

Environmental Police Urge Safe Snowmobile and ATV Use

BOSTON - As recreational vehicles begin to flock to snow-covered landscapes, the Massachusetts Environmental Police today issued guidelines designed to safeguard snowmobile and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) users, private property owners, and the Commonwealth's natural resources.

"Year after year, we see tragic snowmobile accidents," said Colonel Aaron Gross, director of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' (EEA) Office of Law Enforcement. "We are urging snowmobilers and ATV users to be cautious, obey the law and use common sense while enjoying the winter weather."

In addition to responding to accidents, the Environmental Police often receive complaints from the public relating to ATV and snowmobile use. State law requires operators to obtain landowners' permission before riding on private property, and prohibits operation of ATVs and snowmobiles on public roads or within 150 feet of a home. The Environmental Police recommend joining an organized club to discover local areas where snowmobiles and ATVs are permitted, and remind the public that it is illegal to drive ATVs and snowmobiles after consuming alcoholic beverages.

Other precautions include:

- Wear a U.S. Dept. of Transportation-approved helmet;
- Ride at reasonable speeds for existing conditions and be especially cautious when operating at night;
- Check frozen ponds and rivers before going onto the ice - be aware of soft spots in places where there are currents or natural springs below the ice, and exercise extra caution when temperatures creep above 32 degrees F;
- Dress in layers, including waterproof outerwear.
- According to Massachusetts Law, snowmobile operators must be over 14 years of age. Children between the ages of 12 and 14 can operate while being directly supervised by an adult over the age of 18.

Like all outdoor enthusiasts, recreational vehicle operators are urged to respect the Commonwealth's natural resources by taking care to avoid damaging trees, underbrush and other landscape features.

The Massachusetts Environmental Police force is the primary enforcement agency for state recreational vehicle and boating laws and regulations. It is responsible for registering boats, ATVs and snowmobiles, and for safety enforcement. Officers use four-by-four vehicles, ATVs and snowmobiles to patrol off-road areas throughout Massachusetts, and a fleet of more than 50 vessels to patrol the state's coastal and inland waters.