

Dept. of Natural Resources: Snowmobilers: Think smart before you start this season

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is reminding snowmobilers that safety is an important part of the ride. Whether you were gifted a snowmobile over the holidays or are a veteran of the ride, the department asks all riders to be in the know and review Wisconsin's [snowmobile safety rules and regulations](#) before heading out this winter.

Wisconsin is a long-time snowmobile destination offering some of the best riding opportunities in the country, especially in the northern part of the state. With more than 200,000 registered snowmobiles hitting the state's 25,000 miles of groomed trails across the state each winter, safety is critical.

Between January and March 2021, there were [13 snowmobile fatalities](#) in Wisconsin, with alcohol, excess speed, driver inexperience and operator error as the leading causes.

“It's important to think smart before you start,” said Lt. Martin Stone, DNR Off-Highway Vehicle Administrator. “Winter's fluctuating temperatures, snowfalls and snowmelts can cause unsafe conditions on snowmobile trails. The DNR does not monitor conditions and we suggest snowmobilers contact local fishing clubs, snowmobile clubs or outfitters to ask about the ice conditions in your area. Remember – no ice is safe ice.”

There is no such thing as 100% safe ice. Snowmobilers cannot judge ice strength by factors like appearance, age, thickness or temperature, especially when the ice is snow-covered.

There is a 55 mph speed limit when traveling at night. Do not overdrive what headlights can illuminate, such as trail markers or hazards.

Any person who is at least 12 years old born on or after Jan. 1, 1985 is required to have a valid [Snowmobile Safety Certificate](#) in order to operate a snowmobile in most areas. Operators must carry the certificate while riding and display it to a law enforcement officer when requested. Visit the [DNR Safety Education webpage](#) for details and to locate a class or take an online course.

Think smart before you start this season by following these tips:

ON THE TRAILS

- Don't drink and ride.
- Stay on marked trails—riding off-trail or cutting corners is trespassing.
- Always wear your helmet and safety gear.
- Slow down and use extra caution at night.
- Travel with a friend, carry a cell phone and let people know where you are going and when you'll return home.
- Dress appropriately, carry a first aid kit and navigation tools.
- Take a [snowmobile safety course](#).
- Check trail conditions using the [Travel Wisconsin Snowmobile Snow Report](#).

ICE SAFETY

- Remember that ice is never completely safe under any conditions.
- Contact local sport shops to ask about ice conditions locally on the lake or river you want to traverse.
- Wear proper clothing and equipment, including a life jacket or float coat should you fall through the ice and to help retain body heat.
- Do not travel in unfamiliar areas.
- Slow down when traveling at night.
- Know if the lake has inlets, outlets or narrows that have currents that can thin the ice.
- Watch for pressure ridges or ice buckling. These can be dangerous due to thin ice and open water.

For additional information on snowmobile safety classes, regulations, safety tips or to register your snowmobile, click [here](#).

DNR VIOLATION HOTLINE

Anyone with information regarding natural resource violations, including unsafe snowmobile operation, may confidentially report by calling or texting: VIOLATION HOTLINE: 1-800-TIP-WDNR or 1-800-847-9367. The hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Trained staff relay the information to conservation wardens. File an online report [here](#).