

Rash of snowmobile incidents causes spike in death toll

Six recent snowmobile deaths have led the OPP and the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) to strongly urge snowmobilers to stop taking unnecessary risks while riding.

The latest series of incidents brings to 13 the number of snowmobile fatalities this winter, compared to eight deaths at this point last season. While lack of snow was a factor in last winter's lower numbers, the constant over the past two seasons are the causal factors leading to the deaths.

OPP investigators are linking the fatalities to riding on unsafe ice, speeding, loss of control, alcohol use and driver inattention, confirming that driver behaviours continue to cause otherwise preventable snowmobile deaths.

In one recent incident, an 11-year old girl died after the snowmobile she was driving collided with a transport truck as she attempted to cross a major highway. Another collision claimed the life of one driver and left another in critical condition after two snowmobiles crashed head-on. Members of the OPP Underwater Search and Recovery Unit brought to shore the lifeless body of a male driver from a lake, making it the third incident of the season during which a snowmobiler died while riding on unsafe ice.

'The vast majority of these incidents are not random 'accidents' that can happen to just any snowmobiler,' OPP Deputy Commissioner Brad Blair observed recently. 'Somewhere along the way, a risk was taken or an error in judgement was made. Sadly, tragedies occurred at an alarming rate last week and the only way to prevent them is for every snowmobiler to eliminate all forms of risk when riding.'

'As with all recreational activities, there are always risks,' Lisa Stackhouse, manager of participation and partnership development with OFSC added. 'These latest incidents serve as tragic reminders that making smart choices while snowmobiling helps ensure that your journey will be as safe as it is enjoyable.'

The OPP and OFSC remind the snowmobile community that family members can positively influence those who take unnecessary risks on a snowmobile. If you suspect that a loved one's snowmobiling behaviour is placing them at risk, speak up and remind them how important it is to you and your family that they make it home safely after every ride.