

Snow hut building ranks low in the legal risk category

Those of us who grew up on a farm in the prairies have fond memories of the natural winter playgrounds created by drifting snow.

A shovel could keep my brother and me occupied for hours, digging tunnels and caves.

I reminisced the other day with a lady who remembers teaming up with her sister, competing against their brothers to dig the most impressive snow complexes, complete with snow kitchens stocked with items pilfered from the "real" kitchen in the house.

I didn't have access to those beautiful snow drifts until I was seven, when my family moved out to the farm.

Before then, I was introduced by my father (thank you!) to the much more physically demanding method of snow structure construction—the "snow hut."

A snow hut is constructed by shoveling available snow onto a pile, letting it sit (overnight is lots) to allow the piled snow to bond, and then tunnelling in and hollowing out the inside.

The snow you dig out can be added to the top or side of the structure to increase its height or width.

Wikipedia tells me that this type of snow structure is properly called "quinzhee" or "quinzee,"

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but I don't like to use the fancy terminology.

I have, as an adult, built snow huts every chance I've had.

It was easier in our backyard in Glenrosa, with a slightly higher elevation, than our home in Rose Valley.

In Glenrosa, by collecting all the snow in our front and back yards with a sleigh shovel, I was able to build a structure tall enough that I could have one of my children sitting on my shoulders, unable to reach the inside ceiling.

I am excited to report that we have just acquired a unit at Big White. My excitement comes not from a passion for skiing, but rather my passion for snow huts.

We had four families (16 people) in our Big White snow hut bringing in the New Year, and that hut is just going to keep on growing.

Most people I've shared my snow hut stories with have never heard of this type of snow structure, and express concern about the risk of collapse.

They look at me like I should know better.

Presumably, if anyone ought to be cautious about exposing others to the risk of injury, it would

be a personal injury lawyer.

I invited one local reporter, who posted a concern on Facebook, to "Come play with me...I'll teach you about how hand thrown snow works."

This is a personal injury lawyer with admittedly zero structural engineering training but plenty of "hands on" experience with hand-thrown snow.

A pile of hand-thrown snow allowed to sit overnight is about

as likely to collapse on being hollowed out as a hollowed out block of styrofoam.

The only risk I can see is if some joker climbs on top and falls through the thinner styrofoam on the top, landing hard on the icy floor or onto someone else on the inside.

And yes, ensure your body can handle vigorous shoveling activity to avoid a heart attack or back injuries. Did I really need to give those 'disclaimers?'

A very recent CBC radio program, Cross Country

Check-up, explored issues around how cautious we have become, disallowing community ice rinks and toboggan hills, not letting children run in playgrounds, etc., to avoid the wrath of personal injury lawyers and the high cost of insurance.

I am thankful for our civil justice system that provides injured victims the right to pursue fair, financial compensation for injuries and losses arising from the dangerous conduct of others.

It is through those lawsuits that the legal "safety duties" we owe one another are tested and clarified, and dangerous conduct is identified so that it can be avoided.

Snow hut play is a winter activity that is incredibly rich in the "fun exercise" category and incredibly poor in the "risk" category.

Have you got a yard full of snow and children glued to electronic devices?

Grab a shovel and introduce your kids to

this incredibly fun winter activity.

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