six survivors who had sheltered in place, authorities said. The survivors were located on Castle Peak and had taken cover under a tarp amid intense snowfall, Nevada County Sheriff Shannan Moon told ABC News. Two of the six were injured badly enough that they could not ski out.

Perry Peak is roughly 8,200 feet in elevation. A weather station nearby recorded over a foot

**Danger continues on A9**

Hearing on fatal crash draws outrage

Experts weigh in on why driver is likely to avoid jail

By Annie Vainshtein  
STAFF WRITER

A torrent of outrage and confusion has followed in the wake of a hearing last week in which a San Francisco judge signaled he was unlikely to impose prison time, home detention or community service on a woman accused of killing a family of four while speeding down a residential street in 2024.

Backlash erupted on social media against San Francisco Superior Court Judge Bruce E. Chan as users across the country expressed indignation at what they perceived to be inexplicable leniency after the driver, Mary Fong Lau, changed her plea to no contest Friday. She had previously pleaded not guilty to four counts of vehicular manslaughter.

A no-contest plea indicates that while a criminal defendant does not admit guilt, they waive their right to a trial and allow the court to treat them as if they were guilty for the purposes of sentencing.

Prosecutors said Lau, 80, of San Francisco, was driving at speeds of up to 70 mph down a West Portal street when she slammed into a bus shelter, killing a family waiting for transportation to the San Francisco Zoo on March 16, 2024. Diego Cardoso de Oliveira, 40, and his 1-year-old son, Joaquim Ramos Pinto de Oliveira, were killed immediately. Matilde Moncada Ramos Pinto, 38, and 3-month-old Cauê Ramos Pinto de Oliveira were hospitalized and died days later.

In California, judges are given significant latitude for sentencing in many cases. They must consider a wide array of factors, from the defendant’s criminal history, their perceived remorse, their age, the likelihood of them reoffending and the circumstances surrounding the incident itself.

Chan said he had made great efforts to balance the “incomprehensible” losses in the case with other factors: Lau’s age, her lack of criminal

**Outrage continues on A8**

Jackson’s 1984 speech just as potent today

Walter Mondale walked away with the nomination at the Democratic National Convention in 1984.

But for thousands of delegates and local citizens at the San Francisco gathering, the enduring memory was Jesse Jackson at the podium in Moscone Center, proffering one of the greatest speeches in American political history.

Jackson, who died on Tuesday at age 84, finished in third at the convention, but his July 17, 1984, “rainbow coalition” address has echoed through the generations — a progressive message that his political party has aspired to and San

PETER HARTLAUB  
CULTURE

Francisco arguably adopted in the 42 years since.

“Our flag is red, white and blue, but our nation is a rainbow — red, yellow, brown, black and white — and we’re all precious in God’s sight.

“America is not like a blanket — one piece of unbroken cloth, the same color, the same texture, the same size. America is more like a quilt: many patches, many pieces, many colors, many sizes, all woven and held together by a common thread.

“The white, the Hispanic

**Jackson continues on A8**



Frederic Larson/S.F. Chronicle

Jesse Jackson gave his famous “Rainbow Coalition” speech at the 1984 Democratic National Convention at Moscone Center in San Francisco.