

ACSL Clean Stream / Safe Boating Jan 2018 REPORT

General ICE FISHING SAFETY TIPS – Always remember ICE is NEVER 100% SAFE

First and foremost, measure the thickness of ice, don't guess, physically measure ice.

Guide below is *For new, clear ice only!* (clear ice like you get from your freezer)

Ice Under 4" thick - STAY OFF

4" - Ice fishing or other activities on foot

5" - 7" - Snowmobile or ATV

8" - 12" - Car or small pickup & 12" - 15" - Medium truck. Cars, pickups or SUVs should be parked at least 50 feet apart and moved every two hours to prevent sinking.

Use a cordless drill and wood auger bit to drill hole or use ice chisel to stab into ice until it penetrates all the way through, measure thickness. Don't judge ice thickness by how easily a chisel or drill breaks the surface. It happens so quickly that it's easy to overestimate the thickness

Measuring in one place is not enough. Take the thickness measurement in several different areas to ensure that the entire area is safe. Ice thickness can vary, even over a fairly small area—especially over moving water. Ice is seldom the same thickness over a single body of water; it can be two feet thick in one place and one inch thick a few yards away. Check the ice at least every 150 feet.

Before stepping on to ice conduct a visual inspection. Watch for dangerous signs like cracks, seams, pressure ridges, dark areas (where the ice is thinner) and slushy areas—even slight slush signals that the icing isn't freezing at the bottom anymore, which means it's getting progressively weaker.

New ice is typically stronger than older ice. As time passes, the bond between ice crystals decays even in very cold temperatures.

Any time you're in the ice, you must keep one factor in mind above all others: SAFETY. This is particularly the case in early winter and late spring, when ice conditions are at their worst and anglers are at the highest risk of falling through.

Ice covered by snow always should be presumed unsafe. Snow acts like an insulating blanket and slows the freezing process. Ice under the snow will be thinner and weaker. A snowfall also can warm up and melt existing ice.

Clear blue ice is the strongest and safest. It forms when the temperature has been at least 16°F for three consecutive weeks.

White opaque ice is half as strong as blue ice. It's formed by wet snow freezing on top of already existing ice. Often referred to as snow ice, it's most dangerous when it forms on top of ice that hasn't completely frozen. - Double the above thickness guidelines when traveling on white ice.

Dull grey ice is the least safe. “Not suitable for even a footstep.” Why? Because it’s rotting.

The grey coloration indicates the presence of water, meaning the ice will not support much weight, if any. Grey ice is most common during the spring melt, although it can be found all winter long near moving water, such as where creeks and rivers enter or leave a waterbody. These same areas also often have underwater currents that can make ice unstable, so avoid them. And remember, no fish is worth the risk of falling through & don’t skate on thin ice.

Know Proper Rescue Techniques

Anyone doing anything on ice outdoors should have knowledge of ice rescue technique. Even kids should be familiar with protocol, so be sure to educate them ahead of time. If someone in your party falls through the ice, the first thing to do is call 911. Anyone still on the ice should slowly lie down, distributing their weight over a larger area.

Reach the person in the water using a long reaching assist—a large stick, a rope or a ladder are all good options (read: have these things ready before you start). The person in the water should be instructed to kick and slowly ease their way out of the water. Once they make it to the surface, they should crawl or roll away from the broken ice area.

Anyone on the ice, including the victim and rescuer, should avoid standing up until they are far away from the broken ice. As soon as you can, get the victim into dry clothing and treat them for hypothermia, serve warm, non-alcoholic, and non-caffeinated drinks.

Another safety tip from the [Minnesota DNR](#) is to carry a set of ice rescue claws. These claws help you get a grip on the ice to pull yourself out if you even fall through. They have a great guide and video on their website how to make your own. **It’s also not a bad idea to wear a life preserver.** This will keep your head above water if your limbs start going numb in the frigid water.

Save yourself! Make a set of ice rescue claws.

Instructions for making Ice Claws (from [Minnesota DNR](#))

1. Get two 4" pieces of wooden doweling the size of a broom handle or a little larger. Whatever material you select, it should float in case you drop the claws while struggling.
2. Drive a stout nail into one end of each dowel. This should be a hardened 16 penny or larger concrete nail.
3. Use a file to sharpen the nail heads to a point.
4. Drill a hole into the dowels (in the end opposite the nail) and tie a length of strong cord through the hole so a pick is on each end "jump-rope" fashion. You may also drill a hole in the ends alongside the nails so the nail on the other pick can nest in the hole, keeping both points covered. Keep the picks in your pocket for quick emergency access if you or a companion do break through.

Avoid going out on the ice alone to ensure rescue is an option. Discuss rescue procedures in advance to ensure all fishers know how to perform a rescue safely.

Wear a flotation device and bright colored cold protection suit, even if you’re fishing from shore or on thick ice. Don’t go alone, BE safe always around water especially COLD water