



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety and Security
Department of Fire Services

P.O. Box 1025 ~ State Road

Stow, Massachusetts 01775

(978) 567~3100 Fax: (978) 567~3121



STEPHEN D. COAN
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

THOMAS P. LEONARD
DEPUTY STATE FIRE MARSHAL

DEVAL L. PATRICK
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
LT. GOVERNOR

KEVIN M. BURKE
SECRETARY

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Contact: Jennifer Mieth (978) 567-3381

**State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan Urges Massachusetts's Residents to
Practice Ice & Cold Water Safety**

“Here in New England, ice and cold water safety is always an important concern,” said State Fire Marshal Stephen Coan. “Each winter too many residents suffer injuries from hypothermia following accidental immersion in the cold, icy water.” Skaters and ice fishermen fall through the ice; boaters and canoeists overturn in their crafts. Unleashed pets run onto the ice and people make the mistake of chasing after them.

Dangers of Thin Ice

Since December 2002, when four boys drowned after they fell through the thin ice of the Merrimack River, the Department of Fire Services and local fire and life safety educators have worked hard to educate children and adults about the dangers of ice and cold water. “No ice, on any body of water, especially running water in streams, brooks, rivers can ever be declared totally safe. There are far too many variables that affect the strength of the ice,” said Coan. Besides the air temperature, which fluctuates constantly, resulting in thawing and re-freezing and un-even ice thickness, water currents, tree stumps, rocks and groundwater springs can weaken the ice.

Don't Become a Victim

If you witness someone fall through the ice remember to “Reach, Throw and Go”. *Reach* from shore with a pole, ladder or similar object. *Throw* a rope to the victim or something to keep them afloat such as a life preserver or boat seat cushion. If this does not work *Go* for help and dial 9-1-1. Do not go out onto the ice where you can become a victim yourself.

If You Fall In

If you fall through the ice, try not to panic. Attempt to save yourself by turning toward the direction you came from. Place your hands and arms onto the ice and place your body against the edge of the ice and kick with your legs to push you forward out of the water, onto the ice. If you break through keep trying until you are on solid ice. Remain lying down to keep your

weight distributed evenly (don't stand or you could fall back in) and roll away from the hole. Crawl back towards the shore. Get medical help immediately.

“The only truly safe ice is at your local skating rink!” said Coan.

Additional information on *Ice and Cold Water Safety* can be found on the Department of Fire Services website at www.mass.gov/dfs then click on *Fire Safety Topics*.