

COUNTY OF OAKLAND  
**OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF**

MICHAEL J. BOUCHARD



**MARINE DIVISION**

**"ICE SAFETY TIPS"**

There is no ice that is 100 % safe. The following chart is a recommended guide to help judge recreational use of clear, solid blue ice and help you minimize your risk:

**Five inches thick minimum for general use (fisherman, ice skaters, and foot traffic)**  
**Eight inches thick minimum for travel by snowmobile, Off Road Vehicle (ORV)**

**(We do not recommend automobiles out on the ice. This also voids any insurance claims.)**

**Survey the ice, keeping in mind that ice conditions change at every lake and every location every day – even on the same body of water. Some signs of changing ice conditions can be, but are not limited to: moving water near a stream, river, unseen spring or inlet, slushy areas, depressions in the snow, heavy snow, white “milky” or black -colored ice and “frazzle” ice weakened by the freeze-thaw cycles. Frazzle ice has tiny air pockets and often looks like frozen slush. These are all signs of thin ice or unsafe ice. Other tips include:**

- Do not go out alone on the ice. Always take a partner or someone who can call 911 or go for help in an emergency.
- Do not make the first tracks on the ice. Check with someone who has experience with a particular lake or pond before you venture out on the ice.
- Always leave a travel plan with someone who can call for help and direct a search party if you do not return.
- Dress appropriately for changing weather conditions. Dress in layers to protect all exposed parts of your body. Consider wearing a personal flotation device (PFD) as part of your overall protective clothing or a flotation jacket or suit. Ice creepers attached to boots will help keep you stable on the ice and can assist in self-rescue.

- Bring safety items which may include cell phone, whistle, rope, ice pick or awls, screwdriver, hand flares, flashlight, throwable PFD. Plan for a rescue.
- Check and double check the ice thickness with an ice spud, auger or cordless drill. If you discover a weak spot, retrace your route off the ice. Keep a distance between others in your group.
- If you hear the ice crack or detect unsafe ice you should stay spread out, immediately lie down (which will distribute your weight) and crawl back to safer ice by the same way you came.
- If someone falls through the ice, do not run to the hole. First call 911 and then use a pole, branch, rope or any other handy object, which can be extended to the victim from a safe position. You cannot help if you become a victim.
- If you fall through the ice, try not to panic as this will hinder your self-rescue actions. Call out for help and kick your feet while getting your hands and arms up onto safer ice. This is when the ice awl or screwdriver will help you with your self-rescue. Continue to "swim" up onto the ice far enough to crawl or "roll-out" to safer ice.
- Snowmobiles, ORV's and other vehicles on the ice increase your risk of falling through, especially at night. Many accidents occur when operators are driving at a high rate of speed and are unable to slow or stop in time to avoid open water or unsafe ice.
- Pets that venture onto unsafe ice are another major cause for many near drownings and deaths. If your pet has ventured out onto the ice, resist the urge to go out after them. Stay at a safe position on shore and persuade them back to safety.
- Wildlife venturing onto unsafe ice is a natural occurrence. Deer are strong swimmers prepared for cold weather and find their own way off the ice. Most often, wildlife discovered in the water are injured and succumb to injuries from predators or natural forces.

Oakland County offers many outdoor recreation opportunities with our lakes, ponds and rivers. However, before you step out onto the ice, we strongly urge you to plan ahead and consider the risks involved.

**"When in doubt, don't go out."**

The Oakland County Sheriff's Marine Division offers: Boating, ORV, Snowmobile, and Hunting Safety Classes to the public. If you would like more information on ice safety or any of our outdoor recreation safety classes, please call us at (248) 391-0256 or visit [www.OakandSheriff.com](http://www.OakandSheriff.com).