

Ice Safety

Always be careful when near or on a frozen lake, pond, or stream—you're taking a risk anytime you go out on the ice. Ice thickness can vary significantly over a very short area, with safe ice immediately adjacent to ice that won't support your weight. And it's often impossible to tell, just by looking at it, whether the ice is safe. So please don't go out on the ice unless you know what you're doing and have taken appropriate safety precautions.

Do not judge ice strictly by its appearance, but bear in mind the following:

- In order to support a person's weight, ice must be at least four inches thick.
- The thickness and strength of ice can change greatly over just a few feet. Water currents may eat away at the ice from underneath, thinning and weakening it. This is especially common around narrow spots, bridges, inlets, outlets, and submerged objects. So the ice on any given body of water won't be the same over the whole area and that may not be visible from the surface. For example, the ice along the northern and eastern shores of Crystal Lake/Panhandle Reservoir typically melts out first.
- Stay away from cracks, seams, pressure ridges, slushy areas, and darker areas, which signify thinner ice. Ice with standing water on top of it is generally unsafe.

Safety around and on ice:

- Never go out on the ice alone. Have a buddy along with you who can help rescue you or call for help if you fall through.
- When walking across the ice with your buddy, always walk at least ten yards apart, so if one of you falls through, the other can go for help.
- Always wear a life jacket or personal flotation device over your winter clothing. Life jackets not only assist with flotation but can provide some protection from hypothermia. — Carry ice awls (self-rescue devices), a whistle, a rope, and a cellphone (in a waterproof container). Tie yourself off to shore with the rope before going out on the ice.

If you fall through the ice:

- Stay calm. Move slowly and deliberately to conserve heat (your body will lose heat faster while moving than if you stay still) and expect your strength and ability to move to decrease progressively as your exposure to the cold lengthens. Note: slow and deliberate only applies as you get into position to attempt a self-rescue or if such an attempt has failed. When you're making your attempt to get out of the water, do it as soon and as vigorously as possible, and go all out in that effort – your ability to self-rescue decreases the longer you're in the water.
- Use your whistle to call for help.
- Get as much of your upper body onto the ice shelf as possible, using ice awls for grip, and kick hard in an effort to push the rest of your body out of the water and onto the ice. As soon as your hips are on the ice shelf, start rolling away from the hole.
- If you're able to pull yourself up on the ice, do not stand up. Move away from the hole by rolling or belly-crawling to keep your weight distributed over as much area as possible. If you don't keep your weight spread out, you're likely to break back through the ice. Once you get farther away from the hole, you can begin crawling. Do not stand up until you're on an area of known solid ice or have reached the shore.

— If you're unable to pull yourself out of the water, get your arms up onto the ice shelf and keep them there, where your wet clothing may freeze to the ice and help keep you from slipping under the surface.

If you see someone fall through the ice:

— Call 911 immediately.

— NEVER go out on the ice to try to rescue someone. If the ice can't support them, it can't support you, and your chances of falling through are very high, doubling the number of people needing rescue.

— Extend a rope, branch or other long object to the person who's fallen through. If possible, pull them out. If not, use the rope or long object to anchor them until more help arrives. — Talk to the person and try to keep them calm. Keep your eyes on them and make a deliberate mental note of their location in relation to landmarks on the shore—if they slip under the water before we get there, we'll need you to be able to tell us exactly where they went under.

— If you're able to pull someone out of the ice, cover them with a blanket if you have one, make sure there's something between any exposed skin surfaces and the ice, and wait for our medical personnel to arrive. Do not move them any more than is necessary to get them out of the ice and away from the hole. Jostling a hypothermic person too much can send extremely cold blood rushing to the heart and cause an irregular heartbeat or even heart failure.

Finally, always keep your pets on a leash when in the vicinity of a frozen lake, pond or stream. If your pet falls through the ice, DO NOT attempt to rescue them yourself. Animals are better able to self-rescue than we are, and if the ice can't hold your dog's weight, it certainly won't hold yours. So if Fido falls in, don't go out after him—call 911 and let us attempt a safe rescue.

Never assume it's safe to go out on the ice. Take appropriate safety precautions and take no chances with your safety. The members of Crystal Lakes VFD are equipped and trained for ice rescue, but it's training we never want to have to use.