Ice Safety

Ice and cold water safety is important and concerns many of us who participate in outdoor activities near water. Too many residents are injured from falling through ice and exposure to cold water.

Skaters and children playing near bodies of water fall through the ice; boaters and canoeists overturn their crafts; unleashed pets run onto the ice and people chase after them. Educating residents on the dangers of being around ice and cold water is vital to staying safe.

Ice Dangers

- Never go onto the ice alone. A friend may be able to rescue you or go for help if you fall through.
- Always keep your pets on a leash. If a pet falls through the ice, do not attempt to rescue your pet. Go for help.
- New ice is usually stronger than old ice. As ice ages, the bond between the crystals decays, making it weaker, even if melting has not occurred.
- Ice formed over flowing water (rivers or lakes containing a large number of springs) is weaker.
- Ice seldom freezes or thaws at a uniform rate. It can be one foot thick in one spot, and be only one inch thick ten feet away.
- Beware of ice covered with snow. Snow can insulate ice and keep it strong, but can also insulate it to keep it from freezing. Snow can also hide cracks, weak, or open ice.

What to Do When Someone Falls Through Ice

Call 911
Reach - Throw - Go. If someone falls through the ice and you are unable to reach the person from shore, throw them something they can grab (rope, jumper cables, tree branch, etc.). If that does not work, go for help before you also become a victim. Get medical assistance immediately.

If you fall in, do not panic. Turn toward the direction you came from. Place your hands and arms on the unbroken surface, working forward by kicking your feet. Once out, remain lying on the ice (do not stand) and roll away from the hole. Crawl back using your previous tracks or route, keeping your weight distributed until you return to solid ice on land.

Cold Water Dangers

- Cold water is dangerous below 70 degrees.
- Cold water robs the body of heat 25-30 times faster than air.
- Safety experts estimate that half of all drowning victims die from the fatal effects of hypothermia, not from water in the lungs.

For more information, call Daniel L. Schmidt or Captain I William Moreland, Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, 703-246-3801 and TTY: 711. Fairfax County is committed to nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in all county programs, services and activities. Reasonable accommodations will be provided upon request.

Contact:
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