



Wisconsin DNR Weekly News Article

Three people drown within three days after falling through thin ice

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MADISON – Following three drownings over a three-day period after people broke through thin ice on Wisconsin waters, state recreational safety specialists are again strongly cautioning that ice on many state waterways is not thick enough to safely support a human -- much less any type of vehicle.

Conservation Warden Todd Schaller, recreation safety chief for the Department of Natural Resources, says the ice is always unpredictable, but this winter's mild weather has resulted in ice levels much thinner than normal for this time of year.

A car with two occupants broke through thin ice on the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir near Mosinee on Saturday. One occupant was able to exit the vehicle and make it out of the water but another drowned.

Early Sunday a man walking on thin ice on the Fox River in Oshkosh broke through. His body was recovered Monday.

On Monday, a rural Warren man drowned after falling through the ice on a private pond in Monroe County. The man was riding a rough-terrain vehicle when the accident happened.

Two other people fell through thin ice in December, bringing to five the number of people who have died in such incidents this winter. An ice angler broke through thin ice on High Fall Flowage in Marinette County and drowned, and a teenager broke through the ice of on a quarry near Oshkosh and drowned.

Temperatures that have reached into the 50s in southern Wisconsin in the last week have continued to slow ice formation, and even helped melt ice that had already formed.

Conditions vary throughout the state with some of Wisconsin larger lakes like Lake Winnebago and Lake Mendota still having open water. Many river systems also remain open.

“It is important that ice fishers use caution if conditions in their area allow them to venture out,” Schaller said. “If ice thickness is unknown, stay on the shore and stay dry. The ice fishing season will be here soon.”

Schaller says people should use this time to brush on some ice safety precautions. Review these with others who enjoy the outdoors – especially any children. Ice poses dangers on ponds, lakes and rivers.

Before you go:

- Contact local sport shops or bait dealers to ask about ice conditions on the lake or river you

want to fish.

- Learn about the water you are going to use. Know if the lake has inlets, outlets or narrows that have currents known to thin the ice.

When you go:

- Do not go out alone. If you do, carry a cell phone and let someone know where you are and your expected return time. Follow that timeline.
- Carry a spud bar to check the ice while walking to new areas during daylight only.
- Carry a couple of spikes and a length of light rope in an easily accessible pocket to help pull yourself – or others – out of the ice.
- Do not travel in unfamiliar territories at night.

Watch out for this:

- Look for clear ice. Clear ice is generally stronger than ice with air bubbles in it or with snow on it.
- Watch out for pressure ridges or ice heaves. These can be dangerous due to thin ice and open water and may be an obstruction you may hit with a car, truck or snowmobile.

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