

OPP?warning of dangers from ice

In the wake of a tragic weekend that claimed the lives of three snowmobilers on frozen waterways, Ontario Provincial Police and the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) are warning snowmobilers about unsafe ice and urging everyone, including anglers, to stay off lakes and rivers.

In one incident over the weekend, four snowmobilers went through the ice on a lake in the Haliburton region and one of them drowned. In another incident, a snowmobiler and his passenger were travelling on a Georgian Bay area lake and died after reportedly colliding with rocks on an island. The ice was too unsafe to get to the victims by ground and they had to be recovered by helicopter. Police are reminding everyone that no ice is 100 per cent safe.

The winter's late start and persisting mild temperatures throughout the province make current ice conditions extremely dangerous. Even when sufficient ice forms, it is never 100 per cent safe to snowmobile on. Staying off the ice altogether is the only sure way to prevent snowmobile tragedies from occurring on waterways.

Some snowmobilers call riding on frozen waterways a ?personal choice.? This is not the case when they and their snowmobiles go through the ice and police, other emergency personnel and civilians have to try to rescue them on that same unsafe ice.

To avoid unnecessary risks and get home safely after the ride, OPP and OFSC recommend that snowmobilers adhere to available, land-based OFSC trails whenever possible. OFSC clubs provide many trails that avoid water crossings altogether and include bridges and culverts that allow them to pass over water crossings safely.

If parts of the province experience sustained periods of cold temperatures in the coming days or weeks, carefully assess ice conditions before heading out on frozen waterways. Those who do choose to snowmobile on lakes, cross only where a marked stake line is in place and go directly from shore to shore, without stopping on the ice.

The following safety checklist can help ensure a safe ride:

- ? Check ice thickness and quality before riding onto any frozen waterway.
- ? Only travel where ice is already well-tracked and others are present, and where ice roads and fishing huts are in place.
- ? Be mindful that ice conditions can vary from day-to-day, from hour-to-hour and from one location to the next.
- ? Never travel on ice alone, at night or while impaired by alcohol or drugs.
- ? Avoid slushy or untracked ice or ice near moving water or dock bubblers.
- ? Watch out for obstacles like rocks, stumps, docks, ice roads and fishing huts.
- ? Wear a buoyant snowmobile suit and carry ice picks.
- ? Do not travel on ice for several days after any mild temperatures and stay off the ice altogether as soon as spring temperatures stay at or above 0°C.

Finally, OPP and OFSC are asking snowmobilers to remember every time they head out for a ride, that their loved ones expect and need them to get home safely. Don't let your family be the ones who answer the door to a police officer who has to deliver the devastating news that their loved one died in a snowmobile incident.

OPP is committed to saving lives on Ontario's highways, trails and waterways through the reduction of preventable injury and death. Initiatives are developed and delivered through the Provincial Traffic Safety Program.

OFSC is committed to proactive leadership in promoting safe, responsible riding, on and off Ontario snowmobile trails, by building safer snowmobiling knowledge, attitudes and behaviours through rider education, safety legislation development and enforcement.