

# Safety Tips to Protect Workers on Snowmobiles



In the winter, some workers need to use snowmobiles to get around or to and from worksites. As with any powered mobile equipment, snowmobiles pose certain risks to workers. And if such equipment is used on ice-covered lakes, rivers and other bodies of water, workers are also at risk of falling through the ice. (Here are [seven tips for staying safe on the ice](#).)

For example, a 57-year-old Newfoundland fish and wildlife enforcement officer was patrolling an area on a snowmobile when he fell through the ice and drowned. His employer was convicted of violating the *OHS Act* and fined it \$70,000. The court also ordered it to conduct a safety audit and ice safety training for employees and to report on its progress implementing these measures [*Justice and Public Safety Department*, Govt. News Release, Dec. 30, 2015].

So if your workers must use snowmobiles on the job, here are some safety tips from the [WSCC](#) of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories to give such workers:

## Before Your Trip

- Check the weather forecast, so that you can plan and dress appropriately.
- Check the condition of snowmobile trails and don't snowmobile on ice if you're not sure of the thickness and conditions. Never drive on ice that's weak, slushy, near moving water, or that has recently thawed and

refrozen. Avoid unfamiliar frozen lakes and rivers; open water may not always be visible. (Learn [how to protect workers on ice covers](#).)

- Make sure you have enough fuel for your entire journey. When fueling up, follow proper procedures to avoid accidental burns.
- When loading your snowmobile on and off trailers, ask for help if needed. Don't overexert yourself, and take your time to prevent strains and crush injuries.
- Refresh yourself on the signs of hypothermia and what to do if it happens. (Protect workers from hypothermia and other forms of [cold stress](#).)
- Know your snowmobile: it's best to have basic knowledge of your snowmobile in the event of equipment failure. Familiarize yourself with key controls and the importance of proper fluids.
- Tell somebody where you're going, the route you'll take, what your snowmobile looks like and when you expect to return.

## **Equip Yourself**

Dress appropriately, which means wearing well-insulated protective clothing, including goggles, waterproof snowmobile suits and gloves, and insulated boots with rubber bottoms. Dress in bright colours, and make sure you have reflective clothing'especially if your trip may run into nighttime.

In addition, pack the following:

- First Aid Kit;
- Emergency tool kit, including an extra key;
- Survival kit: flares, fire-starters (matches or lighters) in a waterproof container, a knife, saw, or axe, an ice pick, a flashlight (with extra batteries), a whistle, high-energy food like nuts or granola bars, and an extra set of dry clothing;
- Navigation guides: a GPS unit, trail map, and a compass;

and

- Communication tools: carry a cell phone if you're in an area with service. If you know you'll be in an area with no service, alert someone of your travel plans and carry a satellite phone if you have one.

## **Drive Safely**

- Always drive within your ability: beginners should stick to groomed trails and drive during the day.
- Always travel at safe speeds. Obey speed limits and road/trail signs.
- Take extra care with corners and hills. Be extra careful on unfamiliar or rugged terrain; you might run into hazards you cannot see, such as snow-covered fallen trees or rocks.
- Always keep your headlights and tail lights on so that you can see and be seen.
- Avoid [travelling alone](#) if possible. It's best to travel in groups of two or more. However, don't carry more than one passenger on each snowmobile.
- Don't pull people on sleds, skids, tubes, tires, or saucers behind a snowmobile. If you must tow someone, the safest way is to use a sled or cutter attached securely to the snowmobile by a rigid bar connection. When towing someone or something, travel at slow speeds over level terrain, and stay away from trees, rocks, and other vehicles. A spotter should stay behind the snowmobile and watch when someone is being towed.
- When driving at night, use your headlights, wear reflective clothing, and reduce your speed.

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