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Ride right on ice

East Lansing, Mich., December 2020—Taking the sled out for a ride is a great way to enjoy a change of scenery and get some fresh air, but don't ignore ice conditions while appreciating the ride, reminds the American Council of Snowmobile Associations, (ACSA).

Not all ice is created equal, and as such, won't support in the same way. While many riders consider a 5" thickness safe for sleds, experts say that overall measurement may not be as safe and that minimum thickness should be doubled if ice is covered by snow.

"Ice fluctuates in freezing and thawing cycles making it potentially unstable and dangerous," said Scott Herzog, ACSA president and long-time rider. "The best ice to ride on is clear ice with a blue tint, as that is typically the thickest and strongest ice."

Always stay away from white, gray or murky colored ice, as well as slushy ice and open bodies of water.

Snow, while a necessity for the enjoyment of snowmobiling, can also be a cause of dangerous ice conditions. Because it acts as an insulator and can render ice layers uneven and weakened, experts recommend assuming any ice under snow may be unsafe and to drive accordingly.

The easiest way to stay safe on a snowmobile is to pay attention to snow reports, weather conditions, your surroundings and use common sense.

Other ice safety tips to consider before heading out:

Take note: Before taking off across a lake or wide river, look for recent sled tracks or any ice shanties. If you don't see any activity, don't go. Also, check with local snowmobile clubs, bait shops, local businesses and area social media for updates on local ice conditions.

Unseen danger: Logs, rocks, cracks and ice heaves can appear suddenly on a lake. Wind can move ice quickly and cause cracking and weakness. Pay attention to your surroundings and don't assume that the trail you rode in on is still safe when riding back again over the same spot.

Be prepared: Make sure you give details of your ride to someone not on the ride. Jackets or suits with floatation are recommended if you ride on ice often—plus small accessories like a floating rescue rope and small ice picks. A few pieces of additional gear could make a big difference in your survival if an accident occurs.

The most important tip though, is to pay attention to conditions and not be a reckless driver.

"When it comes to ice – if you don't know, don't go," said Herzog

Visit www.saferiderssafetyawareness.org/snowmobiling-and-ice.html for more snowmobiling and ice safety information.