The recent March 15th Haines avalanche death is the fourth fatality in conditions rated “Considerable Danger.” It shows an obvious pattern of profits over safety: In 2012, Nickolay Dodov and guide Rob Liberman were killed in a massive avalanche after five feet of new snow, growing surface hoar, an overnight strong wind storm that overloaded the mountain bowls and the gullies with wind deposit snow. In 2013, guide Christian Cabanilla was killed after an overloaded cornice collapsed that set off an avalanche. In 2014, guide Aaron Karitis was killed in an avalanche after three weeks of unusually dangerous conditions.

Unregulated heli-skiing industry in the United States, ruled by its own insurance, left the door open for negligence. The U.S. Heli-Ski Association, instead of setting mandatory safety standards and protocols, has recommended safety guidelines based on self imposed safety standards and self-certified heli-ski guides. US Heli-Ski Association’s mission is: “To ensure and protect the future of helicopter skiing in the U.S.”

Canada is the worldwide leader in heli-skiing industry. They have been highly regulated by the government since the early 1970s.

If the multimillion dollar heli-skiing industry in the U.S. was serious about regulating their safety standards, they would have adopted the U.S. Army’s Tenth Mountain Division strict safety standards years ago.

Two years ago after our son was killed in an avalanche in Haines, we requested from the U.S. Heli-skiing Association to see their strict safety standards, as this was stated on their website. Their response was a letter to the senators stating that they did not want to be regulated, and refused farther discussion of the matter. “Fatal accidents like the one last spring (2012) only increase the volume of that clamor. But people need to remember,” Points North owner Kevin Quinn said. “Heli-skiing is an inherently risky activity. And not even a litany of rules and regulations can guarantee that nothing will go wrong. Being a part of U.S. Heli-Ski wouldn’t have saved those people,” Quinn said. “Not even kind of.”

This is the extent that the heli-skiing industry in the U.S. is willing to go to – casual self-regulation instead of mandatory safety standards.

Every heli-skiing operator in the U.S., member or non-member of the US Heli-Ski Association, states on its websites and operating plans that they have been operating under strict safety standards. This information should be considered fraudulent. Heli-skiing in the United States has never been regulated. Therefore, no state or federal authority has set safety standards for this industry.

It appears that heli-skiing industry insurance companies, supported by law enforcement, labor safety, land managers, local authorities, avalanche forecasters, and mainstream media were able to suppress and cover up information and details of the events related to the deadly incidents.

We are concerned that desperately needed changes will not happen in the foreseeable future. This leaves us with a dangerous environment for the clients and the guides in the U.S. heli-skiing industry.

We have started Nickolay Dodov Foundation for snow sports safety. The foundation’s mission is to promote snow sports safety and awareness through educational programs and events, to encourage children and enthusiasts of all ages to safely explore the beauty of the mountains, and to inspire a healthy and positive lifestyle in the light of Nickolay Dodov.

For events and updates you can visit Nickolay Dodov Foundation website: www.nickolaydodovfoundation.com. For more details and information you can visit our blog at: alexnatalianickdodovdotcom.wordpress.com