

Snowmobile Safety Tips

The winter weather is bringing out snowmobilers, and safety officials are urging them to be careful. More than 200,000 registered snowmobiles hit Wisconsin's 25,000 miles of groomed trails each winter, making safety an important part of the ride. A snowmobile is only as safe as the driver and the key to safe operation is knowing the machine, having good judgment, and courtesy towards other snowmobilers.



BE A DEFENSIVE DRIVER

Always be alert of potential danger. Your helmet and engine noise can impair your hearing. Visibility is also reduced in conditions of snowfall, blowing snow and night driving. Never assume what another snowmobiler will do. Do all that you can to ensure your safety and that of other riders. Expect the unexpected!

Watch out for:

- Thin ice and open water
- Grooming equipment
- Oncoming snowmobiles
- Unforeseen obstacles beneath snow
- Unexpected corners, intersections and stops
- Road and railway crossings
- Logging/Forestry operations
- Snow banks and drifting snow
- Trees and branches on the trail
- Bridges and approaches
- Wildlife and domestic animals
- Other trail users (skiers, hikers)



DON'T DRINK AND RIDE

Snowmobiling requires alertness, caution, and attention. Your reaction time and ability to control your sled can be drastically affected after consuming even small amounts of alcohol. Alcohol can affect perception, reaction time, and response to unexpected situations.

Alcohol has been shown to be a contributing factor in most fatal snowmobile accidents. Alcohol also causes body temperature to drop at an accelerated rate which increases your susceptibility to cold and hypothermia. Snowmobilers often have access to remote locations miles away from help. If a situation should occur where help is needed, your chances of survival and treatment of injury can be greatly affected. Don't let alcohol be a contributing factor to your fate.

NIGHT DRIVING

When night riding visibility is reduced by darkness, it is much more difficult to spot and identify potential hazards in time. Overdriving headlights can also be a serious problem, so slow down when snowmobiling after dark. Ride with individuals familiar with the area. Always wear outer clothing with reflective trim on the arms, back and helmet. Never ride alone at night. Always dress in your full snowmobiling outfit even if your intended destination is just next door.

Be certain that all lights are operational and keep in mind that hand signals become increasingly more difficult to see as darkness sets in.



ICE RIDING

Drowning is one of the leading causes of snowmobile fatalities. Wherever possible, avoid riding on frozen lakes and rivers because ice conditions are never guaranteed. Ice conditions can change in a period of several hours. If you must cross ice, stay on the packed or marked trail. Don't stop until you reach shore. If you hit slush, don't let off the throttle. If you are following someone who hits slush, veer off to make your own path. If you must travel over lakes and rivers then consider using a buoyant snowmobile suit which will help you reach the closest ice surface. Also consider carrying a set of picks that will help you grip the edge of the ice more easily. As a rule of thumb, "If you don't know, don't go."

If you do break through the ice, don't panic. Follow these self-rescue tips:

- Kick vigorously into a horizontal position and swim to the nearest ice edge. Place hands/arms on unbroken ice while kicking hard to propel your body onto the ice, like a seal.
- Once clear, stay flat and roll away to stronger ice.
- Stand, keep moving and find shelter fast.



DRESS APPROPRIATELY

If you dress properly with high tech winter wear and proper layering, winter comfort is easy. Start with polypropylene and thermal under layers that release moisture while retaining heat. Add other heat retentive layers depending on the temperature. Also consider the fact that your forward motion will add to the wind chill factor. Avoid cottons and sweatshirts that retain moisture. Try to find suits that are water and wind proof. Carry extra clothing, socks, and mitts for layering. A helmet and face shield combat cold and hazards, while waterproof insulated boots and leather snowmobile mitts provide warmth and protection.



Hypothermia

Hypothermia is the lowering of the body's core temperature. It can happen in water or on land. Hypothermia does not require extreme cold and accelerates with wind and wetness. Dressing warmly in water-resistant layers helps, but if immersed, quickly replace wet clothes, keep moving to generate body heat, and find immediate shelter and warmth.

Snow Blindness

Snow blindness occurs when direct and reflecting sun glare is too bright for the eyes. Riding without good quality, UV-protected sunglasses, goggles, or visor can cause permanent damage.

Frostbite

Frostbite results from freezing temperatures and poor circulation. Cover up and layer well, making sure that socks fit loosely within your boots. And remember mitts with liners are warmer than gloves.



REPAIR KIT

You can easily snowmobile beyond immediate help so basic repair kits are essential.

The kit should contain:

- spare belt
- spare spark plugs
- manufacturer's tool kit
- extra wrenches nuts & bolts sized for your sled
- tow rope
- pry bar
- duct tape
- wire jack-knife

A cellular phone can be a terrific asset if trouble arises, but bear in mind that cell phones have limited service range.



From everyone at West Bend, thank you for your part in making the world a safer and healthier place. We hope that you have found the information in this free eBook to be helpful in your risk management efforts.

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