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DCR ISSUES WINTER SAFETY TIPS

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) urges everyone to get outside this season to enjoy the beauty of nature, while keeping safety in mind.

DCR officials unveiled a list of tips for safe sledding, skating, skiing, and winter hiking and walking. The tips include suggestions on how to spot hazardous ice and what to do in emergency situations.

“This is a beautiful time of year to be outdoors,” said DCR Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. “Visitors who keep a few basic safety tips in mind will enhance their sense of well-being and connection with nature.”

Recent storms caused trees and branches to break or fall along trails in some DCR parks and forests. Storms also have knocked down power lines. Icy and snowy conditions also can be dangerous to winter park visitors.

Some DCR trails are closed where conditions have become particularly hazardous. For information on a particular park or forest, go to www.mass.gov/dcr and click on “Find a park.”

Keep these safety tips in mind when hiking, walking, or skiing in the woods:

1. Always let someone know when you are going into the woods. Tell them where you’re going and when you expect to be back.
2. Under your coat or jacket, wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight clothing, rather than a single layer of heavy clothing.
3. Wear sturdy footwear, as well as a hat and gloves.
4. Carry drinking water, and a map, compass, and whistle.
5. Keep an eye out for fallen trees and branches on the trail, and especially avoid trees and branches that may be at risk of falling down.
6. Be particularly cautious around downed or hanging electrical wires. Expect all wires to be live wires. Never touch or move downed lines. Do not touch anything the power lines are touching, such as tree branches or fences.
7. Stay on the trails; do not take shortcuts.
8. Pay attention to your surroundings, and make sure you know where you are.

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS · EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

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While participating in recreational activities on the frozen lakes and ponds across the Commonwealth, use common sense and follow these recommended safety tips from the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA):

1. Never go onto the ice alone. A friend may be able to rescue you or go for help if you fall through the ice.
2. Always keep your pets on a leash. If a pet falls through the ice, do not attempt a rescue. Go for help.
3. Beware of ice covered with snow. Snow can insulate ice and keep it strong, but it also can insulate the ice and keep it from freezing. Snow also can hide cracks as well as weak and open ice.
4. 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.
5. Ice formed over flowing water (including springs under the surface) is generally weaker than ice over still water.
6. Slush is a danger sign, indicating that ice is no longer freezing from the bottom and can be weak or deteriorating.
7. Ice seldom freezes or thaws at a uniform rate. It can be 1 foot thick in one spot, and be only 1 inch thick 10 feet away.
8. If a companion falls through the ice and you are unable to reach that person from shore, throw something to them (a rope, tree branch, even jumper cables from the car, etc.). If this doesn't work, go or phone for help before you also become a victim. Get medical assistance for the victim immediately.
9. If you fall in, try not to panic. Turn toward the direction you came from. Place your hands and arms on the unbroken surface, working forward by kicking your feet. Once the ice is solid enough to hold you, and you can pull yourself out, remain lying on the ice (do not stand; lying down spreads your weight across a wider area, lessening the weight on any one spot) and roll away from the hole. Crawl back the way you came, keeping your weight distributed, until you return to solid ice or ground.
10. As the season progresses, plan accordingly and use caution, as the condition of older ice greatly varies and is subject to rapidly changing conditions.

The state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife offers additional ice safety tips and also provides an “ice strength table” and guidance in determining “how can I tell if the ice is safe.” Visit www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/dfwice.htm or www.mass.gov/dfwele and search for “ice.”

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The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), an agency of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, oversees 450,000 acres of parks and forests, beaches, bike trails, watersheds, and dams, in addition to 278 bridges and miles of roadways. Led by Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr., the agency's mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources. To learn more about DCR, our facilities, and our programs, please visit www.mass.gov/dcr. Contact us at mass.parks@state.ma.us.