

Ice Fishing

February 2023



Ice fishing is a favourite winter pastime for recreation in Manitoba. It can be a dangerous activity as an error in judgement can lead to serious injury or death. There are several steps that need to be taken to help make your time on and around the ice as safe and enjoyable as possible. A safe and successful day on the ice requires more than just showing up at the lake.

Know Where the Current Is

Moving water is great at maintaining a steady temperature and the constant movement makes them some of the last areas to freeze and the first areas to lose their ice. These areas can be very dangerous during the early and late days of winter. Identify river inlets and outlets as ice conditions cannot be trusted to have consistent thickness in these areas.

Ice Facts

- New ice is often stronger than old ice that may be partially thawed
- Ice seldom freezes uniformly. It may be 30 cm. at one location and 10 cm. a few meters away
- Ice formed near streams, culverts and bridges is often dangerous due to currents
- The insulating effect of snow can slow down the freezing process and the extra weight can reduce the amount of weight that the ice can support.
- Cracking ice is not automatically dangerous as it means that the ice is expanding and contracting as the temperature changes.
- A person should not venture onto the ice alone as a fall may occur due to the slippery conditions and they may require assistance to return to shore.

Recommended Ice Thickness

- 4cm., or less – **STAY OFF**
- 10cm.– Ice fishing or on foot activities
- 14cm.– Snowmobile or ATV
- 32cm., or greater – Car or small truck

These guidelines are for new, clear solid ice. It is recommended that these values be doubled for white ice. Check ice measurements with a local resort or bait shop. Manitoba Natural Resource Officers can often provide information on local ice conditions.



The teacher in charge should check the ice thickness using an ice chisel, ice auger or a cordless ¼ inch drill with a long bit.

Many factors affect ice thickness including type of water, location and the time of the year. Logs, rocks, and docks absorb heat from the sun and may cause local melting. Chemicals, including road salt will factor into ice conditions. Always be aware of the thickness and quality of ice to reduce risk of breaking through.

Ice Fishing Safety Gear

- Ice picks – lightweight tool that hangs around your neck and in the event a person falls through the ice, they can use these picks to get traction or grip needed to pull themselves out of the water.
- Whistle
- Rope - 15 to 30 meters that can be used to pull someone out of a hole
- Cell phone
- Life vest – wear a life vest under your winter clothes or wear a new flotation snowmobile suit



When ice fishing, always wear appropriate winter clothing including a hat and gloves along with a warm jacket. Remember that when it's cold outside, it is even colder on the ice.

Additional ice fishing safety can be found at Canadian Red Cross: <https://www.redcross.ca/training-and-certification/swimming-and-water-safety-tips-and-resources/swimming-boating-and-water-safety-tips/ice-fishing>

RECOMMENDED ICE THICKNESS

Guidelines for new, clear ice only. Ice is never 100% safe.

