

UI snow-load study flawed

The University of Idaho's "Ground and roof snow loads for Idaho" study completed under the leadership of Dr. Ronald Sack is so scientifically flawed it should never have been published. As cities and counties adopt the resulting snow load roof standards, millions of dollars are wasted by overbuilding roof systems, in many cases, the cost of complying runs between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per home.

The problem is the study extrapolated snow levels from the peaks of the tallest mountains and then made a direct correlation to the valleys, accounting only for lower precipitation as a result of the elevation difference. The study failed to account for the fact that snowfall early in the winter and late in spring melts at the lower elevations, rather than accumulating all season as it does at high elevations. When the NOAA data taken at the lower elevations was checked to confirm the model's accuracy, those readings would not support the already completed computer model's results, so they were explained away, as is the case of the Coeur d'Alene readings, or marked with an asterisk as a "local anomaly."

In Kootenai County, the only two low-elevation measurement points (the NOAA collection points) were discarded, leaving only the data from the mountain peak readings, resulting in roof load standards of about twice as high as the NOAA site's data would support. Part of the county has construction standards that will support over twice as much snow as has ever fallen in recorded history, including the legendary snow of 1968-1969.

The UI should redo this study immediately rather than continue to lose credibility until something truly embarrassing happens, like the Idaho Legislature adopting into law a provision that the study may not be used by municipalities to set the roof building standards.

Larry Spencer, Hayden, Idaho