

# DNR "Ride Smart from the Start" promotes safe snowmobiling in Wisconsin

Richard D. Ackley, Jr.

Wisconsin is the birthplace of snowmobiling and continues to offer some of the best snowmobiling opportunities you are likely to find, especially in northern Wisconsin. More than 200,000 registered snowmobiles hit Wisconsin's 25,000 miles of groomed trails each winter, making safety an important part of the ride. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) offers "Ride Smart from the Start" – safety tips.

**Slow down** - Speed is a contributing factor in nearly all fatal snowmobiling accidents. Drivers should proceed at a pace that will allow ample reaction time for any situation. Drive at moderate speeds, and drive defensively, especially after sunset.

**Carry a first-aid kit** - Your first-aid kit should include a flashlight, knife, compass, map, and waterproof matches.

**Dress appropriately** - Always wear a helmet with goggles or a face shield to prevent injuries from twigs and flying debris. Wear layers of water-repellent clothing and make sure you have no loose ends that might catch in the machine or tangle in equipment.

**Use caution around ice** - Avoid traveling across bodies of water when uncertain of ice thickness or water currents. Rapidly changing weather and moving water in streams and lake inlets also affect the thickness and strength of ice on lakes and ponds. Snow cover can act as a blanket and prevents thick strong ice from forming.

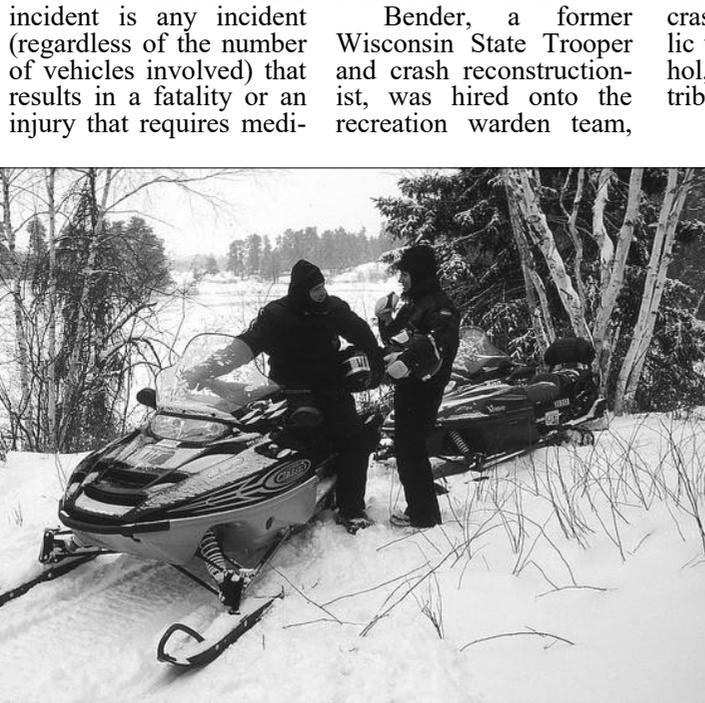
**Be aware of your surroundings** - Stay on marked trails or, where allowed, on the right shoulder of the road. Be alert for fences, tree stumps and stretched wire that may be concealed by snow.

**Never travel alone** - Most snowmobile accidents result in personal injury. The most dangerous situations occur when a person is injured and alone. If you must travel alone, tell someone your

destination, planned route, and when you will return.

A snowmobile crash incident is any incident (regardless of the number of vehicles involved) that results in a fatality or an injury that requires medi-

cal treatment by a physician. Wisconsin law requires every snowmobile operator involved in a crash incident to report the incident without delay to law enforcement officials.



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Over the past 10 years there has been a slight decreasing trend in the number of fatalities per year, per 100,000 registered. The DNR 2017-2018 snowmobile season report shows that alcohol was a contributing factor to snowmobile accidents along with operators not being safety certified. 89% of operators involved in a fatal accident had not completed a safety course.

Additional Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources conservation wardens were put on patrol on northern Wisconsin trails last January, following a rash of serious injury and fatal snowmobile accidents. There were five fatal snowmobile accidents in Iron and Price Counties, last January.

What's new in safety. According to Justin Bender, Recreation Warden, Wisconsin DNR / Northern Region (East) during a recent email interview, "The DNR established a team of 10 recreation wardens statewide in May 2018. The primary role of these positions is to provide specialized training to field staff and partner agencies, enforcement efforts, safety education

and outreach, and incident investigations related to recreational vehicles. Bender, a former Wisconsin State Trooper and crash reconstructionist, was hired onto the recreation warden team,

completed a snowmobile safety course in Wisconsin. The majority of the crashes occurred on public trails with speed, alcohol, and nighttime as contributing factors.

The DNR reports that snowmobiling is a growing sport in Wisconsin. For the 2016-2017 Season, 8,300 students were certified in a snowmobile safety course. The number of students was up 1,449 from the previous year. Snowmobile operators at least 12 years of age who were born on or after January 1, 1985 must complete a snowmobile safety certification course in order to operate on public snowmobile trails and areas in Wisconsin. DNR recreation-

al safety specialists recommend all snowmobile operators complete a safety course. You must carry the certificate while riding and you must display it to a law enforcement officer when requested. The number of instructors certified and active for the 2016-2017 Season was 933, which is higher than the previous five seasons. For more information contact: Justin Bender (715) 356-5211 or JustinD.Bender@wisconsin.gov



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## Snowmobile Code of Ethics

1. I will be an ethical rider. I recognize that people judge all snowmobile operators by my actions. I will use my influence with others to promote ethical conduct.
2. I will not litter or pollute streams or lakes.
3. I will not damage living trees, shrubs, or other natural features.
4. I will ride within my limits and within the limits of the least experienced rider in my group.
5. I will lend a helping hand when I see someone in distress.
6. I will make myself and my snowmobile available for search and rescue.
7. I will not interfere with or harass hikers, skiers, bicyclists, ice fishermen or other winter sports enthusiasts. I will respect their rights to legally enjoy Wisconsin's great outdoors.
8. I will know and obey all federal, state and local rules regulating the operation of snowmobiles.
9. I will not harass wildlife. I will avoid areas where wildlife is known to gather and slow or stop my snowmobile when I see wildlife nearby.
10. I will stay on marked trails or marked roads open to snowmobiles.
11. I will avoid cross-country travel unless specifically authorized.

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