

Careers

Red Cross

Know the ways of ice

The Canadian Red Cross Society states that your knowledge of the winter environment, including ice, will help ensure your activities stay enjoyable and safe.

Understand The Environment

Ice forms on fresh water when the surface water temperature falls to 0 degrees C. Salt water and water containing dissolved impurities freeze at a lower temperature. Freezing also depends on various factors: Air temperature, solar radiation, wind speed, snow cover, waves, currents, and tides, the size and depth of the body of water, Underwater vegetation. For example, a small lake freezes earlier in the winter than larger lakes. A fast-moving river freezes later in the season or perhaps not at all.

Characteristics of Ice

The better you understand ice, the safer you will be on it. Your understanding should be based on the colour of ice and on other aspects that determine its strength.

The colour of ice is an indication of its quality and strength.

- * Clear blue — strongest
- * White opaque or snow ice — formed when water-saturated snow freezes on top of ice, making an opaque white ice that is usually only half as strong as clear ice.
- * Grey ice — the greyness indicates that water is present, usually from thawing.

Clear blue is the strongest type of ice. Its strength increases as the temperature drops further below 0 degrees C. However, if the temperature drops very quickly, such as overnight, internal stress within the ice itself can weaken it.

Likewise, removing snow from an ice surface may result in a temperature drop within the ice that weakens the ice. Thus, if you clear snow from lake or pond ice for hockey or skating, consider this ice to be only half as strong as it appears.

Large vehicles such as pick-up trucks or cars compress the ice when they drive over it. The ice returns to its original qualities after the load is removed. The movement of the vehicle across the ice also creates a wave in the water under the ice that weakens it. After vehicles have been on the ice, recheck its thickness.

Before an activity on the ice, measure the ice to determine whether it is thick enough to support the people and equipment for the activity, and check that the ice is uniformly thick.

Some recreation departments and community groups measure ice thickness in areas for public use during the winter months. Find out if this service is available in your community or in areas to which you are travelling.

If you must determine ice thickness yourself, drill test holes 15 metres apart in a river or 30 metres apart in a lake. When going onto the ice to drill these holes proceed with caution in case of ice breakthrough.

For recreational use, make sure the ice is thick enough for the particular activity. Use the following guidelines for blue ice thickness. Be sure the thickness is uniform throughout the area.

- * Individual or partner activities - 15 cm thick
- * Group activities - 20 cm thick
- * Operation of snow machines - 25 cm thick
- * Operation of heavy vehicles - 40 cm thick

In addition to understanding the environment of cold and ice, The Canadian Red Cross Society suggests that staying safe during your ice activities includes following certain safety guidelines while engaged in the activity.

1. As with any physical activity, always drink plenty of water or other fluids to avoid dehydration. Warm fluids help maintain body temperature. But avoid alcohol, which hinders the body's ability to produce heat and may hasten the onset of hypothermia.

2. Know and respect the changing qualities of ice and changing weather. A sunny day may be perfect for pleasure skating, but the ice could be melting right under your feet!

3. Keep children safe. Constantly supervise children on ice. They may wander onto unsafe surfaces.

4. To really enjoy winter activities, you need to be in control. Never mix alcohol with activities on the ice. Alcohol reduces your reaction time, dulls your judgment, and makes you more susceptible to the cold.

5. Use the buddy system when snowshoeing, skiing, or walking across the ice. It's safer and more fun!

6. Watch for the signs of hypothermia: shivering, numbness, lack of coordination, or confused behaviour. If these occur to you or someone with you, get out of the cold immediately.

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office help

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