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For immediate release

## **Enjoy the ride: Tips for staying safe while snowmobiling**

**By JOE YETZER**

**Chief Deputy, Rice County Sheriff's Office**

Last week's snow delivered what may best be described as a wonderland for snowmobilers.

But along with driving across those piles of fresh powder comes responsibility – for those operating a recreational vehicle and for motorists driving near the trails. We want snowmobilers to enjoy the snow, but want everyone to stay safe while doing so.

While hopping on a sled and heading out of town sounds oh so appealing, ensure your snowmobile is registered with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and that you understand the state laws and regulations associated with snowmobiling. Find information on both at [dnr.state.mn.us/regulations/snowmobile/index.html](http://dnr.state.mn.us/regulations/snowmobile/index.html).

Anyone born after Dec. 31, 1976, needs a safety certification from the DNR. Find snowmobiling safety classes for those 11-15 at [www.mndnr.gov](http://www.mndnr.gov) under Education & Safety and then Recreational Vehicle Safety Classes. Anyone 16 and over can complete the online class at [snowmobilecourse.gov](http://snowmobilecourse.gov).

Before hitting the trail, make sure you've dressed in warm, water repellent layers and have a DOT-approved helmet and face mask, a fully charged cell phone and are riding with a buddy driving another snowmobile. That ensures that if one machine is disabled, you're not stranded.

Once you're on the trails, it's tempting to go full throttle, but keep a check on your speed. The speed limit on public property (trails, lakes, etc.) is 50 mph. Stay under 40 mph after the sun goes down.

Most all trails are two way, so stay on the far right of the trails, particularly on hills and corners. Follow all trail signs and triple check for oncoming cars when crossing roadways.

Staying on designated trails reduces the risk of crashes, and ensures you won't be charged with trespassing for riding on private property without the owner's permission or worse: having the trail closed.

Snowmobiling on frozen lakes is a Minnesota tradition, but requires particular caution. On average there are two fatal breaks through each year in Minnesota. Rivers, which most always have moving water underneath the ice, are never safe for snowmobiling. That also true for Rice County's Cannon Lake, which is part of the river system.

Lakes, though covered in ice, can be dangerous. While no ice is 100% safe, the DNR recommends ensuring there are 5-7 inches of solid, clear ice on the lake; packing ice picks and putting on buoyant gear before going out on a lake. The county's dive team is trained for water rescues, but responding to breaks through due to driver carelessness needlessly puts our emergency responders in dangerous and icy waters.



Joe Yetzer

And just like on the road, drinking and driving can be deadly. For those 21 and older, it's illegal to drive ANY vehicle – snowmobiles included -- with a blood alcohol content of .08 or above. Doing so can lead to a DWI and revocation of your driver's license. If you're under 21, the not a drop provision still applies.

Motorists, especially those driving in the rural parts of the county, should keep an eye out for snowmobiles. Trails run along many of our rural roads and even some in town so headlights could appear on your right. If you see snowmobiles or know you're driving near a trail, keep your eyes peeled. And slow down.

Planning ahead and following a few simple tips will help ensure everyone makes it home safe. Now get out there and enjoy the ride.

Contact:

Joe Yetzer, Chief Deputy, Rice County Sheriff's Office

[joe.yetzer@ricecountymn.gov](mailto:joe.yetzer@ricecountymn.gov)

507-333-3860

Suzy Rook, Communications Coordinator

[suzy.rook@ricecountymn.gov](mailto:suzy.rook@ricecountymn.gov)

507-384-6509