

# **Dying To Go Caving, 50 Years of Fatal Accidents In North America**

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## **Abstract**

Fatal accidents in North America from 1948 to 2000 were examined. These accidents are an un-biased indication of caving activity. Starting with an initial compilation of fatal accidents by Richard Breisch (1977) the number of fatalities was brought up to date with information from the annual *American Caving Accidents*. Fatal accidents were then divided into “fatal incidents” which was defined to be a mistake that led to one or more fatalities. Incidents were further broken down into two categories, general fatalities and vertical fatalities. It was found that both general and vertical fatal incidents correlated well with the growth of the National Speleological Society. A comparison of the first and last 25-year periods shows that the rate of fatalities has decreased by about 25%. The largest gain has been a 40% decrease in the rate of vertical fatalities. The decreased fatality rate is tentatively attributed to the introduction of better equipment.