

Sheriff's Points

By Sheriff Byron Nogelmeier

Snowmobile Safety

Let it snow let it snow. Well the snow that we received this past week has been a blessing to sum and an aggravation to others. Those who are owners of snowmobiles are very happy to see the white powder.

Just like the in the summer month with our motorcycle we have to make sure our machines and our selves are ready to go. Here are some safety tips for those who own a snowmobile.

In North America, more than 10 million people enjoy snowmobiling, according to the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association (ISMA), and it is a family sport for most participants. However, the laws governing snowmobiling vary widely between states and provinces, and they are generally less restrictive than regulations which govern the use of other motor vehicles, including all-terrain vehicles. In some areas, helmets are not required and children as young as eight can legally operate a snowmobile. Often there are no regulations governing snowmobile use on private property. In South Dakota there is no age limitation for the operation of a snowmobile. However, no person under the age of fourteen may drive a snowmobile across a roadway except under the immediate direction of a parent, legal guardian, or person who is eighteen years of age or older.

In an analysis of children's injuries from snowmobiling (*Pediatrics*, March 2000), researchers from the Toledo (OH) Children's Hospital found that head and neck injuries were the causes of death in two-thirds of fatalities. Striking a stationary object was the most common mechanism in fatal crashes. Non-fatal injuries most often involved a child being thrown or flipped from the snowmobile. Towing someone on an inner tube behind a snowmobile is an emerging source of injury.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that snowmobiles should not be used by children under 16 years of age and that all riders be required by law to be licensed and wear helmets.

Safety Tips From the ISMA:

- Keep your snowmobile in top condition and follow the "pre-op" checklist outlined in the snowmobile owner's manual before each ride.
- Wear a helmet with goggles or a face shield. Wear layers of water-repellent clothing. Warm boots and gloves or mittens are important as is a windproof outer layer. Do not wear clothing with loose ends that might get tangled in the machine.
- Tell someone your destination, what route you plan to take, and when you will return. Contact him or her when you return.
- Carry a first-aid kit, tool kit, flashlight, compass, map and waterproof matches.
- Never consume alcohol or drugs before or while snowmobiling. Alcohol has been found to be a contributing factor in most fatal accidents. Plus, it can lower body temperature and lead to hypothermia.
- Slow down. Speed is a contributing factor in nearly all fatal accidents. Drive defensively and always drive within the limits of your machine and your abilities.
- Stay on marked trails, or where allowed, on the right shoulder of the road. Watch for fixed objects like fences and tree stumps that may be concealed by snow.
- When crossing roads, come to a complete stop and make sure no traffic is approaching. Cross at a right angle.
- Avoid traveling across bodies of water, particularly when uncertain of ice thickness.
- Never travel alone. If you have an accident or mechanical breakdown, you'll need immediate help.
- Be aware of your fatigue level. Wind, sun, glare, cold, vibration and motion can affect you physically and mentally.

- When riding in mountains, be cautious of avalanche dangers, and carry extra equipment such as shovels and a portable radio to summon help.
- If you should fall through ice while snowmobiling, the ISMA offers these suggestions: kick your feet to slide back onto the ice; if the ice keeps breaking, continue moving toward shore or the direction you came from; once on the ice, roll away from the hole; don't stand until well away from the hole.

Please ride safe and stay warm!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!