

Snowmobiling on ice

Each year, tragic and avoidable snowmobile deaths occur across Canada. Snowmobiles are high-speed vehicles that operate in a hazardous natural environment. Riders are at risk of personal injury and fatalities due to collisions and immersion in cold water.

Important facts

- Canadian Red Cross' ongoing surveillance of unintentional water-related fatalities tracked 398 snowmobile-related deaths over a period of 20 years and found that snowmobile immersion deaths were largely preventable.
- The major risk group for snowmobile immersion deaths was 15- to 44-year-old males, with the largest number of deaths occurring among 25- to 34-year-olds.
- Snowmobiling immersion incidents occurred while riders were travelling on ice, going off-road or off bridges, and 59% of incidents occurred on lakes.
- Alcohol was present or suspected for 58% of fatalities 15 years of age and older (blood alcohol content was above the legal limit for 37%, below the limit for 12%, and suspected for 9%).
- Only 3% of people who died in snowmobiling incidents were properly wearing a flotation device such as a lifejacket or survival suit.
- Other immersion deaths involving motor vehicles on ice include ATV's and ice fishing using a road vehicle.
- Among deaths from immersion while on ice, 46% resulted from open holes in the ice, and 42% from falling through thin ice.

Tips

- **It's important to know your terrain and wear the proper safety equipment.**
 - Survey the area you are riding in and identify the potential danger spots.
 - Avoid snowmobiling in the dark, when it is more difficult to detect unsafe conditions.

- Wear a helmet, a personal flotation device in case of unexpected submersion, and clothing appropriate for the conditions in order to prevent frostbite and hypothermia.
 - Carry rescue equipment such as ice picks, a rope, a cell phone (in a waterproof container), and a first aid kit. Other safety equipment to be considered include a flashlight, waterproof matches/lighter, tool kit, candles and survival blanket.
 - Do not consume alcohol before or during a snowmobile outing and ensure you are not tired.
- **Always verify the ice conditions and ensure that ice is at least 25 centimetres thick before snowmobiling on it. Snowmobiles are heavy and require thick ice for support.**
- No ice formed over open water can be considered 100% safe.
 - Where ice is checked for thickness, obey posted signs on when and where ice surface is acceptable for activities.
 - Check with local authorities regarding ice conditions before venturing out.
 - Ensure that the ice across the entire area is a uniform and safe thickness—avoid locations where there are currents or tides.
 - Clear, blue ice is the strongest; grey ice is unsafe as it indicates the presence of water.
 - Avoid ice that has recently frozen, thawed, and then frozen again.
 - Ice conditions can change very quickly—if you are returning from a day of riding, check the ice again before crossing.
- **Always snowmobile with others.**
- Avoid going out on the ice alone; always ride with at least one other snowmobile to ensure rescue is an option.
 - Discuss rescue procedures in advance to ensure all riders know how to perform a rescue safely.
 - Follow the shoreline and leave 15 metres between snowmobiles.



- **Create a trip plan.**
- **Tell someone:**
 - the names of everyone in the group
 - whose snowmobile is being used
 - where you are going, and why
 - when you are leaving
 - when you expect to reach your destination
 - any stops you plan to make along the way
 - when you plan to come back
- **Take a Red Cross first aid class to learn the signs and treatment for cold-related emergencies:**
redcross.ca/findacourse