

Fatal snowmobile incidents has OPP worried about doubling of numbers

With fatal snowmobile incidents now more than double the number this time last season, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) and Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) are dismayed to see the same behaviours drive the numbers up at an alarming rate. Fatal snowmobile incidents and resulting deaths now sit at 20 for the season, compared to eight such incidents and 11 deaths to this time last year. Thirteen of the deaths have occurred within the past six weeks. The causes and contributing factors clearly reflect snowmobilers' ongoing disregard for their own safety and that of their fellow riders and passengers:

? Twelve of the deceased either collided with a tree, a rock, a snowbank, a road vehicle or another snowmobile.

? Speeding excessively, too fast for the conditions and/or losing control of their snowmobiles were actions in nine of the incidents.

? Four of the snowmobilers were travelling on frozen waterways. Three of them encountered open water and the fourth fell through the ice. Sadly, in one of those incidents, a young passenger died.

? Driver inattention was the primary cause of four fatalities.

? A lone snowmobiler died of hypothermia after her snowmobile became stuck in the snow ? a harsh reminder of what can happen when riders do not pack an emergency kit for each ride.

Seventeen males and three females, which include a 16-year-old and an 11-year-old girl, have been killed to date.

According to OPP Deputy Commissioner Brad Blair, the prominent demographics among the deceased may come as a surprise to some and are telling in terms of the attitudes and behaviours among some Ontario snowmobilers.

?Men in their 50s and 60s make up the majority of this season's snowmobile deaths, with 15 of the 20 deceased within these age groups,? Blair said. ?What snowmobilers and their families need to take away from this is that even those with considerable driving experience ? be it on a snowmobile or in a road vehicle ? are equally vulnerable to the inherent risks associated with this popular, yet high-risk recreational sport.?

?A snowmobiler impacting another vehicle or a tree isn't an ?accident,? OFSC?Executive Director Paul Shaughnessy observed. ?It's a preventable incident, often the result of excessive speed and operator inattention.?

?Some snowmobilers do not appreciate that they are operating a motor vehicle, machines that are capable of reaching significant speeds,? he added. ?They need to drive with due care and control.?

OPP is urging snowmobilers to stay off lakes and rivers, the conditions of which are deteriorating rapidly in many parts of the province. Family members are also encouraged to help their loved ones make smart decisions before they head out, to help ensure a safe return home from their ride.

OPP and OFSC are reminding snowmobilers to check for trail status and conditions before each ride.