

Be wary of poor ice, DNR says

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REGION – Although cold temperatures at night in recent weeks has frozen the water of some smaller, shallower lakes in Antrim and Kalkaska Counties, with shanties already seen on some lakes, abnormally warm daytime temperatures has the Michigan Department of Natural Resources reminding people to be extra careful when going out on the ice.

Some things to consider before heading out:

- Ice conditions vary from lake to lake. Find a good local source - a bait shop or fishing guide - that is knowledgeable about ice conditions on the lake you would like to fish on.

- Purchase a pair of ice picks or ice claws, which are available at most sporting goods stores.

- Tell a responsible adult where you are going and what time to expect you back. Relay-ing your plan can help save your life if something does happen to you on the ice.

- Ice differs from place to place. Before heading out here are some things you should know:

- You can't always tell the strength of ice simply by its look, its thickness, the temperature or whether or not it is covered with snow.

- Clear ice that has a bluish tint is the strongest. Ice formed by melted and refrozen snow appears milky, and is very porous and weak.

- 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 snow-fall also can warm up and melt existing ice.

- If there is slush on the ice, stay off. Slush ice is only about half as strong as clear ice and in-



Courtesy photo

Ice anglers should not venture out onto the ice of any frozen body of water with less than four inches of ice, the Michigan DNR says, noting that weather conditions in recent weeks have not been ideal for ice production on Antrim County and Kalkaska County's lakes.

dicates the ice is no longer freezing from the bottom.

- Be especially cautious in areas where air temperatures have fluctuated. A warm spell may take several days to weaken the ice; however, when temperatures vary widely, causing the ice to thaw during the day and refreeze at night, the result is a weak, "spongy" or honey-combed ice that is unsafe.

- The DNR does not recommend the standard "inch-thickness" guide used by many anglers and snowmobilers to determine ice safety. A minimum of four inches of clear ice is required to support an average person's weight on the ice, but since ice seldom forms at a uniform rate it is important to check

ice thickness with a spud and ruler every few steps.

When venturing out on the ice the DNR recommends the following:

- The DNR does not recommend taking a car or truck out onto the ice at any time.

- If you are walking out onto a frozen body of water with a group, avoid crossing ice in a single file.

- Never venture out alone without telling a responsible adult on shore your plans.

- Test ice thickness with an ice spud before you settle on a spot.

- If you are with a group, avoid standing together in a spot. Spread out.

- Wear a life jacket and bright

colored clothing.

- Take a cell phone for emergency use.

- Look for large cracks or depressions in the ice and avoid those areas.

- Remember ice does not form with uniform thickness on any body of water. Underwater springs and currents can wear thin spots on the ice.

If you happen to fall through remember the following:

- Try to remain calm.

- Don't remove your winter clothing. Heavy clothes won't drag you down, but instead can trap air to provide warmth and flotation. This is especially true with a snowmobile suit.

- Turn in the water toward the

direction you came from - that is probably the strongest ice.

- If you have them, dig the points of the ice picks into the ice and, while vigorously kicking your feet, pull yourself onto the surface by sliding forward on the ice.

- Roll away from the area of weak ice. Rolling on the ice will distribute your weight to help avoid breaking through again.

- Get to shelter, heat, dry clothing and warm, non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated drinks.

Call 911 and seek medical attention if you feel disoriented, have uncontrollable shivering, or have any other ill effects that may be symptoms of hypothermia (the life-threatening drop in the body's core temperature).