



Winter Safety – Ice

February 22, 2017

Ice begins to be "safe" at around 4 - 6 inches thickness. Do not even walk on ice 3" or less in thickness. However, even at a 9" - 10" thickness, there may be unforeseen hazards such as a flowing current underneath that is ceaselessly weakening the underside of the ice. In this instance, even the thickness is not a good indicator of safety, as the ice could collapse at any time.

In general, the rules for ice thickness measurements are:

- 3" (7 cm) (new ice) - KEEP OFF
- 4" (10 cm) - suitable for ice fishing, cross-country skiing and walking (approx. 200 pounds)
- 5" (12 cm) - suitable for a single snowmobile or ATV (approx. 800 pounds)
- 8" - 12" (20 - 30 cm) - suitable for one car, group of people (approx. 1500 - 2000 pounds)
- 12" - 15" (30 - 38 cm) - suitable for a light pickup truck or a van

People should always remember that these measurements do not indicate ice safety in every instance. It is always important to follow safety practices when traveling on the ice including:

- Tell someone your travel plans, route and estimated time of return
- Wear proper gear such as a floater coat and carry survival equipment
- If you don't know, DON'T GO!

The color of ice may be an indication of its strength with clear blue ice as the strongest. Meanwhile, white opaque or snow ice is half as strong as blue ice. Opaque ice is formed by wet snow freezing on the ice. Finally, grey ice is unsafe as grayness indicates the presence of water. Environmental factors such as water depth, chemicals including salt, changing air temperature and shock waves from vehicles traveling on the ice also play a role in ice thickness.

When You Are Alone On Ice

- Call for help.
- Resist the immediate urge to climb back out where you fell in. The ice is weak in this area.
- Use the air trapped in your clothing to get into a floating position on your stomach.
- Reach forward onto the broken ice without pushing down. Kick your legs to push your torso on the ice.
- When you are back on the ice, crawl on your stomach or roll away from the open area with your arms and legs spread out as far as possible to evenly distribute your body weight. Do not stand up! Look for shore and make sure you are going in the right direction.

When You Are With Others On Ice

- Rescuing another person from ice can be dangerous. The safest way to perform a rescue is from shore.
- Call for help. Consider whether you can quickly get help from trained professionals (police, fire fighters or ambulance) or bystanders.
- Check if you can reach the person using a long pole or branch from shore – if so, lie down and extend the pole to the person.
- If you go onto ice, wear a PFD and carry a long pole or branch to test the ice in front of you. Bring something to reach or throw to the person (e.g. pole, weighted rope, line or tree branch).
- When near the break, lie down to distribute your weight and slowly crawl toward the hole.
- Remaining low, extend or throw your emergency rescue device (pole, rope, line or branch) to the person.
- Have the person kick while you pull them out.
- Move the person to a safe position on shore or where you are sure the ice is thick. Signal for help.